



TE AHUREI
TOI O TĀMAKI

AUCKLAND
ARTS FESTIVAL

A STAB IN THE DARK

EDUCATION PACK



Nightsong

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CARL BLAND - WRITER & DIRECTOR

Carl Bland is a writer, actor and painter. He wrote and created his own shows with Peta Rutter under the name Nightsong Productions. Their shows included The Bed Show, The House of Doors and Camels, Peta and Carl at the Last Supper and Sofa Stories. Collaborating with Theatre Stampede, they also made Head (2005 winner of Chapman Tripp Most Original Production) and 360 - a theatre of recollections for the 2010 New Zealand Festival. 360 won an inaugural excellence award and also The Hackman Cup, the people's choice award for most original production, at the 2014 Auckland Theatre Awards. Recent works for Nightsong include: Te Pō, Spirit House, Call It A Night and Mr Red Light. For further information visit www.nightsong.co.nz

BEN CROWDER - DIRECTOR

Ben Crowder is a theatre director and creator; he is a co-founder of Theatre Stampede. He has directed all their productions since 1999. Past productions include: 360 - a theatre of recollections, Head (both in collaboration with Nightsong Productions), The Young Baron, The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, A Midsummer Night's Dream and the national tour of Blossom. Ben also works extensively as a freelance director and creator. He's worked with Auckland Theatre Company, Silo Theatre, Red Leap, Dust Palace and Auckland Live, among others. He is often engaged on the development of new works. Recent works for Nightsong include: Te Pō, Spirit House, Call It A Night and Mr Red Light. For further information visit www.nightsong.co.nz

JON CODDINGTON - PUPPET DESIGN & CREATION, PUPPETEER

Jon Coddington promotes himself as a theatre designer and collaborator, illustrator, animator and sculptor, and has been primarily working as a puppeteer

and puppet maker for 9 years. Highlights include sell-out international Fringe Festival hit Puppet Fiction (2012-18), a marionette homage to the movie Pulp Fiction, and the manipulation and making of puppets for Fat Freddy's Drop's music videos 'Clean The House' (2013) and 'Special Edition' (2019). He has worked in screen puppetry with training by Muppeteer Peter Linz at Whoa Studios in Auckland producing the series 'Custards World' for TVNZ (2018), created puppets for the New Zealand Arts Festival show 'The Devil's Half Acre' (2016), NZ Comedy Festival show 'Hand To God' (2017), and recently created puppets and performed in Silo theatre's 'Peter and the Wolf' (2017), and Trick of the Light Theatre's 'The Griegol' for Auckland Arts Festival (2021).

RACHEL MARLOW & BRAD GLEDHILL - LIGHTING & PROJECTION DESIGN

Bradley Gledhill and Rachel Marlow are production designers and co-founders of design company Filament Eleven 11. Creating the lighting and projection design for A Stab in the Dark has been a labour of love! Filament Eleven 11 works collaboratively, with designers, directors and companies to create dynamic production designs and lighting environments for live experiences, and to produce work that puts design and technology at the centre of storytelling in an inventive and unique way. The company produces designs for theatre, dance, rock and roll, corporate events, televised live events and installation art experiences. With lighting at the core of every design, their work expands to video design, projection design, set design, system design and overall production design. Filament Eleven 11 is drawn to work that is pushing boundaries and is led by inspiring creatives. No surprise then that Filament Eleven 11 have worked with Nightsong across the years, in a myriad of roles - from Head and 360; A Theatre of Recollections, to Te Pō and Spirit House.

JOHN GIBSON - SOUND DESIGN

John Gibson has been composing original music for New Zealand theatre, film, dance and television since 1980. During that time, he has composed over 100 scores and sound designs for theatre. In 2008 he received a Qantas Film and Television award for his score for Vincent Ward's film Rain of the Children. He has performed in Edinburgh in a comedy he wrote and directed called Gordon Six Pence He Is Music. John is currently adapting a book by Alain de Botton for the stage

ELIZABETH WHITING - COSTUME DESIGN

Elizabeth Whiting has designed costumes for Auckland Theatre Company, Silo Theatre, Nightsong, NZ Opera, Indian Ink, Court Theatre, Red Leap Theatre Company, New Zealand Dance Company, Okareka Dance Company, Douglas Wright Dance Company and many others.

Elizabeth was responsible for the central performance design for the World of Wearable Art for six years. Her work has been presented at Edinburgh Festival and the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. She won the Chapman Tripp Theatre Award for Costume Design for *The Arrival* (Red Leap). Her opera designs have been well reviewed in Australia and the United States. This year she is designing *The Life of Galileo* and *Blithe Spirit* for Auckland Theatre Company, *Stab in the Dark* for Nightsong and *The Most Naked* (Project Muse). She designed *The Hall* (Bullet Heart Club) which has just opened in Wanaka and *Paradise or the Impermanence of Ice Cream* (Indian Ink). Earlier this year Elizabeth designed *Don Pasquale* for the Opera in Schools Programme for New Zealand Opera.

JOEL TOBECK - PERFORMER

One of Australasia's most experienced and respected actors, Joel comes from a theatrical family, making his stage debut aged five with mother Liddy Holloway.

Stage work has ranged from Shakespeare to musical theatre. He has worked in bands as singer and guitarist. His skillset embraces voice work, radio, improv, Theatresports, dance and choreography. Screen appearances have been equally diverse. Two dozen film roles on a spectrum from whimsical comedy to intense drama and horror; and a television career that has seen him move comfortably between New Zealand, Australia and the U.S in a variety of genres. 19 years apart, he played two regular characters in *Shortland Street*. He had a rollicking time in *Westside* and played Burgermeister in Peter Jackson's *Mortal Engines*. The busy times continue: playing Laurie Mains in the mini series *Jonah*, another season of *The Blake Mysteries* (nominated for a 2019 Equity Ensemble Award) *Runaway Miilonaires*, *The Luminaries*, *One Lane Bridge* Seasons 1 & 2 and the massive *Avatar* 2 and 3 production. Awards include Best Actor in the NZ Film & TV Awards; Most Outstanding Performance By an Actor at the Australian Subscription Television & Radio Association Awards, and in 2019 a Best Actor nomination for *Alibi*, an innovative non-linear drama for TVNZ On Demand.

ALISON BRUCE - PERFORMER

Alison feels blessed to have worked with some of our great theatre innovators over her career. She began at Theatre Corporate and the Mercury Theatre in the 1980's and worked with Theatre at Large, Inside Out, and The Watershed. She has performed in driveways during lockdowns with The Rebel Alliance, in the domain with Arts Festival pyromaniacs, in arenas with Kip Chapman for WOW, on flooded stages and in freezing warehouses. Alison has also worked with Silo, Massive, ATC and has been involved with Red Leap since its inception in 2008. In 2021 she played Mary in Shane Boshers' long awaited play 'Everything After', a role written specifically for her.

Alison is also a sought after actor by the screen industry having played numerous key roles in many well renowned NZ and International productions, including Mercy Peak, The Worlds Fastest Indian, Top of the Lake, The Almighty Johnsons, Legend of the Seeker, and Power of the Dog. Most recently she has been seen on our screens in award winning local series One Lane Bridge and The Gulf.

MILO CAWTHORNE - PUPPETEER

Having acted from a young age, Milo has established a prolific career in film, television and theatre. His television credits range from children's shows P.E.T Detectives and The Amazing Extraordinary Friends to drama series When We Go To War and The Brokenwood Mysteries. He has appeared in feature films Human Traces, Guns Akimbo (alongside Daniel Radcliffe), the 2016 remake of Kiwi classic Pork Pie, and a leading role in Deathgasm. Most recently, Milo acted in the New Zealand drama series Mystic.

ANDREW FOSTER - SET DESIGN

Designer, Director and Actor Andrew Foster was a co-founder of the award-winning Wellington theatre company Trouble, and has become known for his contribution to the development of new work.

Designs include Mr Red Light and Te Po for Nightsong, Things I Know to Be True at Court and Circa Theatres, To Kill a Mockingbird at the Civic for ATC, Gary Henderson's Shepherd and Peninsula for the Court, The dance work Orchids with Foster Group, and Michael Hurst's King Lear at Circa. Work as a Director includes Eli Kent's Black Confetti for ATC, The Lead Wait, Red and Venus in Fur at Circa, and the immersive works Apocalypse Z and Second Unit: What We Do in The Shadows.

Andrew is married to Choreographer Sarah FosterSproull. They have two very cool children: daughter Ivy and son Roman, who makes his stage debut as the voice of the child in A Stab in the Dark.



An interview with Carl Bland and Ben Crowder

What inspired the writing of A Stab in the Dark? What resources, provocations or stimulus did you draw from?

The inspiration for A Stab in the Dark was a desire to experiment with how to tell a story. In my last few plays I have been using a box set, where the action happens in one naturalistic room. I wanted to go back to my earlier creative roots where I played with the theatrical form, and also wanted to challenge myself to take more creative risks.

A Stab in the Dark is a feast of mixing theatrical disciplines and genres, what inspired you to write and stage this story in this way?

Before playing with how to tell a story. I needed a strong story that had a driving narrative. A story that was strong enough to be played with. I've always been interested in the detective novel or crime drama. It takes the audience on a suspenseful journey, where characters are under constant duress. And most importantly there is a search or quest to find the truth.

Why was this the best format to deliver this story?

Part of the creative risk was to ignore conventions. So I wanted to find out if I could mix what are often thought of as opposing mediums.

I deliberately tried to be as extreme as I could with this. A giant puppet as the policeman, the main actor being real and cinematic in performance. Have a character that no one sees, apart from her arms. Then restrict them all by setting it on an upturned circular table. Which has to transform into various locations.

What does the name of the play mean? How can ākonga start to discuss the name of the play and its links to the major themes or ideas of the performance?

A Stab in the Dark is a name you could imagine being the title of an old black and white noir thriller. But it is also a perfect metaphor for how I felt. I didn't know if this experiment would work. It was about being brave enough to risk failure.

Why should this work carve out a space in audiences lives in 2022? Why is it important for young people to watch creative, new work that experiments with theatre forms and styles they may not have seen before? Such as expressionism and mediaeval theatre features.

One of the main themes of the play is an exploration of the nature of evil. Why does the human race continue to repeat the same pattern of selfish behaviour? We never seem to learn from our repeated history. If we haven't learnt from what history tells us, could this behaviour just be inherently in us. Wanting to try to understand this also coincided with a fascination in the doppelganger story. Where the good and evil part of ourselves have split into two different beings. Then I started investigating people with multiple personalities. This clinical disorder is often caused by some trauma in childhood. Where the child finds a different person to inhabit because the world their real self lives in is so violent.

What is the main message that our ākonga can take away from A Stab In The Dark? What do you want them to understand, do or think about from the performance?

If there were a moral to this story. It would be that evil comes from selfishness. The inability to see a situation or even the world from outside yourself. What I see is the truth! What I feel is the only feeling that matters! etc

Carl, you write with huge specificity about the technology incorporated into the performance, for example lighting, sound and use of puppets or special effects. What do you want the audience to think about or understand when you are writing these into your scripts?

I write with great specificity about the visual world in the play. Because for me, both are as important as the other in telling the story. I've never felt a division between words and pictures. I'm a visual artist as well as a writer, so I will draw a scene as I'm writing it.

Ben, you and your technical team have the task of bringing Carl's imaginative ideas into reality on the stage. Could you speak about how you approach beginning to stage a work written by Carl. What are some of the practicalities you need to consider at the beginning of a rehearsal process?

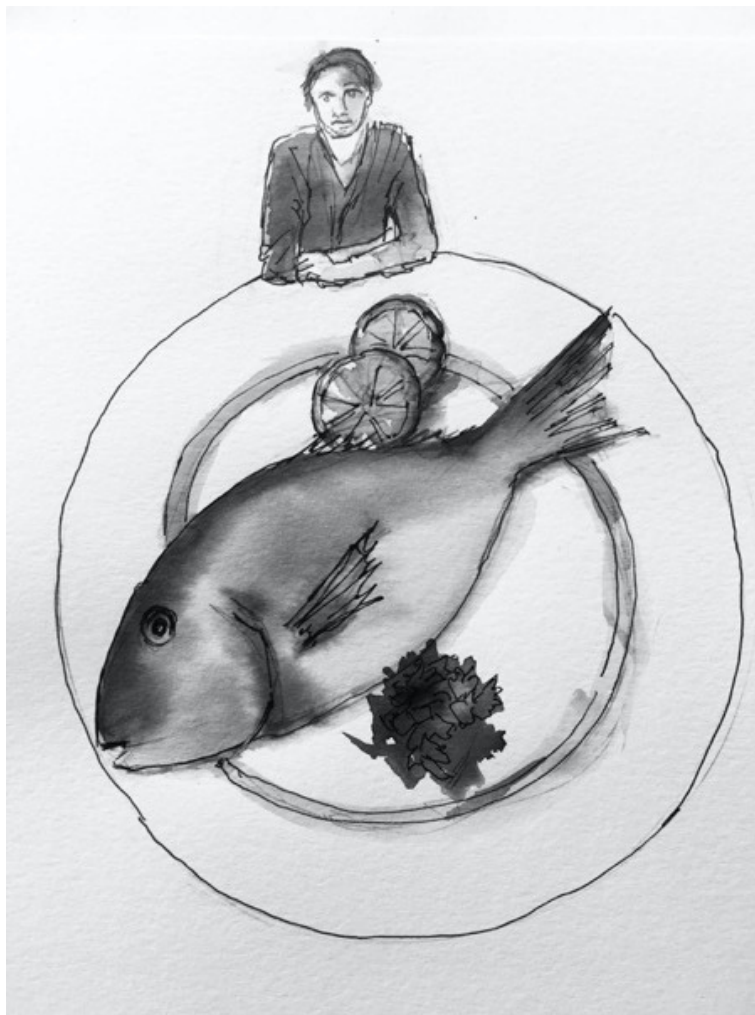
I think time is an important part of the process. I usually am aware of what the general scope/theme or in this case, visual catalyst for the show was before there is a draft to read. Therefore, I have started rolling the show around my head before I have ever read any of the words. At this stage it is important to keep things very open to possibility, as things may change or grow – and also, it's important to not get too rigid in thinking. Often Carl has done some drawings that sit with the early draft which helps visualise the imagery in the script.

We then go through a series of development stages. Usually a read or two with actors of early drafts, then followed by a workshop. For the workshop for this work, it was essential we had the 'table' so we had one made. Naively I thought this might be the one we carried on using. But in the end it became a prototype table that we could develop ideas from and develop the exact needs for the show. It was great to have it set up in the Nightsong office/studio for 18 months before rehearsals as I find actually being able to talk about a design adjustment/challenge is much easier when I can point at something physical as opposed to seeing it in digital form etc. It also allowed us to keep doing tests with projection etc in the pre-production phase.

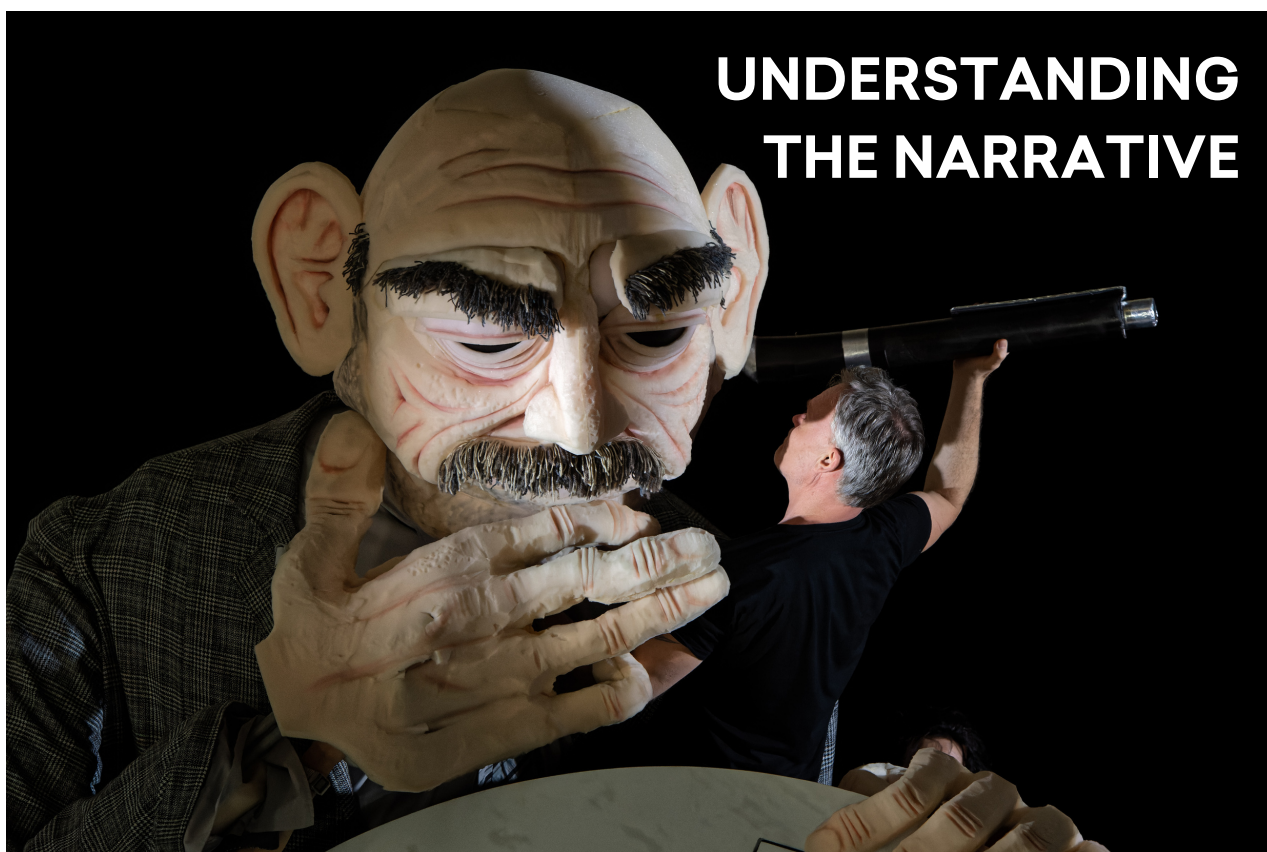
The shows tend to have an extended design period long before rehearsals start. The plan is to have everything into rehearsal in terms of major design elements pre the first day. This is not always possible, particularly on this show where we had a few delays due to Covid slowing the process (i.e. slowness of supply chains and waiting to get out of lockdown to start building). For this work we ended up having two weeks in the rehearsal space prior to actual rehearsals proper; this was so we could achieve some of the filmed elements and then also have a 'tech' focused week where we started mapping some of the video etc. About two shows back, we introduced bringing the production manager on board from the start of the design process, rather than nearer the actual rehearsal/presentation phase. This was to support the designers and to have another eye on solving problems, but also ensuring the work is able to be successfully toured (i.e. can the set be deconstructed reasonably quickly and what sort of size touring vehicle/container would be needed to travel). I like the fact Carl writes things in his work that are hard to achieve in a theatre; therefore coming up with innovative solutions is part of the collaboration.

You have both worked together for such a long time, can you comment on the strategies/processes that help you work well as a team?

Again, I think as above, time is the key. Working for such a long period, (over 15 years), has meant we have developed enormous trust in each other. We are very aware of our strengths and also able to listen to each other's instincts/ideas. Carl and I are very different people – so in many ways we are an 'odd couple' to collaborate, but also I think that is what gives us our strength. We usually are in agreement on approach – and on the odd occasion we are not, I believe we are respectful in solving this. Communication is important. I speak a lot to Carl – I'm sure I'm quite maddening at times! – but for me it is important to talk through what we are up to and the multitudes of decisions and complexities that need addressing. However, on the flip side we can act very quickly and also by a shared understanding/shorthand in rehearsal for instance. It is important to be honest. Making theatre like this is pretty consuming and there can be emotion in the mix.



An early sketch by Carl Bland



A Stab In The Dark is a provocative and innovative piece of work that not only challenges the audience but has also challenged the Director, the actors and the design team in bringing it to the stage. During the first table read Ben Crowder noted that he had to work carefully through the script highlighting when characters were represented in person, as puppets and through film and when different technical elements appeared and why, throughout the performance. As students who are tackling this work within the classroom, it is important that you do as much work unpacking and understanding the narrative as you can, so that you can all discuss it with depth and understanding. Using your digital copy of the show, the script you have been provided and the points and activity below kickstart your discussion and understanding of the performance.

Experimenting with how to tell a story:

Discuss:

- What theatrical forms were played with?
- What was creatively different for you as audience members, from other shows you might have seen?
- How did this show steer away from naturalism or realism?

Plot the narrative: as a class

Get a large piece of paper, ideally a long piece of craft paper that you can roll along the floor and sit around with pens. Draw a long line horizontally along the piece of paper and starting at one end plot the following along the line, creating a visual map helping you understand and discuss the narrative:

- Note the major plot points, you could think about: moments of important action, moments of tension, when the focus or mood shifts or change
- Note when characters are represented in different ways and discuss why.
- Note when projection, oversized props and puppets are used and discuss why they might appear
- Note when film is used and discuss why it is used in these specific moments
- Note when ideas, characters or themes are used in opposition and discuss how this idea connects to Carl's exploration of the "doppelganger story"

Playing with genre, style and theme:

Carl Bland has commented that he has been inspired by the following ideas and themes. Add notes to your visual map about how and when these ideas appear within the performance:

- How the idea of the detective novel or crime drama is present within the narrative/performance (take note of the moments of suspense, take note of when characters are under duress and how this is linked to major themes and idea
- When moments are inspired by Film Noir techniques and why this is important to the narrative
- When the "search or quest to find truth" is highlighted by a character, through dialogue or symbolically through technology
- When you feel characters are acting selfishly linking to the overarching theme of "evil comes from selfishness" identified by Carl Bland in his interview



JOEL TOBECK

What drew you to this character and why did you want to play them?

I've never played two people at once before and the concept of the show intrigued me from the moment I heard about it. I really enjoy a challenge!

What does your character represent within the world of the play?

I think my character(s) represent certain sides in all of us, those parts of ourselves that are constantly challenging our perspectives and how we move in the world. Some would call it good and bad. I like to call it light and dark.

What lessons can we learn from your character? What would you like the audience to take away with them?

That there are those among us that have the light and dark both operating at the same time, which can be very disorientating.

I hope the audience will enjoy the piece and all the elements involved. We have amazing puppeteers, lighting designers, sound designers that really make the show what it is.

And of course Ben Crowder and Carl Bland are geniuses!

Your character has many different versions - filmed, acted and puppeteered. What were the challenges and surprises you encountered during the development, rehearsal and performance process? How did you approach the roles - separately or as individual characters?

At first I was a bit nervous about acting with 'myself' and I wanted to make a clear distinction between the two sides of my character. The trick is to be truthful and let the story play me, not the other way around.

How did you develop your character physically, can you talk briefly about how you accessed this role as an actor?

I don't use any particular acting style, I've always trusted my instincts. Those instincts aren't always right but I enjoy the danger of not really knowing what I am going to do until I get in the room. If you have great people around you who are open to collaboration (and we do) the fun of it is seeing how we can build this world together.

What has the rehearsal process been like for you? What challenges or surprises arose within rehearsals?

I've always wanted to work with Nightsong and I think Ben and Carl are brilliant creative beings. Of course to be working with Alison Bruce, Milo Cawthorn, Jon Coddington and our amazing production people and designers is a total treat and you quickly realise you need to bring your "a-game".

The challenge is telling the truth of the piece... Ironic given the piece is about deceit and lies.

Why do you think your character is important in today's world?

Exploring the world of light and dark, good and bad, whatever you want to call it has always been intriguing to people. My character(s) are just trying to live their lives as best they can... As we all are. It's not always easy and straightforward. The challenge is to keep learning and growing... I think.

ALISON BRUCE

What drew you to this character and why did you want to play them?

It's very exciting and challenging to be part of a work where your character is open to so many possible interpretations and presented in different forms throughout the show. Working in this way is a process of discovery right from the start. It's a great opportunity to really enter the unknown.

What does your character represent within the world of the play?

Ann is quite a puzzle ... it can be tricky to figure out when she's real and when she's fantasy or imagination:

- Is she a victim of murder? And if so whodunnit?
- Maybe she only exists in Warren/ John's imagination?
- Or maybe Ann represents the 'feminine' in him ?
- Maybe she's all these things and more?

We only ever see Ann as disembodied arms - puppet, film and real, and her voice is recorded - except for one small moment where we see her head but not her face. That moment is also the only time she speaks live.

What lessons can we learn from your character? What would you like the audience to take away with them?

What does this tell us about her place in the world - why is she not a whole woman?

Hands and arms hold us, hurt us, hug us, caress us, feed us, make us feel safe, fight for us.

They're really functional parts of our bodies, adept at performing practical day to day tasks and also actions that are filled with meaning and story.

Your character has many different versions - filmed, acted and puppeteered. What were the challenges and surprises you encountered during the development, rehearsal and performance process? How did you approach the roles - separately or as individual characters?

Even though Ann is represented almost only by her arms (animated and real), as actors we have to approach all our characters as real people full of the hopes and fears we all carry. Preparation for playing Ann was similar to the investigation that I'd do for a more traditional play. A script is like an archeological site or a mystery to solve: it's looking for clues to tell us who our character is and what they want. You can't play 'symbolism'. I don't think that's an actor's job. We have to honour the truth of our character's experience. Though Ann is less easily defined than a more naturalistically presented woman, I think as long as we play the truth in each moment she can be all the real/unreal forms of herself without compromising her integrity.

How did you develop your character physically, can you talk briefly about how you accessed this role as an actor?

Because of the puppetry in the show I also had to be flexible and strong in order to clamber in and out of small spaces and bring to life the sometimes heavy objects -

so just on a practical level a bit of yoga and strength training were useful prep. Puppetry is a whole other thing in itself and takes focus and detail. We view the world through the puppet's eyes, and then we have to find ways to infuse this inanimate thing with the spirit of their character. We look to the real: How does a child play? How does an eagle hunt, an armadillo move and so on. We're lucky to have John (Coddington) who made all the puppets and is a brilliant and generous puppeteer, to guide us.

What has the rehearsal process been like for you? What challenges or surprises arose within rehearsals?

The rehearsal process for STAB has been exciting and brain bending at times. There are lots of elements to co-ordinate and we're lucky to have the sound, lighting, and AV design teams in the room right from day one, as well as the writer, puppet maker and director. It's intricate and exact work that relies on precision to be magic and like any new work there are frequent cuts and changes and a lot of brainstorming and testing to figure out the 'how's. Working collaboratively is not only the most productive but also the most enjoyable and satisfying way to work.

Why do you think your character is important in today's world?

Stories of women being murdered by people they know and love are far too common. Looking from the outside we struggle to understand why women stay in abusive situations. Ann gives us some insight into how complex relationships are – nothing is absolute. People aren't just good or bad, kind or cruel. Ann gives us a window of understanding – not condoning – but seeing – and that is a first step towards changing things.

MILO CAWTHORNE

What drew you to this character and why did you want to play them?

I've always been fascinated by puppetry and how someone can make an inanimate 'thing' come to life. I like the challenge of mastering that skill myself. I was drawn to the detective character, because he has lots of comedic moments in the show. Also I didn't have much of a choice. The director told me where to stand.

What does your character represent within the world of the play?

Several things: The search for 'truth' or meaning. The inevitable collapse of false beliefs. Our inner critic. The detective spends the whole play grilling 'John' about his story and several times reprimands him for not sticking to 'facts'. He is on the hunt for the concrete truth of what happened and at times puts pressure on John to confess to the murder. He is steadfast and calm, as opposed to John who is excitable and pained.

What lessons can we learn from your character? What would you like the audience to take away with them?

Calmly investigating your thoughts and emotions with curiosity rather than animosity will cause less suffering for everyone involved.

Everyone has parts of themselves they are embarrassed or ashamed of, and there is nothing unusual about that. People act out because they are in pain, they are suffering and probably need compassion rather than punishment.

Your character has many different versions - filmed, acted and puppeteered. What were the challenges and surprises you encountered during the development, rehearsal and performance process? How did you approach the roles - separately or as individual characters?

The challenge has always been the literal physical challenge of making a big heavy hand look like it's moving easily and fluidly. Also trying hard to not be seen, to not stick my head out too far. I try to embody the character as much as I can in my own self, and let that ripple out into my movements of the puppets. If the character is a slow methodical thinker, how would that person make a point, get someone's attention.

How did you develop your character physically, can you talk briefly about how you accessed this role as an actor?

I've just been reading Larry Moss' 'Intent to Live,' he was trained by Stella Adler, so is from the Stanislavski pedagogy. He has a few fantastic questions, one of them being: How does this character view the world?

So for example, the detective might answer "The world is an interesting puzzle for me to solve and by methodical progress I will solve it, I have no need to fear it."

Also "what does this character want?" and "how does he go about getting that?"

If he wants a confession, does he:

Cajole? Threaten? Punish? Enquire?

I try to find verbs that excite me and make playing the scene fun.

What has the rehearsal process been like for you? What challenges or surprises arose within rehearsals?

The ever present challenges in any rehearsal space are fear and boredom. Fear you'll be terrible when you do perform and boredom when you're not performing. It's obviously verrry muggy right now, so it's a challenge to maintain focus and to do something over and over again without zoning out.

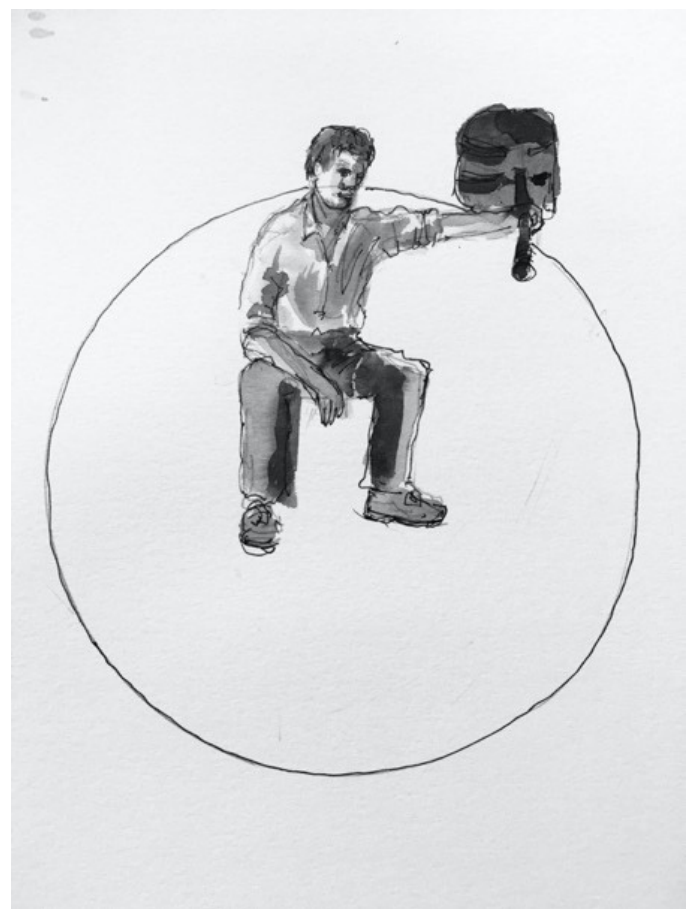
The rehearsal process has been chilled out so far, but we are about to really start refining and working some technical parts of the show, so it will be getting more demanding in terms of energy and attention.

The surprises have been around how the set has changed, because we are interacting so much with it, when one small part of the set moves or is removed, it changes how we move in and around it.

Why do you think your character is important in today's world?

A calm and curious nature is always helpful I think, in any world. To be able to confront problems and grievances without jumping to conclusions and punching someone in the face is useful in many scenarios.

This can be applied to many binary groups we have in our society today. Vaxxers & Anti-vaxxers, Republicans & Democrats, Home-owners & Renters. The ability to curiously engage without animosity is useful for understanding and educating each other and far more peaceful, probably.



Early sketches by Carl Bland



PUPPETRY AND ITS IMPORTANT ROLE IN A STAB IN THE DARK

JON CODDINGTON

Puppets are an important component of A Stab in the Dark, how do you approach creating puppets for a show once you have read the script?

To begin with I met with Ben and Carl, our directors, to discuss the themes and visual language we were speaking in. Then there was much investigation into the logistical side, from the functionality of the puppets, to simply moving the puppets and props around in the backstage area and making sure that's an easy process. What I love about making puppets is that every little thing is a problem, and you have to solve each problem in relation to each other, such as having mechanical functions that may incur weight in places that affect other things. I rely on material knowledge, and engineering ideas and practices to support these solutions.

What influences did you draw from in creating the many different puppets within the performance?

I looked at the large scale puppets from Bread and Butter Theatre Company, old images of wooden puppets and Bunraku style puppetry. I drew from the shows I've seen and worked on during my career, such as the excellent Dimanche from French theatre companies Chaliwaté Company and Focus Company, and my recent work in Trick of the Light Theatre's The Griegol.

What are the main materials you work with and why are these the best for puppet creation?

For the large Interrogator, I mainly used PVC piping and mattress foam as they are lightweight and relatively robust materials, plus the way they move and flex adds performative qualities that can add to character. For the child puppet I used papier mache over a PVC and aluminium skeleton structure to illustrate a more naive quality to his construction and aesthetic. Then for the small John/Warren hand puppet, we needed him to be the most realistic looking one, so I sculpted Joel's head from Google images then moulded and casted in a soft foam material to maintain a human-like squishiness.

What were the challenging aspects in the creation and performance of/with these puppets?

The main challenge in creating these puppets came from time constraints and time management. As I had many puppets and a few props to make, it was difficult to get them to a finished state while working on everything at once. To overcome this, I needed to better communicate where I was at with the making process to ensure that as a company we were moving in the same direction.

What is your process when preparing to perform puppetry/with puppets? Do you develop the characters physically in the same way an actor would prepare or is the process different? If so, how?

I do approach puppetry in the same way as an actor would, I act out the scene with my body, and pay attention to what it is doing. Then when performing with the puppet, I transfer that physicality into the puppet with the same energy. Puppeteers from The Muppets say that puppetry is acting from the elbow up, so the same preparation is necessary.

What do you hope students/audience members see or look for when they are watching these puppets in performance?

I hope that the audience see characters and not puppets in this show, but are also curious about how we as performers are moving around backstage and working as a team. There is a bit of choreography in moving around the set and making sure puppeteers are where they need to be, as we are in darkness and silence we need to know where each other are and need to be.

Puppetry and Classroom Activities

Physical Activity:

Go into this activity with no preconceived ideas or story lines. Let your creativity and curiosity drive the creation of the puppet, as well as the improvisation, rehearsal and performance with the puppet.

Material: pattern paper or large brown craft paper, you should get 1 - 2 metres of paper each

Puppet Creation:

Play with the paper shaping it into a large hand puppet by moulding a head with the ability to put your hand inside or to shape it so you can hold the head from the back of the puppet. Focus on creating a prominent facial part for your puppet:

- Nose
- Ears
- Eye Brows

Don't worry about making it realistic, just have fun with the shape of it.

Puppet Personality:

Create an identity for your puppet as your shape and mould it, think about how the shape of it and the way you can move it through space impacts who the puppet is. Come up with:

- A name
- Personality traits
- Prominent emotions
- A voice or is your puppet just physical with only sounds?

Scene creation:

In groups of three or four:

- Introduce your puppet to others. You could either do this by explaining who your puppet is to your peers or you can give your puppet a voice and dialogue.
- Discuss how your puppets personalities all work together or create contrast
- Improvise a short scene where your puppets interact, let their personalities drive what the storyline is
- Be creative with movement of the puppet through space, including proximity to others, pathways, levels and styles of movement, especially creating contrast
- Think about how you as the puppeteer move your body with the puppet
- Think about what inspiration you could take from A Stab In The Dark for your scene

Perform your scenes for your peers.

Reflect and discuss after each performance:

- What was effective within the performance?
- What advice would you give each other to make the scenes more effective?
- What references to A Stab In The Dark could you see in each other's performances?

Revision Activity:

Use the template below to discuss the Puppets that were used and their purpose within the performance of A Stab In The Dark. You may also want to sketch and annotate each puppet, as a revision exercise for your external exam. Try to be as detailed as possible in your discussions, note take, sketching and annotation. The more you unpack the purpose of these puppets, the more you may understand about the ideas, themes and symbols within the performance.

Puppet/ Character	Description	Purpose within the narrative	Links to themes, ideas and symbols
Ann	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Materials- Style of puppet- Size- How it is manipulated by the puppeteer or actor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Why was this puppet important to the story- Why was the style of the puppet important to its purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What did the puppet represent thematically?- What did the puppet make you think about and why?- How was the puppet used symbolically within the performance?- What ideas did you think about or make connections too in the moments where puppets were used in the performance?

DESIGN & A STAB IN THE DARK



SET DESIGN - ANDREW FOSTER

In developing the design aesthetics for A Stab in the Dark, we recognised the influence of hardboiled crime writing and its evolution in film, particular in the genre of Film Noir.

Film Noir evolved out of the necessities of war time cost cutting. Black and White film stock, minimal lighting and simplified sets became the aesthetic of Hollywood's return to storytelling over spectacle in the 1940's. Narratives exploring crime, the psychology of trauma and the chameleonic of memory coalesced into dark examinations of the soul adrift in the modern world.

This preoccupation with perception and the fallibility of the human mind is also pervasive in the art of the early twentieth century. Movements like surrealism, Dada, Impressionism and Expressionism all shift the focus of painting. No longer do artists look to represent what we see, but rather how we see it. And this surreal retelling of reality is at the heart of A Stab in the Dark. The play requires the world to operate with the logic of a dream, it plays with perception. Scale, fragmented memory, and the mystery of moments half seen. I was drawn to the art of Rene Magritte and Salvador Dali, and their play with perspective, scale, sublimation and shadow.

As is typical with the work of Carl and Ben, there is as much design going on behind the curtain as in front of it. In the case of *Stab in the Dark*, this is all the more true. We have arrived at a sparse and minimal design capable of magical transformation, that leaves room for the audience's imagination to reach into its dark corners.

COSTUME DESIGN - ELIZABETH WHITING

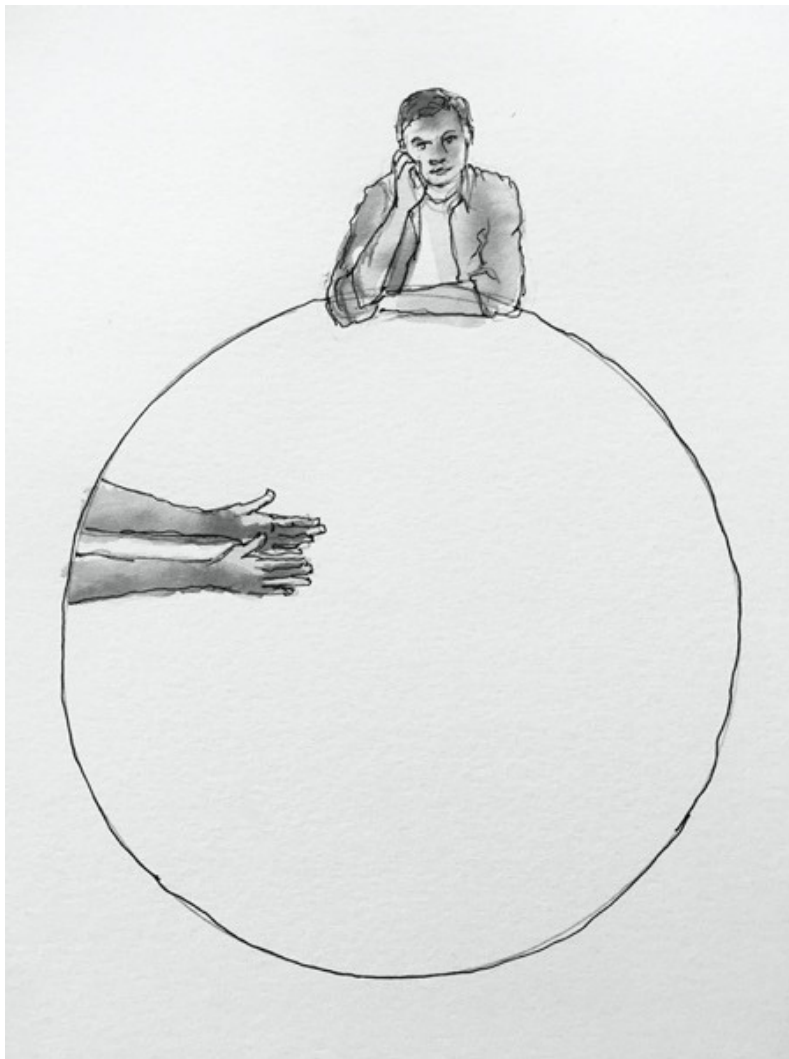
The costume design brief was to create costumes which honoured the film noir style and be timeless. They had to serve the main conceit of the play and facilitate the quick changes of identity for the main character. I have chosen a very limited palette of black, white, and grey to reflect this style. There is one burgundy dress, however, which may perhaps suggest passion or murder! I was also asked to design the clothing for the interrogator puppet, which is approximately six times life size. The choice of fabric pattern had to be in proportion to the puppet and able to facilitate the actions of the puppeteers inside.

SOUND DESIGN - JOHN GIBSON

A Stab In The Dark has many strands to the sound choices. First of all the psychology and perspective of the various puppets and actors: what is alive and spontaneous and what is prerecorded for practical and psychological reasons. In this case Joel is live, the inspector prerecorded, Anne is live with Joel but some of her scenes as a puppet or as a voice alone are pre recorded. The inspiration for the psychology of the vocal sound is Freud. Freud would sit behind his patients, so that his prompts were perceived as coming from within the patient's mind, not as visual cues.

The choice of music is wide, from standard noir ideas coming from contemporary classical scores to contrasting and specific emotional cues. This means I have used a broad spectrum; songs to full on necessary foley sound effects and percussive natural noises. The burden for the music is, as always the case, that the coherence of the whole story is only made possible by the soundscape in its entirety. With so many types of media, it is the sound that has to unify, make transitions and hold the media together in the emotional story. The emotional hues of the whole piece are only conveyed by sound. There is a narrative but there is no necessary emotion in that.

To make a meaningful experience it is all held and made conscious by the uses of the music and sound. In this way music has to be the conscience of the whole piece's meaning, at its deepest level. It articulates and makes the whole, one experience. Think of a film without sound, look at the images without sound and you will see what I mean. Jaws without the music for the first frames is ridiculous if seen as a pure visual. Structure and pacing of this kind of theatrical experience is only provided by the score. Whether or not there is sound or not, the rhythm of the whole is held by the music/silence paradigm, as a kind of deep focus. The depth of moments are what make the overall depth of a theatrical experience, this in many ways is a standard suspense story. This narrative is held in suspension by the gravitas and depth of the sound and its emotional pull. It pulls out the poetry of the piece, like a tooth and makes it articulate. In this way the sound is the most articulate and most important. Sound is providing all the clues and all the articulations that guide you, the viewer, to feel. Through tempo, colour, depth association and on all levels, rhythm.



Early sketches by Carl Bland



Expressionism was a theatrical style that developed in Germany in the early 1900's. We often think about the form in terms of Visual Arts, rather than Theatre. A good example of this is Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*. The development in the theatre space was driven by artists wanting to rebel against realistic or naturalistic theatrical practices made popular by Stanislavski and Chekov. Expressionists thought that realism only focused on the surface details of a character or situation, whereas by moving away from reality and into the unreal, you could discuss a character's humanity. Often plays that fall into the expressionist form are a type of social or political protest and are aiming to make social commentary. Expressionism in theatre had a profound impact and this move away from naturalistic theatre eventually influenced the likes of Bertolt Brecht. You can see some of the features of Epic Theatre beginning to emerge in the features and techniques used within Expressionist Theatre.

When thinking about expressionism on stage, we as the audience, are looking for the following:

- Strongly built sense of atmosphere: it feels eerie, nightmarish, dreamlike. The themes, symbols and ideas of the play are strongly linked to the atmosphere built and are highly emotive

- Set design: is highly stylized, symbolic in nature, the size and scale of the set is not realistic and there are interesting lines and shapes on stage. If props are used they are important to the narrative of the performance and often appear in an unusual or abstract manner
- Lighting design: stark, using shadow and focusing on key areas of the stage, set or highlighting props, sometimes the lighting will distort what is happening on stage
- Place and time: usually there is no sense of place (location) and time within the performance
- Plot or Narrative: the protagonist of the performance is often searching for something, and the story is told from their point of view, as if in a dream. Taboo topics or ideas are incorporated. The plot or narrative often weaves in big overarching ideas or themes. Unrealistic conflicts or tensions are portrayed by the characters
- Characters: stereotypes and caricatures rather than fully realised emotionally driven characters, made stranger by the use of puppets and film
- Dialogue: doesn't flow like a conversation and the threads are muddled. Lyrical monologues, staccato phrases, use of expletives and singular words, as well as disjointed and overlapping conversation
- Style of Acting: actors avoid the detail of naturalistic acting, such as motivated movement and nuanced facial expressions. Actors might appear to be larger than life, mechanical or puppets may be used in the place of an actor, grotesque or uncomfortable movement

Expressionist Theatre, A Stab In The Dark and the classroom:

Expressionist Theatre is evident within the performance of A Stab In The Dark in the following in varied ways throughout. Examples are provided below, with questions prompting you to think further. Please note there are many more examples from the performance and this list is intended as a starting point for further thinking and discussion:

- The projections and physical symbols that appear throughout that are linked to the dialogue such as the fly in the water, the baby in the womb, the rabbit ears, the shadow, the eyes in the rearview mirror, the white dove and the crow. There are many more - can you list them for further discussion?
- The three iterations/versions of each character - the actor in front of you, the puppet and the filmed version. How does this challenge you as an audience member? What impact does it have on the presentation of the story being told?

- The use of expletives throughout the performance. What weight do they add in the moments they are used? How are they purposeful when you are thinking about expressionist theatre?
- The use of the over large table that moves and changes throughout the performance - detail how the table works within the performance. What purpose does the table serve within the story/narrative?
- The recurring appearance of Noah through projection and AV - how does this link to the main story being told? Why has Carl Bland included this strand in the story? What does the dialogue make you think about?

Links to NCEA Achievement Standards:

You could explore Expressionist Theatre when working on internal Achievement Standard 1.4, 2.4 and 3.4 and/or external Achievement Standard 1.3, 2.3 and 3.3. After seeing *A Stab In The Dark* you could:

- Devise a performance using the show as stimulus exploring the features and techniques of the Expressionist form
- Find expressionist texts such as those by Eugene O'Neill or Sean O'Casey, compare and contrast their work with *A Stab In the Dark* and look at how or imagine how the features are evident within a performance

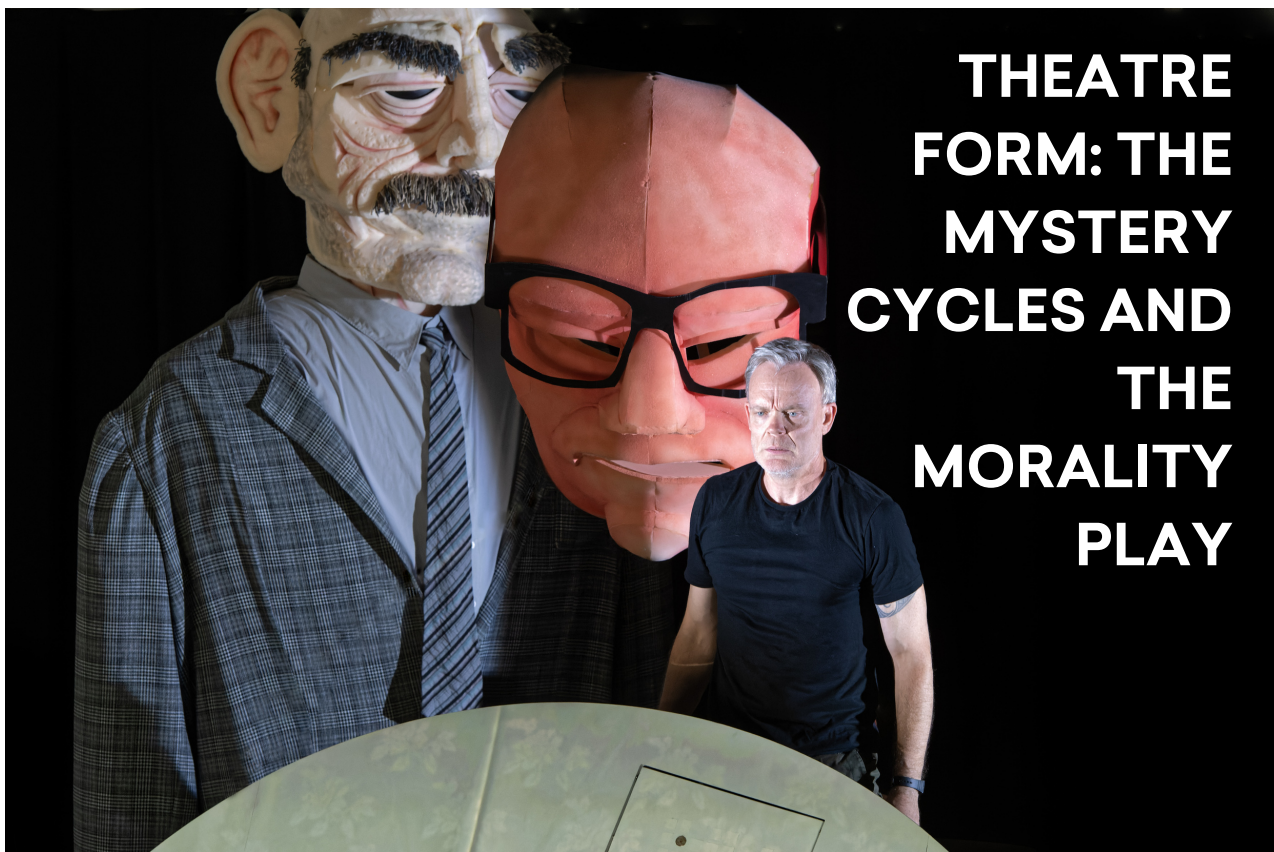
Use the following table to unpack how the features are used within *A Stab In The Dark* and discuss their impact and impression on you as an audience member. This exercise may also assist you in exploring “wider context” when revising for Achievement Standard 1.7, 2.7 and 3.7 - Live Performance. Remember that wider context can help you explore perceptive writing for this standard and help you approach the exam with creativity and originality in your answers.

Make sure that your notes are detailed and that you provide physical examples directly from the performance of the play.

Feature	Definition of the feature	Explanation of how this feature was used physically in the performance	What did the use of this feature make you think about in terms of the themes, ideas, symbols and wider context of the performance
Set Design	Put the definition of the feature into your own words so you know you will understand it in context	E.g. The oversized table, its many technical features and how the actors used it.	Think about: - what was the purpose of this set piece? - what did it make you think about? - how was it thematically, symbolically important - what can it be linked to socially, politically and historically

References:

J. L. Styan Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre, 1981.



THEATRE FORM: THE MYSTERY CYCLES AND THE MORALITY PLAY

The following notes on this theatre form are highly abridged and it is recommended that you conduct research about this theatre form, if you wish to use it for assessment purposes on its own, rather than as a wider context for the Live Theatre external exam.

Mediaeval theatre, like Greek Theatre, comes from ritual activity and originated as an expression of Christianity. Prior to this, theatre was not hugely popular and many performers were limited to the likes of Troubadours, Minstrels, Trouveres, Jongleurs and the Waits, where music, mime, acrobatics, dance, use of animals, juggling, wrestling and storytelling were an integral part of their performance style. During this time period, theatre found a foothold in houses of rich and noble families and would eventually lead to the patronage of theatrical troupes by the crown, like in the Elizabethan period. At the same time Christianity was spreading throughout Europe and while The Church wasn't fond of the theatre on moral grounds, they found it better to regulate theatrical performance, rather than prohibit their congregations from viewing it at all. Christian mass is highly ritualised and ideas, themes and symbols drawn directly from religious texts formed the basis of liturgical drama or morality plays at the time. Eventually the theatre moved outside of the church and performances of the Mystery Cycles - which cover from The Creation to the Last Judgement in the bible, focusing on The Passion of Christ, became hugely popular.

The features of a Mystery Cycle are outlined below:

- Does not have a specific sense of place, time and action
- Performances are dramatisations of old and new testament stories
- Performed outside on wagons
- A form of satire and can be commentary on life
- Created by the community of everyday people
- Performers were members of guilds or craftsmen
- Technologies were incorporated such as trap doors and creating the illusion of flying

As this type of theatre moved outside the church, the performances shifted and morphed, which is where Morality Plays were introduced. Most of the church congregation could not understand the Latin used within the services they attended, nor were they particularly literate. This type of theatre served to teach people through a theatrical point of view, what was morally right and wrong. While the plays began in a serious nature, they eventually became more farcical and satirical. Popular during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the dramas presented were allegorical in nature, personifying moral values outlined in the bible to teach a moral lesson. They were didactic, educational and informative.

The features of a Morality Play are outlined below:

- Included or incorporated christian symbolism
- Farcical elements
- Morals are personified by characters within the story
- The narrative focuses on a Hero or Protagonist whose inner weakness is the main action, tension or conflict
- This weakness is drawn out or challenged by the Villain or Antagonist
- The Seven Deadly Sins of Lust, Greed, Gluttony, Envy, Anger, Pride and Sloth are included in some way
- The characters are searching for what is morally right and wrong

Ideas for the classroom:

In small groups you could explore using the features of the Mystery Cycles and/or Morality Plays through devised work:

- Choose an interesting idea, line of dialogue or moment from *A Stab In The Dark*
- Brainstorm your own short story or narrative from this chosen provocation/stimulus as a group
- *Make sure you have a Protagonist and Antagonist*
- *Make sure the Protagonist's weakness is the driving action within the scene*
- *The scene does not have to be resolved but should be thought provoking*

- Use the features listed above in your devising process
- Rehearse and perform your short scene
- Gain feedback from your peers and discuss the following:
 - *How obvious were the features of the Mystery Cycles and/or the Morality Play*
 - *How strong was the link to A Stab In The Dark*
 - *What lesson did the scene teach you? How could you make the moral lesson stronger?*
- You could then implement the feedback to make the scene stronger

Questions to get you thinking:

- How do Warren and John fit into the Protagonist/Antagonist idea?
- *Are there other characters who could be deemed either a Protagonist or Antagonist drawing out another character's weakness? Or searching for truth?*
- *Discuss and defend your thoughts and ideas with your peers*
- What religious imagery and symbols are used within the play by the Director and Designers?
- *What was their purpose within the narrative?*
- *What did these images or symbols make you think about?*
- What do you think the purpose of the Noah and the Ark story line is? Discuss how and why it has been incorporated into the narrative.
- Identify and discuss the farcical or satirical elements of the performance. What links can you find to your own life or the world?
- Have the Seven Deadly Sins been incorporated into A Stab In The Dark? If so, how and why were they important to the narrative as a whole?
- What are characters searching for and what does this make you think about as an audience member?

Exploring wider context within A Stab In The Dark:

Wider context can be many different things. As a student it is important to understand how you can think about the play you are studying and link it to a wider context. Wider context could be:

- The wider world of the play itself - what has happened prior to the beginning of the play and what happens after?
- What theatre forms are being played with - the history of that form, the forms original context and purpose and how the stylistic choices the director or designer have made, change or use the form
- How the play links to our world socially, politically, historically and geographically

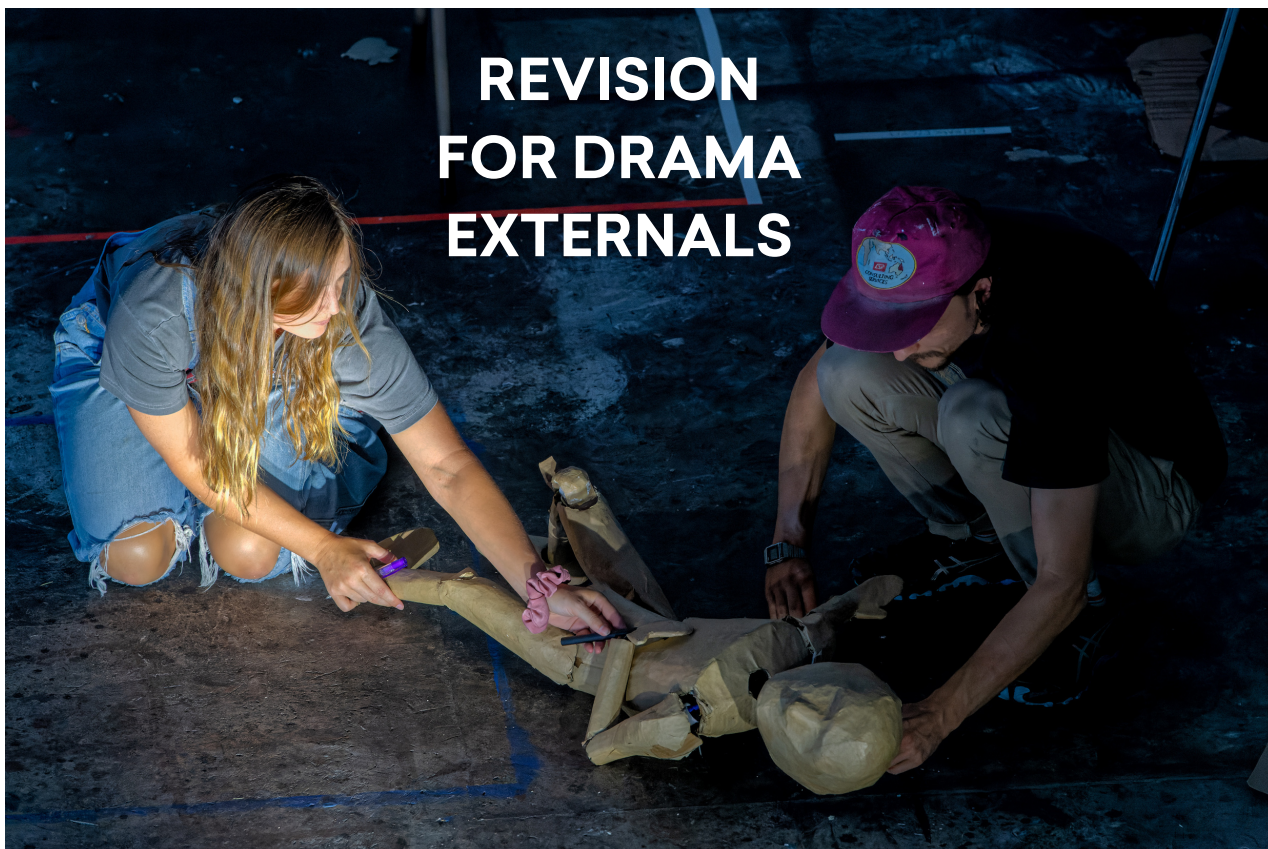
Use the following table to unpack how the features of the Mystery Cycles and/or the Morality Plays are used within *A Stab In The Dark*. Discuss their impact and impression on you as an audience member. Remember that wider context can help you explore perceptive writing for this standard and help you approach the exam with creativity and originality when constructing your answers.

Make sure that your notes are detailed and that you provide physical examples directly from the performance of the play.

Feature	Definition of the feature	Explanation of how this feature was used physically in the performance	What did the use of this feature make you think about in terms of the themes, ideas, symbols and wider context of the performance
Hero or Protagonist	Put the definition of the feature into your own words so you know you will understand it in context	E.g. How John is reflective of the idea of the protagonist having his weaknesses drawn out by the antagonistic Warren.	Think about: - what was the purpose of the duality of John and Warren? - what did this make you think about? - how was this thematically, symbolically important - what can these characters be linked to socially, politically and historically

References:

<https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/mystery-and-morality-plays/>



Below are the specifications for Achievement Standards for external drama exams (taken from the NZQA website, via the following link:

<https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/subjects/assessment-specifications/>)

The questions in this pack are designed specifically to prompt discussion or written answers that will enable you to revise successfully. You will want to have access to a glossary of Drama Components or Aspects on hand as you revise. Your teacher should have access to these or they can be found at TKI's Arts Online. This list is not divided into the four categories Techniques, Elements, Conventions and Technologies, so a good starting point would be to make a chart dividing them up and ensuring you know the difference:

<https://artsonline.tki.org.nz/Teaching-and-Learning/Pedagogy/Drama/Glossary>

Level One: 1.7 (90011)

Candidates should be familiar with the use of drama techniques, the use of technologies, character, and drama elements in their own performance and a performance viewed as an audience member.

Level Two: 2.7 (91219)

Candidates should be familiar with character and the use of drama techniques, drama conventions and technologies in their own performance and a performance viewed as an audience member.

Level Three: 3.7 (91518)

Candidates will be expected to make connections between the director and designer's concept(s) and the performance seen.

Candidates should be familiar with the use of drama elements such as role, focus and contrast, the actor/performers' use of techniques, and the use of technologies and conventions.

NOTE: Questions at all levels may cover a combination of elements, techniques, conventions, and technologies.

Revision Questions for A Stab In the Dark

Note: When answering the following question you will want to find and provide physical examples from the production. A physical example is when you describe, with specificity, what is happening on stage at the time. Get down to the nitty gritty, for example, explaining how the actor/performer is standing or moving, how far away from the audience they are, what is happening with technology, where exactly they are in space, etc. The more detail, the better!

Character/Role:

- How did the actor/performer use the drama techniques (voice, body, movement and space) to create their characters or roles within the performance?

Think further:

- *There are three versions of each character: physical, puppet and filmed. Discuss the purpose of presenting the characters like this and how it impacted your understanding of the story?*
- *How did the actors use the drama techniques to differentiate each version of the character from the other?*
- *Did the characters/roles you met evolve or stay the same and how is this communicated through their use of techniques?*
- How did the actor/performer create focus with their use of drama techniques?

- What did you understand about the characters and story through the dialogue that was used in the performance?
- *Think further: what do we find out about the character's lives, world and point of view through their dialogue? Think of a specific moment and use direct quotations from the text.*
- How did the actor/performer build contrast in their performance? Link to specific moments or examples in the performance.
- *Think further: What did you understand about the wider meaning, question or dialogue of the play from the way the actor/performer realised the characters or roles in this performance?*

Themes/Ideas/Symbols:

- What were the main themes, questions and ideas evident in the script? Link these themes, questions and ideas to specific moments or examples from the performance.
- What themes and ideas do each of the characters represent and how is this communicated through the acting techniques used?
- *Think Further: discuss how the three different versions of each character (physical, filmed and puppet) link to the themes, ideas and symbols? What was the purpose of presenting these ideas in this way?*
- How were design and directorial elements (props, setting, AV, puppets) and the Drama Elements used in conjunction to build the performance? How did this make you feel as a member of the audience?
- *Think further: How was the contrast created by the design used? Link your answer to specific technologies or moments in the performance.*
- *How was focus created by the actor/performer or design team? Link your answer to specific technologies or acting moments in the performance.*
- Identify recurring symbols or motifs throughout the performance. Explain why they were important to the performance or narrative?
- How do these themes, symbols or ideas link to the wider world of the play or the wider context of Aotearoa and what impact does this have on the audience?
- *Think further: Were there moments where the content was confronting or forced you to think about an idea in a new light? What impact does this have on the audience? What do you think the creative team was asking you in presenting the content in this way?*

Director/Designer Concept/Structure:

- Discuss how the performance was structured. Why was this effective?
- *Think further: Discuss how the switching between performance genres - puppetry, film and physical acting helped you understand the important ideas presented OR challenged you as an audience member.*

- How was tension created through the way the narrative was structured?
- Discuss the tension created between the technologies used and the actor/performer use of conventions, elements or techniques.
- How was puppetry and film used to create structure and focus in the performance?
- *Why was this effective?*
- How was the structure of the play different from a normal linear narrative and why was this important? How did this affect you as an audience member?
- *Think further: What do you think the performers/director/designers were trying to say through the structure of this performance? How was this brought to life in the performance space? What did you take away as the main message? What idea or questions asked challenged you the most? Why did you find this challenging?*
- Discuss how contrast was created and link this to either how the performance was structured or how the technology was designed for the performance. Link your ideas to specific moments or examples from the performance.
- Discuss the purpose of the performance and how it links to what is happening in the world, socially, politically or historically. Link your ideas to specific moments or examples from the performance.
- *How did features of expressionist or mediaeval (Mystery Cycles/Morality Plays) theatre impact the style of delivery of the content? What features can you identify that help to both challenge and serve the audience in this discussion?*
- Discuss the impact of Drama Conventions on the structure of the performance?

Technology: link your ideas to specific moments or examples in the performance. Think about lighting, set, sound, props, costumes, make-up and how this helped bring you into the world of the play.

- How was technology used to create focus in the performance?
- How was technology used to highlight important ideas, themes and symbols in the performance?
- How was contrast created or built through technology and why was this important?
- How did the use of technology help you gain a deeper understanding of the world of the play?

IMPORTANT NOTE: When you are writing about Set or Costume, you need to be specific about the following details and also sketch what you see. Imagine the person you are writing for has not seen the production and create a vivid image in their mind of what you saw:

For example: Set/Props - the size, shape and dimensions of any set pieces or props used, the materials used, their textures and the colours