

MTC EDUCATION TEACHERS' NOTES 2014



Neighbourhood Watch

by Lally Katz

17 Mar – 26 Apr 2014

Southbank Theatre, The Sumner

Notes prepared by Meg Upton

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH – TEACHERS’ NOTES

The Experience

Theatre tells stories. These stories differ from books, television, film, DVD, magazines, podcasts and other online media, because in the theatre stories are told to us by real people in a real space in real time. Each performance of a play is different to any other as it is dependent upon the time, the actors, the technical equipment and, very importantly, the audience. You can’t re-read a live theatre performance or copy it to see again and again. Each performance exists only once. The performance you will see of *Neighbourhood Watch* will differ from the one before and the one after. That makes it special, unique. Your role as an audience ensures its uniqueness. As a student of drama and theatre, MTC Education advises that you carefully prepare to see the production so that you can capture that unique, one off experience and be able to reflect on it in detail. The following resources are designed to assist you in preparing for, seeing, discussing and writing about the production of *Neighbourhood Watch*.

SYNOPSIS, SETTING & CHARACTERS

SYNOPSIS

Neighbourhood Watch takes place in the year between Kevin Rudd’s election as Australian Prime Minister and Barack Obama’s as US President. Everything was changing in the Western World and for a brief time anything seemed possible.

Against this backdrop we meet Catherine, a young woman stuck in suburbia, waiting for her life to change as monumentally as the world around her is. Into her life comes Ana, an elderly Hungarian immigrant carrying the weight of the twentieth century on her shoulders. As their unlikely relationship develops, Catherine’s life is transformed by Ana’s stories of an almost forgotten world: through her new friend’s eyes she witnesses the traumas of war, the desolation of the refugee experience, and the struggle of settling in a foreign land. It’s a common tale in our country, but one that’s all too foreign to middle-class Australians like Catherine.

In meeting Ana and hearing her stories, Catherine is given the rare opportunity of learning from someone who has survived the unthinkable. The courage this gives her in dealing with her own past is Ana’s gift to her. In turn, Ana is granted one last great friendship at a time when the journey to her life’s end was looking to be a lonely one.

SETTING

Neighbourhood Watch is a contemporary play set mainly on a street in suburban Australia. In the published script it is set in Sydney, and where it was first performed. This production it is set in Kew, Melbourne, the setting for which it was originally written, but it can easily be set in the suburbs of any other Australian city, depending on where it is performed. The play has multiple locations, including the outside street, Ana’s house, Catherine and Ken’s house, the doctor’s surgery, the chemist, the cinema, and Hungary during World War Two. It is up to the director and design team to work out the best way to represent these shifts in location and time (Notes from script)

CHARACTERS

In Australia

ANA, an 80 year old Hungarian woman

CATHERINE, a woman in her late 20s

KEN, a man in his early 30s
MARTIN, a man in his late 20s
BELINDA, a woman in her early to mid-50s
MILINKA, a Serbian woman in her late 70s
NANCY, Neighbourhood Watch, from 45 to 65 years old
DOCTOR VALKER, a woman in her mid to late 40s
CHEMIST, a man in his late 20s, early 30s
POSTMAN, any age
NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH POLICEMAN, a young man
WOMAN WITH SMALL DOG, any age
WOOLWORTHS DELIVERY BOY, a teenage boy
WOMAN WORKING AT CINEMA, any age
CINEMA CLEANER, any age
AMBULANCE OFFICER, any age
(NOTE: In this production Christina has become Belinda, and Milova has become Milinka)

In Hungary:

ANA'S FATHER
ANA'S MOTHER
ANA'S SISTER
GYPSY
SOLDIER
ARTUR
SOLDIER IN INFIRMARY/HOSPITAL
NURSE IN INFIRMARY
RUSSIAN SOLDIER
SOLDIER'S MOTHER
SOLDIER'S FATHER
MEAN GIRLS AT ANA'S WORK
POLICEMAN IN HUNGARY

KEY MARY STREET CHARACTERS

Ana – an 80 year old Hungarian refugee, a widow, she lives alone with her dog, Bella

Catherine/Kitty-Kitty/Cathy - is an aspiring actress, obsessive compulsive, who is recovering from the loss of her boyfriend Martin, she house shares with Ken.

Ken– is a diabetic, a *West Wing* enthusiast who spends his time watching 'lunch time eps' and playing World of Warcraft, a game he celebrates for the way it introduces him to people 'he wouldn't normally have access to in life'.

Belinda - is surveillance-security obsessed, she suffers from cancer, her children are so 'international' that she battles the illness in isolation.

Nancy – is an enthusiastic Neighbourhood Watch advocate rallying the street for the next meeting.

Milinka – a Serbian woman who lives in Ana's previous street, Creswick Street, a constant visitor to Mary Street seeking out Ana for coffee.

CAST, CREATIVE & PRODUCTION TEAM

CASTING NOTE (from published script)

Many of the roles in this play are tiny and any actor can play multiple roles. The Hungarian roles can be doubled by the actors playing the characters in modern Australia. However, consideration should go into this doubling as it will inevitably bleed into the story of the characters in modern Australia (especially the roles that the actors playing Martin and Ken play in the past in Hungary).

In this production the following roles and character doubling occurs:

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Robyn Nevin | Ana |
| Megan Holloway | Catherine (Kitty-Kitty) |
| Akos Armont | Martin/Artur/Soldier in Infirmary/Ambulance Officer |
| Charlie Garber | Ken/Ana's Father/Russian Soldier/Policeman in Hungary/ Cinema cleaner |
| Anthony Harkin | Pianist/Chemist/Gypsy/Woolworths Delivery boy/Postman/ Neighbourhood Watch Policeman |
| Natasha Herbert | Belinda/Nancy/Woman with small dog/Ana's Sister/Dr Valker/Mean Girl at Ana's work/Woman working at cinema |
| Kris McQuade | Milinka/Ana's Mother/Nurse in Infirmary/Soldier's father/ Mean Girl at Ana's work |

Production Team

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Director | Simon Stone |
| Set and Costume Designer | Dale Ferguson |
| Lighting Designer | Damien Cooper |
| Composer | Stefan Gregory |
| Associate Sound Designer | Terry McKibbin |
| Stage Manager | Eva Tandy |
| Assistant Stage Manager | Jess Keepence |
| Rehearsal & Production Photographer | Heidrun Löhrr |

THE THEATRE SPACE – SOUTHBANK THEATRE, THE SUMNER

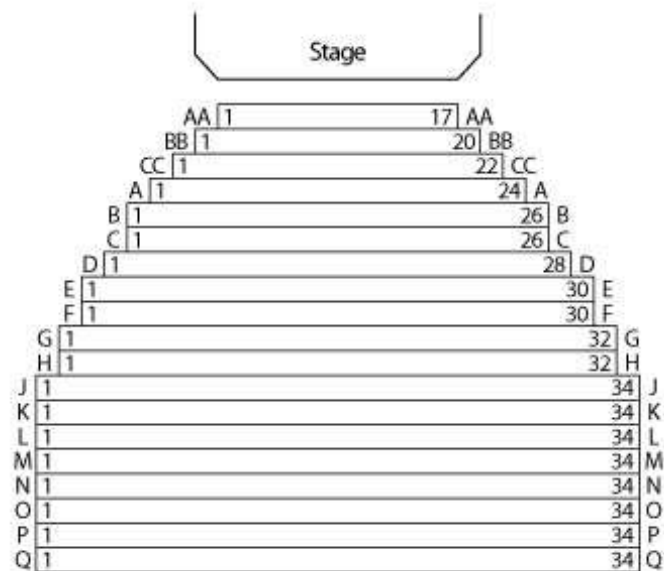
Neighbourhood Watch is performed in a proscenium arch configuration at Southbank Theatre, The Sumner which allows both the set and the actors to be framed within the playing space. The Sumner is a very contemporary proscenium arch theatre, quite different in design and aesthetic to other proscenium arch theatres you may have seen such as The Regent, Her Majesty's or The Princess.

Neighbourhood Watch makes use of the width and depth of the Sumner which easily allows for the use of a double stage revolve. The double revolve consists of a small central stationary piece. This is surrounded by the inner-revolve, then a second outer revolve. Beyond the outer revolve is more stationary playing space that provides entrance and exit points. Both revolves have the capacity to turn in either direction. The design looks a little like the image below except the revolves fit snugly into the Sumner stage without gaps.



Image source: <http://www.therevolvingstagecompany.co.uk/halogaland-theatre/>

Below is a seating map of the Sumner auditorium in relation to the stage, and following that is a panoramic image of the Sumner looking towards the stage. By having some understanding of the style, size and aesthetic of the theatre, you can begin to consider how it may impact on the actor/audience relationship, use of space, and how these enhance the non-naturalistic theatre styles present in *Neighbourhood Watch*.



CONTEXT/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following contextual information draws on references made in the production to places, events, eras, organisations and people, as well as aspects of popular culture.

NEIGHBOURHOODS

A neighbourhood (British English), or neighborhood (American English), is a geographically localised community within a larger city, town, suburb or rural area. Neighbourhoods are often social communities with considerable face-to-face interaction among members. "Researchers have not agreed on an exact definition. Neighbourhood is generally defined spatially as a specific geographic area and functionally as a set of social networks. Neighbourhoods, then, are the spatial units in which face-to-face social interactions occur – the personal settings and situations where residents seek to realise common values, socialise youth, and maintain effective social control".



Neighbourhoods – source: <http://www.google.com/imghp>

That ever popular Sesame Street Big Bird sings about his neighbourhood

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YA45UBu5cJM>

HUNGARY IN THE YEARS THAT SPAN ANA'S STORY



The Erzsebet Bridge, Budapest, pre WW2



The Erzsebet, Budapest, post WW2

WORLD WAR II

1939 - Hungary joins Anti-Comintern Pact of Germany, Japan and Italy. At the outbreak of World War II Hungary remains neutral.

1941 - Germany invades the Soviet Union. Hungary declares war on the Soviet Union. A large part of the Hungarian army is destroyed. Hungary declares war on the United Kingdom and the United States.

1944 - Hungarian Nazis depose Horthy and install a puppet regime after Horthy asks advancing Soviet troops for an armistice. Hungarian Jews and gypsies are deported to death camps.

1945 - Soviet forces drive the Germans out of Hungary by early April. Large parts of Budapest are reduced to rubble by the fighting. New Hungarian government introduces land reform bill, redistributing land from large estate owners to peasants.

1947-48 - Communists consolidate power. Hungary aligns itself more and more with the Soviet Union.

1949 - A new constitution makes Hungary a workers' and peasants' state. Industry is nationalised, agriculture collectivised and a wave of police terror launched.

NATIONAL UPRISING

1956 - Protesters demand the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Imre Nagy becomes prime minister. Nagy announces plans for Hungary to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and become a neutral power. Soviet forces crush the rebels, thousands are killed. Nagy takes refuge in the Yugoslav embassy, from where he is abducted by Soviet agents. Janos Kadar becomes head of government.

1958 - Announcement is made that Imre Nagy has been executed for high treason.

1960s - Kadar gradually introduces limited liberalising reforms. Political prisoners and church leaders are freed, farmers and industrial workers given increased rights.

1968 - New Economic Mechanism brings elements of the market to Hungarian socialism.

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1054642.stm

HUNGARIAN MIGRATION

World War II resulted in physical devastation, economic collapse and gradual takeover by a communist dictatorship in Hungary. Australia welcomed about 15,000 refugees officially termed Displaced Persons recruited from the International Refugee Organisation's refugee camps, mainly in Austria.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 against Soviet occupation and communism was crushed by Soviet Union troops reoccupying the country. Once more Australia welcomed about 14,500 migrants following a mass exodus of 200,000 Hungarians from their own country.

FORCED LABOUR CAMPS



Young Hungarian girls in a labour camp



Russian invasion of Hungary 1956

In *Neighbourhood Watch*, Ana talks about being sent to 'camps'.

The topic of **forced labour of Hungarians in the Soviet Union** in the aftermath of World War II was not researched until the fall of Communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While exact numbers are not known, it is estimated that up to 600,000 Hungarians were captured altogether, including an estimated 200,000 civilians. An estimated 200,000 citizens perished. It was part of a larger system of the usage of foreign forced labour in the Soviet Union.

In addition, an uncertain number of Hungarians were deported from Transylvania to the Soviet Union in the context of the Romania-Hungary Transylvanian dispute. In 1944, many Hungarians were accused by Romanians of being "partisans" and transferred to the Soviet administration. In early 1945, during the "de-germanisation" campaign all Hungarians with German names were transferred to the Soviets in accordance with the Soviet Order.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forced_labor_of_Hungarians_in_the_Soviet_Union

'GYPSIES' & THE ROMANI PEOPLE

In *Neighbourhood Watch*, the character of Ana believes she has 'sixth sense'. She tells Catherine that when she was a young girl, a Gypsy appeared one night outside their house in Budapest, Hungary and sang a love song but one she felt boded ill fortune. The next day Ana's father died on his way to work. In the production Ana is constantly reminding Catherine not to trust too soon and to not be 'the baby horse'.

Origins of the Gypsies or Romani People

The Romani are a diasporic (scattered) ethnicity of Indian origin (although this is disputed, some say they originate from Egypt) living mostly in Europe and the Americas. Romani are widely known among Anglophonic people by the exonym "Gypsies" (or Gipsies). In their own language, Romani, they are known collectively as Romane, or Rromane (depending on the dialect).



Various images of Hungarian Gypsy/Romany people in the period 1930-1945
Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/kent/voices/gallery/images/hungarian_gypsies.jpg

MUSIC

Romani music characteristically has vocals that tend to be soulful and declamatory, and the music often incorporates prominent glissandi (slides) between notes. Instrumentation varies widely according to the region the music comes from. There is a strong tradition of Romani music in Central and Eastern Europe, notably in countries such as Hungary, Romania and the former Yugoslavia. The quintessentially Spanish flamenco is to a very large extent the music (and dance, or indeed the culture) of the Romani people of Andalusia.

Apart from Romani music for local use, in Eastern Europe a separate Romani music originated for entertainment in restaurants and at parties and celebrations. This music drew its themes from Hungarian, Romanian, Russian and other sources of Romani origin, but was more sophisticated and became enormously popular in places like Budapest and Vienna. Later on it gained popularity in Western Europe, where many Romani orchestras were active, playing sophisticated melodies of East European origin.

Read more at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/insideout/northwest/series7/romany_gypsies.shtml

Gypsy love song: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2vR-y21BSw>

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY

Listen to the Gypsy love song link above and consider -

How does it make you feel?

What type of **mood** does it generate?

Consider in your preparation for seeing the production how this music as use of **sound** could contribute to the non-naturalistic styles present in *Neighbourhood Watch*.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH ORGANISATION

The title of the production is a play-on-words re the title of the widely recognized organisation. So what is NHW?

Neighbourhood Watch is a community based crime prevention program which aims to improve the quality of life within a neighbourhood by minimising preventable crime and promoting closer community ties. The program relies on the community and the Police working together in a partnership to achieve these aims.

Read more at: <http://www.nhw.com.au/Home>

How to be a 'good' neighbour: <http://www.wikihow.com/Be-a-Good-Neighbour>

THE WEST WING

In *Neighbourhood Watch*, *The West Wing* is referred to on several occasions by Ken and Catherine. The series' main character, President Jed Bartlett, is seen as a beacon of hope, much as the newly elected Kevin Rudd, then one year later, Barack Obama.

The West Wing is an American serial political drama television series created by Aaron Sorkin that was originally broadcast on NBC from September 22, 1999, to May 14, 2006. There were seven series of the program all set primarily in the West Wing of the White House, where the Oval Office and offices of presidential senior staff are located, during the fictional Democratic administration of Josiah Bartlett (played by Martin Sheen).

The West Wing, like many serial dramas, stretches storylines over several episodes or entire seasons. In addition to these larger storylines, each episode also contains smaller arcs that usually begin and end within an episode

Read more at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0200276/>

KEVIN RUDD and BARACK OBAMA

Kevin Rudd was elected Prime Minister of Australia on November 24, 2007

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/11/24/1195753362801.html>

Barack Obama was elected to the Presidency of the United States on the November 5, 2008

Obama's victory speech: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/us_elections_2008/7710038.stm

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

World of Warcraft is an online game where players from around the world assume the roles of heroic fantasy characters and explore a virtual world full of mystery, magic and endless adventure. Games such as World of Warcraft are commonly referred to as MMORPGs which stands for Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing games.

Role-play means that you play the role of a character living in the game's fantasy world. How much or little you role-play is up to you. Some players construct entire background histories for their characters and adopt unique mannerisms when 'in character'.

World of Warcraft thrusts you into a central role of an ever-changing story. You and your friends will be active participants in events that are steeped in the rich lore of this fantasy universe. Fight for either the Alliance or the Horde, and experience a fully-realised fantasy world.

Adapted from: <http://us.battle.net/wow/en/game/guide/>

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR, SIMON STONE

Due to a very short and intense rehearsal process for *Neighbourhood Watch* the creative team were unavailable to participate in interviews. We deeply respect that. As Simon Stone the director said, you will glean all that you need from seeing the show. In the meantime, here are some interesting links to Simon Stone's work and his approach to theatre making

On female characters...

"All the famous plays about male characters - *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Macbeth*, *Oedipus* - are about a kind of encroaching psychosis," Stone says.

"It's usually about something fundamental changing in their lives that shakes them to the core and makes them doubt everything about themselves.

"Humans invest so much in a man's crisis in that way. We believe in men having nervous breakdowns on stage and go, 'Yes, isn't it hard to be you'.

"I'm really drawn to plays in which women get to have all the complexity of characterisation and inner crisis that men do. *The Cherry Orchard* is a good example of that." And arguably *Neighbourhood Watch* as well.

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/australia-culture-blog/2013/aug/09/simon-stone-theatre-director>

On *Neighbourhood Watch*...

"The magic of this piece for me is how effortlessly it moves between memories, dreams and reality, and how each makes the other more poignant. The play bends time and explodes space. The past is resurrected and the present is spun around itself. Life pours into the afterlife. Lally has written a play for the modern age: a time travelling mix of fantasy, hyperrealism, sitcom and epic theatre. The eclecticism of its form is not haphazard – it's a tribute to the myriad life we lead nowadays. It's a privilege to be delving into such rich and exciting material and I thank her for entrusting me with it"

(Director's note from MTC Program)

On Stone's directing of the *Belvoir* production...

"...director **Simon Stone** skilfully allows the action to shift between the broad comic scenes and darker elements, while astutely steering the action away from unnecessary sentimentality. **Stone's** simple staging is elegant and effective. He uses a bare stage with a few props and an imaginatively used revolve. At one point, for instance, the revolve transports the two central characters literally back in time as Ana tells her stories to Catherine"

Further readings/watchings for Simon Stone:

The Talented Mr Stone

ABC TV Art Scape: <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/stories/s3849926.htm>

Simon Stone talks to Ralph Myers about art and theatre

Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2kzhDUTmlk>

What is theatre capable of?

Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6VffGvAVZI>

ABOUT THE WRITER, LALLY KATZ

Playwright Lally Katz is a generous soul and always up for an interview. She spoke to Meg Upton while on tour to Hot House Theatre in Wodonga with her one woman show *Stories I want to Tell You*.

INTERVIEW WITH LALLY KATZ, PLAYWRIGHT, *NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH*

Lally, in an interview with Belvoir before the 2011 premiere of *Neighbourhood Watch* you talk about the way you researched the play and structured it; in three acts, and drawing on the traditional hero journey structure. In *Neighbourhood Watch* who are the heroes and in what way are they heroic?

In *Neighbourhood Watch* there are two main heroes, Ana and Catherine. Well, I don't know if they're really heroes, but I used some of the heroes' journey structure in writing them. But I guess they're heroic to me. Certainly Ana is, as a person and as a character. Her life has been full of so many adventures that are hard to imagine for those of us who haven't grown up in the midst of a war. Her stories of survival are incredible. But also her stories of suburban life in Kew are also pretty wonderful to me!

When you write do you imagine the world of the play? If so, how did you imagine all those characters and Ana's incredible life being staged? Did you imagine a large cast? A large set? An ensemble of actors?

To be honest, when I write, I don't actually imagine a play or a stage or a set. I just imagine it all happening in real life. Like if the scene is on a street, I see the street, not the set of the street. Or if the scene is in the woods- I see the real woods. The only way I know how to write is by feeling that it's all real- feeling the truth of the scene and the characters and the story. However, this can make it complicated for a director when they've got to work out how to make the characters change location without having clumsy set changes. Simon Stone and designer Dale Ferguson have done a fantastic job with this in this production of *Neighbourhood Watch*!

Would you talk about how time - present, past, and juxtaposed - works in the play?

Well when I was hanging out with Ana and we would be sitting in her lounge-room telling me stories of the past- it was like we were living in two times at once. The present time and Ana's past. She and I were both in her lounge-room, but it was like a magic dust was sprinkled and we were transported to her past. Often she would be telling me stories to help me with a predicament of the present. Maybe I'd be having boy troubles and she would begin this very involved story about Hungary during world war two and that magic dust would sprinkle around us and suddenly we'd be in the story. And then at the end of the story, there was always something for me to learn from and use in my present situation. So I guess time in the play is used to teach Ana and Catherine about their lives in ways that they maybe can't see in just one time frame.

In VCE Drama students study the form known as 'non-naturalism'. What is non-naturalistic about *Neighbourhood Watch*? What is truthful about the play?

Gosh, I'm not a hundred percent familiar with that term- but I'm guessing that it means something sort of surreal or another kind of reality? There's plenty of that in *Neighbourhood Watch*. There's really naturalistic stuff, but then it departs from there and the characters become characters in Hungary. I've always loved the magic in the ordinary- like the magic in the suburbs- places that seem ordinary, but then there's this secret magic. To me that's non naturalism. And that's what we go for with *Neighbourhood Watch* at certain parts. That someone like Ana can exist- this sort of magic woman- in suburban Kew. And that time can be manipulated. And that ghosts can seem alive.

What other aspects of theatrical styles do you think are present in the production? For instance is there magical realism? Is there fantasy?

I guess there is probably both magic realism and fantasy. But it's hard for me to answer that properly, because to me everything feels real. But to audience members watching it, I'm sure some of it will feel like magic realism or fantasy.

Lally, would you talk about the design of the play? Did you have input into those choices?

I was around for a lot of the initial rehearsal period and saw it all coming together and loved it - but I had very little to do with any of the aesthetic. That was really the Director Simon Stone and the designers. I was there if they wanted to ask me about the way a particular character dressed, but they didn't need my input on the design. Sometimes with a production a writer has a lot of input and sometimes they don't. I never really have strong ideas on design, because I'm always just picturing stuff happening in real life. But I know if I like it or not when I see it. And I love the design for this show. I think Simon and Dale Ferguson handled the changing locations and times in a really brilliant way with the use of the revolve, helping the characters to move seamlessly through time and space. And it's also a lot of fun! I love the piano composition and think that it really adds to the feeling the world. Simon is a brilliant director and the world and aesthetic that he and the designers have created is one that I love. I love how the revolve can be a tram and then a river and then Mary Street in Kew.

What do you think this play says about the world that we live in?

For me it is a story of the epic and the domestic. We are always living in front of the backdrop of history, even if we don't know it. And so often we disregard the wisdom of the elderly. The elderly are so often invisible in our modern world. But they hold the key to our past. And in the past there can be lots of answers to now and the future. It's also a story about a woman displaced after the war. It's the story of a refugee. And that is certainly something that is part of the world we live in now.

Further readings/watchings about Lally Katz & *Neighbourhood Watch*

- A collection of short videos about Lally Katz and writing plays
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLWUECD5FQ&list=PLwqHlrGnRd9ZKzVdITK_fQUwGowDCIjf8
- Review: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/broken-hungarian-is-a-rhapsody-in-the-key-of-nevin-20110728-1i28g.html>
- Review: <http://www.australianstage.com.au/201107284610/reviews/sydney/neighbourhood-watch-%7C-belvoir.html>
- Interview with Lally Katz: <http://theatrenotes.blogspot.com.au/2010/11/interview-lally-katz.html>

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS & EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This section of the teachers' notes directly addresses the requirements of the VCE Drama Unit 3 performance analysis task. While MTC sincerely knows you will enjoy *Neighbourhood Watch* as a new and inspiring piece of Australian theatre, we are also aware that you have a job to do. That job is outlined below:

DRAMA UNIT 3

Area of Study 3: Analysing non-naturalistic performance, Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate a non-naturalistic performance

Key Knowledge

- The way in which non-naturalistic performance styles and conventions are used in performance
- The ways in which characters are represented in non-naturalistic performance through the actors' use of expressive skills
- The ways in which dramatic elements, conventions and stagecraft are manipulated to enhance non-naturalistic performance
- Drama terminology – relevant to non-naturalistic performance

Key Skills

- Analyse the representation of characters within a non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse and evaluate the manipulation of dramatic elements, conventions and stagecraft within a non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse non-naturalistic performance styles within a production
- Analyse and evaluate the use of expressive and performance skills in non-naturalistic performance
- Analyse and evaluate establishment and maintenance of the actor-audience relationship in a non-naturalistic performance
- Drama terminology

Dramatic Elements:

- Climax, conflict, contrast, mood, rhythm, sound, space, symbol, tension

Expressive Skills:

- Voice, movement, gesture, facial expression

Performance Skills:

- Focus, timing, energy, actor-audience relationship

1 THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

The structure of *Neighbourhood Watch* is two acts. Act I begins in Mary Street in 2007 and Act II begins in Hungary during WW2 in an infirmary (Hospital). What did you first feel and think when you entered the theatre to see the production?

- What aspects of the production were already apparent?
- What 'world' did you seem to be entering?
- Was it a contemporary world?
- What was familiar about the world of *Neighbourhood Watch*?
- What was unfamiliar?

Lally Katz states that *Neighbourhood Watch* is a world of the both the surreal and the real.

- What aspects of the performance seemed 'surreal'?

- What aspects of the performance felt more 'real'?
- How did the play create both these worlds?
- How does the use of a predominantly empty space assist in creating different worlds?

2 STRUCTURE & NARRATIVE

Neighbourhood Watch is presented in two acts which are comprised of many smaller scenes or vignettes

- Were these small scenes or vignettes clearly signposted? How was this achieved? Sound? Light? Narration?
- Is the production a linear narrative?
- Does this production play with the concept of time? Flashback? Parallel time? Spheres of time?

3 PERFORMANCE STYLES & CONVENTIONS

Neighbourhood Watch is considered to be a non-naturalistic play. Your task is to analyse the theatrical conventions it drew on in order to achieve and enhance the non-naturalism.

I've always loved the magic in the ordinary- like the magic in the suburbs- places that seem ordinary –
Lally Katz, writer

- Consider the opening to the play – piano music and wheelie bins appearing outside houses
- How do these simple elements create a sense of an 'ordinary' suburb?
- How does the use of space combined with other elements such as lighting create the separate houses?
- How do we know we are outside?
- What seems real about this particular aspect of the play?
- How are each of the characters introduced to us?

...but then there's this secret magic. To me that's non naturalism. And that's what we go for with Neighbourhood Watch at certain parts – Lally Katz, writer

- When did you first notice aspects of 'secret magic' in this play?
- In what way were they magical or even fantasy like?
- Consider the use of lighting in this scene. How does it shift to represent the past?

But to audience members watching it, I'm sure some of it will feel like magic realism or fantasy. Lally has written a play for the modern age: a time travelling mix of fantasy, hyperrealism, sitcom and epic theatre. The eclecticism of its form is not haphazard – it's a tribute to the myriad life we lead nowadays – Simon Stone.

Director Simon Stone focuses our attention on several different theatrical styles in this quote.

Firstly 'sitcom'

- What is a sitcom? What *conventions* do we associate with it?
- Consider the following vignettes or scenes in the production – the arrival of NHW Nancy, the arrival of the Woolworths delivery boy, the ironing scene
- What aspects of these scenes could be considered similar to a sitcom?

Next, 'hyperrealism'. Simon Stone's directorial style is known for the hyper real nature of the acting, whereby we feel we are watching a very real and believable scene.

- Consider the scene between Ana and Dr Valker in Act II, this is quite a dramatic or serious scene
- What could be considered to be hyper-real in this scene?
- What other scenes can you recall that included such a sense of truthfulness or reality?
- How does the writing and language contribute to the hyper realism?

Simon Stone also describes the production as having aspects of 'Epic Theatre'.

- What are some key conventions of Epic Theatre?
- How were they present in the production of *Neighbourhood Watch*?
- Consider the role of the pianists and how he created his many 'types'
- Consider the stories contained within the production and their capacity to 'teach'
- Consider the juxtaposition of scenes and how they manipulated the actor/audience relationship

Both the writer and the director talk about the production as having elements of 'fantasy' within it.

- Firstly, discuss what fantasy is and identify some conventions

Now consider the tale that Ana tells Catherine about Artur, the mass murderer.

We flashback to Hungary before WW2. Old Ana becomes Young Ana. The piano begins to play melancholic Hungarian music. The present and the past merge:

- Discuss this scene in some detail and identify the 'fantastical' elements within it
- How does costume contribute?
- How does accent and language contribute? Ana says, 'We are speaking in the English so you understand'
- How does the stage revolve and the construction of the tram contribute?
- How does lighting and music shift and intensify in order to create this 'nightmare' like world?
- How does this scene explore the dramatic elements of – mood, conflict, climax, contrast, rhythm, tension, sound, and symbol?

Consider the Gypsy scene. As Ana begins to tell her first story to Catherine we are transported back to Hungary before WW2. New characters appear, period costumes, the revolve turns, older Ana becomes younger Ana watching her parents.

- Whose fantasy or memory are we witnessing?
- How are all these moments working together to enhance the non-naturalistic style?
- Consider the use of lighting in this scene. How does it shift to represent the past?

Another theatrical style that is evident in the production is COMEDY. We laugh at many moments through the production.

- Select some key moments from the production that you felt were funny or comic
- How was this humour achieved?
- Consider character types, character interactions, character idiosyncrasies
- Discuss in detail the NHW Meeting when Ana discusses her dog Bella's interaction with the 'piccolo' (small) dog – what conventions of comedy are present in this scene?

It is worth considering the appearance of the character of Martin, Catherine's ex-boyfriend, and how these scenes explore certain theatrical styles and conventions

- Discuss the picnic scene, the ironing scene and the final scene as Ana is dying
- Would you consider these scenes to be part of the fantasy or magical realism that exists in *Neighbourhood Watch*? Why?
- What aspects of the scenes seem very real?
- When you discover the truth about Martin, does that shift the way you think about those scenes? Did you predict this truth? Why?
- The scenes are very self-contained – Martin and Catherine exist in their own world – but this changes in the final scene when Ana is dying. Comment on the meaning and symbolism of this.

At times *Neighbourhood Watch* appears quite **FILMIC** in its style and structure.

- What do you understand as being 'filmic'?

- What are jump cuts?
- Did you feel at times you were watching a series of filmed scenes or were behind the lens of a camera?

When Catherine takes Ana and Milinka to the cinema to see *Mamma Mia* we are treated to a **montage** – a full movie in three minutes!

- How was this montage created theatrically?
- How did language, lighting, sound, and action indicate to us that time was passing?

4 CHARACTERS & EXPRESSIVE SKILLS

This section explores some of the characters and how they were represented and performed in the production. In *Neighbourhood Watch* some actors remained in the one role, some transformed character and others changed character or played versions of themselves.

- Discuss what it means to ‘transform’ character
- Discuss what it means to change character
- Discuss what it means to play another version of the one character eg different age

Anthony Harkin played the Pianist, Chemist, Gypsy, Woolworths Delivery boy, Postman, and Neighbourhood Watch Policeman

- Analyse how the actor created each of these characters
- Which were transformations? Which were achieved off stage?
- How did the actor use the expressive skills of voice, movement, gesture and facial expression to create some of these different characters?
- How did the actor use the performance skills of focus, timing, energy and the creation/manipulation of the actor-audience relationship?
- How did costume and props assist with playing these many roles?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of each of the roles he created – did you believe them, were they clear, why?

ANA, is one of two key characters in this production. Actor Robyn Nevin is playing a character at least 20 years older than herself. She is also playing a character from a different culture.

- Analyse how Robyn Nevin created the character of Ana and, in particular, created her age
- Consider the use of voice and accent ie ‘watersmelon’
- Consider the way she walked, and how this became more difficult for her as she became ill
- Consider her interactions with the other neighbours and how they exposed her nature and approach to life
- How did Robyn Nevin use the performance skills of focus, timing, and energy to create the character of Ana?
- How did costume assist in creating the character of Ana?
- What props did she use or were important to her?

Consider how the character of Ana made you feel.

- Did you find her believable? Why?
- Were there times when you felt sympathy or pity for her?
- Were there other feelings this character evoked?

Old Ana becomes her younger self in some key scenes.

- How does the actor create this younger version of herself?
- Is this transformation? Is it representation?

Megan Holloway plays the character of Catherine. To Ana she is known as Kitty-Kitty, and to Martin she was known as Cathy.

- Analyse the key characteristics of Catherine. How would you describe her? What were her habits? Was she confident?
- Did Catherine express herself differently to different characters ie Ana, Ken, Martin?
- How did you feel about the character of Catherine? Did this feeling change as the story unfolded?

In some scenes, Catherine becomes the young Ana. In the scene with the murderer, Artur, and especially at the beginning of Act 2

- Analyse these scenes in some detail
- Does the actor change her expressive and performance skills in order to become the younger Ana?
- Does she 'transform' into Ana or adopt aspects of her?
- Does the depth of taking on the character of the younger Ana increase in the second act?
- How does costume contribute and enhance?
- How do these two scenes contribute to the non-naturalistic style of the production?

Discuss the characters of Milinka and Ken.

- What were their roles and functions within the play?
- How did you feel about them?
- How did the actors use their expressive and performance skills to manipulate feeling in the audience?

5 ACTOR/AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

Discuss the design of the playing space and all its elements – entrances, exits, shape, size, the revolve, the piano setting

- How was this space used in order to set up particular actor/audience relationships?
- Was there a fourth wall?
- Were certain moments intended to be intimate? Did they succeed?
- Where were you sitting in the auditorium and what impact do you feel that had on the actor/audience relationship?
- What was non-naturalistic about the actor/audience relationships that were established and manipulated within the production?

6 DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

While it is useful to be considering dramatic elements across all aspects of your analysis, this section invites you to explore some in more detail

There are several moments of CONFLICT in *Neighbourhood Watch*.

- Between characters ie Ana and Milinka, Catherine and Ken, Ana and Catherine
- Within certain characters – internal conflict
- Between countries – meta conflict of war
- Select three scenes from the production and explore how CONFLICT is evident
- Consider the use of language, silence, facial expressions, gesture, movement
- Consider how lighting and sound contributed to establishing moments of conflict
- Did the conflict contribute to moments of 'realism'?
- How did the conflict contribute to moments of non-naturalism?

There is much representation and SYMBOLISM in the play

- How is the neighbourhood represented?
- How is Hungary represented?
- How is time represented?
- What is potentially symbolic about the STAGE REVOLVE?
- Is the music or sound symbolic at all? Why?

7 STAGECRAFT

Set & Properties

Describe the set design in as much detail as possible – colour palette, textures, theatre technologies used.

- How did the set design help to create multiple locations and multiple time frames?
- How did it enhance the non-naturalistic styles in the production?
- Evaluate its effectiveness in creating the world(s) within the play – was it too abstract, not abstract enough?

With a minimalist set design, smaller set items and props take on significant meaning. Some of the smaller set items and props in the production include:

- The wheelie bins
- The tea trolley with its coffee making items
- The ironing board and iron
- Various sets of chairs
- The laptop
- Catherine's mobile phone
- The raft on the river

Discuss how each of the set and prop items were used in the production, who used them, how they were used and what they represented or symbolised

- How did the choices of these small set items and props contribute to the non-naturalistic styles present in *Neighbourhood Watch*?

Costume

Dale Ferguson designed the costumes as well as the set.

- It may be useful to analyse and evaluate them in relation to character.
- It may also be useful to consider the costume design from the present day then the costume design from the past in Hungary
- Choose TWO characters from the present and TWO from the past
- Describe/list aspects of their costume (you can use the production shots in these notes to assist)
- Would you consider their costumes to be **naturalistic or non-naturalistic**?
- How did the costumes evoke era and time?
- How did the costumes enhance the narrative or story?
- How did costume create CONTRAST in the production?

After the opening scene of Act II, Catherine is still wearing her costume from war time Hungary when she returns to the present

- Can Ken see her costume or is it meant only for us?
- What do you think this symbolises within the play?
- How does it contribute to the non-naturalism?

Music

Composer Stefan Gregory has used a live musician and on stage piano to deliver some of his especially composed score for *Neighbourhood Watch*.

- How does the presence of the musician enhance the non-naturalistic style of the play?
- Now think about the music itself. Did you hear a difference between the music of the present and the music of the past?
- Analyse and evaluate this and discuss why this may be so
- Was particular music used for certain characters? Did you notice it being repeated when they re-appeared? Did it seem to represent their state of mind?
- Other parts of the composition is pre-recorded. Identify some of these moments.
- How did the live music generate particular **moods** or feelings?
- How did the pre-recorded music generate particular **moods** or feelings?

Sound

There are other sounds heard throughout the production of *Neighbourhood Watch*.

- Bella the dog, telephones, door bells are some – discuss others
- Would you consider these realistic sound effects? Can the performers hear them ie are they diegetic sound?
- How do these sound effects contribute to the theatrical styles present in the play?

Lighting

On such a minimalist and somewhat abstract set, the lighting in this production plays an important role. Lighting designer, Damien Cooper, has used light in a remarkable manner. Consider the following scenes:

- The opening scene on Mary Street
- The first time we meet Martin
- When Catherine as young Ana meets Artur the murderer
- The montage scene at the cinema
- The final scene when Ana is dying
- See if you can recall how these scenes were lit considering the colour, the intensity, the direction of the light.
- What stood out for you in terms of lighting? Why?
- How did particular lighting states evoke mood?
- Was lighting used symbolically ie to capture characters' feelings or states of mind?

THEMES & CONCERNS

- The need for community and friends
- Courage and resilience
- Trust
- Wisdom
- Love
- Friendship
- Memory
- Reconciliation

Discuss how these themes, as well as others, were present or explored in the play

ACT TWO, Scene 1: A close examination

This opening scene has quite epic proportions, the heroic quest (refer to Lally's interview), a love story, a tragedy. In some ways it is like watching a film

It is the past, war torn Hungary, Catherine as young Ana is a working in a hospital/infirmary. She speaks with a Hungarian accent. The costumes in this first scene clearly indicate the war and the culture. Ana meets the young soldier who has lost his legs. She is transferred but later begs a Russian soldier to take her over the river so she can tell his parents he has died.

When she arrives she learns the truth and the young couple fall in love. When he visits her in Budapest he is deeply shamed by Ana's workmates and leaves. Ana does pursue him, in fact she never sees him again.

Things to consider/discuss/develop further:

- Catherine as the young Ana seems firmly embedded in Ana's past and is reliving her life for her
- There is an interesting parallel in this scene with scenes in the present in that Ana/Catherine in love with the soldier/Martin, played by the same actors
- What might this be commenting on or symbolising?
- How does lighting indicate present?
- How does lighting indicate the past?
- The ever present piano music, waltz time evokes the period, the mood and the intensity of the building love affair
- 'Did he come to see you?' returns us to the present very sharply

Discuss, analyse and evaluate this scene considering how the use of character, stagecraft, and dramatic elements combined theatrically to tell the story.

Relating your study of *Neighbourhood Watch* to other Unit 3 tasks

It's a good idea to consider how seeing and studying the production provides ideas for your own devised non-naturalistic ensemble performance.

- What is an 'ensemble'?
- Discuss whether the cast in *Neighbourhood Watch* worked as an ensemble.
- Were there particular scenes that stood out with regard to an ensemble process? For instance the construction of group scenes?
- Were there times when an ensemble process was not occurring?
- Analyse and evaluate particular moments in the play where you felt there was an effective ensemble process
- Remember that this production began with a script.
- You will be creating your own ensemble using a range of playmaking techniques such as: researching, brainstorming, improvising, scripting, editing, rehearsing and refining
- Apart from scripting, do you feel there was evidence of other playmaking techniques in *Neighbourhood Watch*?
- What ideas did you take away from seeing *Neighbourhood Watch* that you feel you could use in your own devised non-naturalistic ensemble performance?

MTC PRODUCTION IMAGES:



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Megan Holloway and Charlie Garber in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Natasha Herbert and Robyn Nevin in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Robyn Nevin, Anthony Harkin and Kris McQuade in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Megan Holloway, Kris McQuade, Robyn Nevin and Anthony Harkin in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Megan Holloway and Akos Armont in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Robyn Nevin and Megan Holloway in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Akos Armont, Megan Holloway and Robyn Nevin in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Megan Holloway and Akos Armont in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Akos Armont, Megan Holloway and Robyn Nevin in *Neighbourhood Watch*



MTC PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY

Kris McQuade, Megan Holloway and Robyn Nevin in *Neighbourhood Watch*