

# Introductory notes to accompany audio description

## A STAB IN THE DARK

By Carl Bland

Based on the recording from 11 March 2022 at Q Theatre

### Information taken from the programme:

#### Introduction

“We feel incredibly fortunate to still be able to share this work with our audience. The filmic elements within the show, and the highly visually nature of the work has lent itself to this hybrid style of presentation.” — Nightsong

“Why God chose me to save the world is a f\*\*\*\*\*g mystery.” — Noah (of the Ark) What would you do if you met your exact double? What would happen if this double started following you? Forced his way into your life? Started to take it over? The story is a page turner. A thriller full of surprises. A wicked, funny, and unpredictable ride as we watch someone’s life unravel. Where they are forced to face the truth. What happened to that small innocent child we once were? What shapes us into the person we all become? A Stab in the Dark uses extraordinary giant puppets, evocative film noir imagery, and a set that’s so tilted our characters have to hang on for dear life. It is dark. Absurdly funny. Visually beautiful. You’ll be on the edge of your seats as you watch good and evil battle it out.

#### A Stab in the Dark Explained

A Stab in the Dark is an attempt to try to understand why people do bad things. Why do they commit terrible acts of violence? Is evil part of human nature? A common thread for this behaviour is a lack of empathy. An inability to feel for their victims. And a sense of injustice. That the world has rejected them and doesn’t care about them. And yet there are lots of examples of people killing someone they profess to love. So on to the story. I have tried to create a narrative that constantly surprises the audience. To make it a page turner. The reasoning being the stronger the story grips you, the more daring you can be in the telling of it. A Stab in the Dark deliberately uses several very aesthetically opposed mediums. A giant puppet; an actor playing two

characters that look the same. A woman who mysteriously we never quite see. Throughout the play we catch glimpses of her. Her arms at dinner. The side of her face in the hallway. Her power is in her voice and the stories she tells. We also have an episodic, beautifully crafted filmed sequence of the Noah story. A ridiculous giant fly and low tech props. A combination of three-dimensional objects and two-dimensional ones. How can these all live in a world that we can believe in? In a world we can become emotionally invested in? The wonder and the magic is that they can, because we are caught up in the story. We want to know what happens next. And these aesthetic opposites help amplify the central themes within it. The fragmented central character. The complexity of human nature. The struggle we all have with our own identity. These elements become integrated and wholly essential within the story. One of the ways I think the work is innovative is the way it's created. There isn't the usual script and set. All the visual elements are thought of and put on the page at the same time as the words. Each have equal importance. Each help tell the story. Often when people first read the script, they only hear the words and can't imagine the pictures. So they are unaware of the power of this multi-layered approach. Each moment in the play is experienced through words, pictures, and sound. Each is carefully crafted like layers of paint. There is a lot of precision in this. From experience, this approach makes the play linger in your thoughts. It makes the emotional impact resonate longer. A Stab in the Dark's central theme is Good and Evil. It's bold. It deliberately uses opposing visual techniques and performance styles. It is very dark and very funny. What is its conclusion? Beware of self obsession. How easily we distort. How easily that person you stare at in the mirror can tell you lies; can make you justify anything. Seems to me this is an important truth. Especially in a contemporary world that offers so many opportunities for us to become transfixed by our own image. But there is also Hope. If you can tear yourself away from yourself you'll find love has been calling your name. — Carl Bland

## **Descriptive notes**

The action in A Stab in the Dark is created through the combined use of live actors, puppets and filmed segments projected onto a round table that is placed in the centre of the stage with its surface almost vertical.

There are doors in the tabletop that allow items or characters to pop up or disappear through it. Sometimes the items that appear are real, like the

flowers that John brings and the vase he puts them in and then they reappear later as projections.

The main action takes place within an interrogation room. The tabletop is lit a plain grey and John and his interrogator sit at the top edge of the table. As John tells his story the action shifts to his memories through use of projection. Some areas, like the corridor in Warren's house are projected film. During meal scenes some plates and glasses are real and others projected.

Most of the area surrounding the table is usually in darkness, then lit in a faint glow when the child puppet moves around it.

There are just a few characters in the piece.

John and Warren are both played by Joel Tobeck. He's a middle-aged man with short grey hair and wears plain dark trousers and a blue shirt. The only apparent difference between John and Warren at the start is that Warren wears glasses and John does not. The two characters are able to talk to each other and interact using film and puppetry. At the beach where John recalls their first meeting, John and Warren both appear as snippets of black and white film. At the café, Warren is a half-sized puppet dressed identically to John but with glasses. During the conversation they swap between puppet and human using the glasses to distinguish them. At Warren's house when they sit at the table John is real and Warren is a projected image of the actor with glasses on – so John is talking to a filmed version of Warren. During the meal they swap so Warren is the real person sitting at the table and John is the projection. I try to indicate when these swaps happen within the description – using 'real' for the live actor.

Ann, played by Alison Bruce, is Warren's wife. She never fully appears but is indicated by a view of her torso in a doorway, the back of her head, or a projection of her hands or her puppet hands at the table.

Noah, played by Dave Fane, is a white bearded man with tattered clothing who appears as a filmed circular projection, his face in close-up, water and mountains behind him.

The Interrogator and the child are both puppets.

The interrogator is a huge puppet of an older man, his head the size of an armchair. He sits at the top of the table to the left of John as we face them. His large right hand mostly lies on the table or moves to articulate points that he makes and his left hand is behind John, occasionally patting him on the back. He seems to be made from a foam-like substance and is lined and slightly saggy. He is bald with a thin line of hair around his head and a full dark moustache. The voice of the interrogator is Carl Bland.

The child is a wooden puppet with vague features – just slight hollows for eyes and mouth but without colour or definition and body parts made of separate segments not covered by clothes or decorated in any way as if it's unfinished. The voice of the child is Roman Foster.

The puppeteers Milo Cawthorne and Jon Coddington also manipulate the many puppet props that are used including the dove, the fly, Ann's puppet hands, puppet John/Warren and the ark.

End.