

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

— EDUCATION PACK PART B —

MELBOURNE TALAM

BY RASHMA N. KALSIE

4 — 20 MAY

SOUTHBANK THEATRE
THE LAWLER

23 MAY — 9 JUNE

REGIONAL TOUR

MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

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Activity



Discuss



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Introduction

Part B of the *Melbourne Talam* Education Pack is designed to help you analyse the production in relation to your VCE Drama studies. This is a post-show pack with information about dramatic elements, expressive skills, performance skills and stagecraft – and spoilers! This resource will help you unpack the MTC production, and is best used in combination with Part A of the Education Pack. Revisit Part A for information about the characters, synopsis, setting and context. While this pack is intended to support your study, teachers and students should consult the VCE Study Design and VCAA documents for information about assessment tasks and examinations.



Photo by Earl Carter

Melbourne Theatre Company

MTC is Melbourne's home of live storytelling, producing an annual mainstage season of up to 12 plays, an annual Education production and diverse learning program, play readings, and more. MTC is one of the major performing arts companies in Australia, and one of the largest theatre companies in the English-speaking world. Founded in 1953, MTC is also the oldest professional theatre company in Australia, and currently exists as a semi-autonomous department of the University of Melbourne.

As Australia changed, MTC has changed with it. We like to think that we have frequently been at the forefront of Australian culture, introducing new ideas and new ways of looking at our lives, our society and the world; helping to explain a swiftly evolving landscape as we moved through it. Today, with Southbank Theatre as our performance home and our headquarters in Sturt Street, Southbank, MTC strives to present Melbourne audiences with the best drama from Australia and overseas to the highest standards.

Our Vision: To enrich lives with understanding and empathy through the storytelling power of the finest theatre imaginable.

Our Artistic Purpose: To produce classic and contemporary Australian and international theatre with style, passion and excellence in order to entertain, challenge and enrich audiences.

MTC acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand, and we pay our respects to Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors past and present, and to our shared future.

Direction

Many aspects of *Melbourne Talam* that you will discuss and analyse are the result of decisions made by the director, Petra Kalive. She has led the creative team (including set and costume designer, lighting designer, and composer and sound designer) in making artistic decisions along the journey of creating this production.



Petra Kalive with Rashma N. Kalsie in rehearsal.

Petra has extensive experience as a director and dramaturg of new works for the stage. Her acclaimed adaptation of Peter Goldsworthy's novel *Three Dog Night* toured nationally in 2009. She was Dramaturg at Red Stitch from 2009 – 2012, Assistant Dramaturg at The Malthouse in 2010. At Melbourne Theatre Company she directed *Beached* (winner of the 2010 Patrick White Award), *In the Kingdom of Cha* (Cybec Electric), and was Assistant Director on *Constellations* and on STC's *Macbeth*. Petra has directed for Arena Theatre Company, Complete Works Theatre Company, St Martins Youth Arts Centre, La Trobe and Monash University performing arts programs. She is currently Artistic Director of Union House Theatre at Melbourne University. Her most recent work as a director includes *Redemption* by Anthony Crowley at

La Mama, *Macbeth and Macdeath: a Coda* for Union House Theatre and the much-acclaimed *Taxithi* which played two sell-out seasons at fortyfivedownstairs.

Petra describes her use of the “given circumstances” when directing the production as essential to giving the play clarity. “Because the play is so non-naturalistic, constantly transforming time and place, the actors needed to play the given circumstances to anchor the audience in a specific time and place, otherwise we don't know where we are.” Petra describes her process below:



Petra Kalive (Director)

“I have worked with the actors on the **given circumstances** of each scene and we have developed a clear idea of the specifics of each location. The actor's imagination is an incredible thing – the more detail an actor is able to contribute to their given circumstances, the more an audience is able to read from their performance. Specifically, when I talk about given circumstances, I mean who are they, what are they doing, where are they, when is it, why are they there? All of these questions open up like a concertina. Where they are can include but is definitely not limited to; are they inside or outside, what is the weather like, do they like where they are, where have they just come from, where are they about to go to, what (in detail) does their surrounding look like, what does it smell like, how comfortable are they in that space, etc.”



Discuss given circumstances

Recall specific scenes in the production and discuss their given circumstances. How do you know where the scene takes place? What cues in the actor's performance provide context?

More insights from Petra are peppered throughout this resource, with specific information about performance styles, the fourth wall, themes, and stagecraft elements.



A day as Petra Kalive

Head to our blog to read about a day in the life of Director Petra Kalive: mtc.com.au/backstage

Performance Styles

Melbourne Talam is presented in a non-naturalistic performance style. You may be able to identify similarities to the work of Bertolt Brecht (Epic Theatre) and Jerzy Grotowski (Poor Theatre) through the use of conventions such as direct address, narration, flashbacks and multiple roles. Petra Kalive (Director) also incorporated elements of Bollywood into this production. For example, the wedding party in Delhi flashback (Act 1, scene 2).

Petra has also created an opening sequence for the play, which incorporates conventions of Bollywood performance. Petra observes that although *Melbourne Talam* is about the Indian migrant experience, we don't really see that much of India. She wanted from the outset to establish the vibrancy of India and contrast it against the grey dreariness of Melbourne.



Petra Kalive (Director)

“Rashma’s play calls for a variety of performance styles. While the three protagonists must be played with authenticity, there is scope for some of the peripheral characters to exist in a more melodramatic or exaggerated place. There are moments of comedy, slapstick and drama. Rashma has also set me the challenge of staging a tragic event – I have chosen to represent this in a non-naturalistic way. While the three protagonists exist in a naturalistic space – the set is both representational and literal. As the play shifts and morphs, so too does the set.”



Discuss Performance styles

Discuss the performance styles Petra mentions above, and identify moments in the production where you saw these styles on stage.

The fourth wall

In this production of *Melbourne Talam*, the characters speak directly to the audience and break the fourth wall. Petra suggests the playwright has written the script in a way where characters invite the audience into flashbacks. You might imagine that, although the characters talk to us, they exist in a world that the audience is observing. Petra provides the following insights into how she directed the production:



Petra Kalive (Director)

“The fourth wall is smashed in this production. The characters confess their innermost thoughts and feelings to the audience. It is almost as if the characters want the audience to understand them or the characters want to understand themselves better by speaking their thoughts out loud. The audience are completely complicit in the decisions that each of our three characters make.”



Discuss the fourth wall

Discuss your experience of how the actors broke the fourth wall in this production. How did it affect your experience of the story and the characters?



Performance styles

Make a table with headings identifying each of the performance styles you saw in the production. Under each performance style, list the conventions you saw and include a specific example from the performance.

Characters

Sonali

Actor Sonya Soares believes *connection* is the driving force behind Sonali. Sonya says Sonali desperately wants to feel loved and valued, which is a very real human need. “I picture Sonali as the middle child,” says Sonya, “sandwiched between an academic older sister and a younger brother who would have been the much anticipated son and heir.” Despite her family's wealth and status, we hear how her life in Delhi was very much prescribed. As an audience, you might imagine that Sonali has struggled to get attention – to get any time in the spotlight – back home in India. This kind of backstory might explain her need for attention and to be admired, perhaps by men in particular.



Sonya Soares (Sonali)

“Things like whether she can drink, what she is allowed to wear and who she is supposed to spend her life with are closely policed. She bristles against these constraints in a bid for greater freedom but she still very much wants and needs her family's love and support...so these very basic human needs [e.g. connection] sit underneath her entitlement and vanity...and the great part is that we get to see her isolation and loneliness as well as all of the lighter, clown-like behaviour.”

Sonya describes her central character as “a lot of fun to inhabit”, because “she's so flawed as a person and it's all of the surface for everyone to see”. Sonya's approach to developing her characterisation for Sonali began with finding the character's voice, and then allowing her mannerisms to flow on from her speech patterns and rhythms. “Rhythm is quite a big part of this play,” says Sonya.



Sonya Soares (Sonali)

“We also did a bit of animal work to play around with differentiating all our characters on stage/ being able to lock into different physicalities and environments very quickly. I see Sonali as a cross between a peacock and a baby giraffe.”



Discuss “a peacock and a baby giraffe”

Discuss Sonya's description of how she developed the character of Sonali. Could you see the essence of the animals she describes in her characterisation?

Poorna

Actor Sahil Saluja explains that “I am an Indian raised in India throughout my life,” and he relates to Poorna’s experiences. Sahil enjoys the challenging character arc that Poorna has throughout the play, from entering a strange and unsettling world, to settling into that world and finding a new rhythm/talam. Poorna speaks specifically about ‘talam’ throughout the play.



Sahil Saluja (Poorna)

“Poorna’s life is centred around rhythms. The way he sits, talks, even waits at the train station is governed by a rhythm; a rhythm he has acquired from Carnatic music, his mother’s voice and just being Hyberabadi.”

Sahil identifies Poorna’s driving force as “his connection to his origins – Hyderabad, being a Telugu Brahmin, Carnatic music, and his family”. Poorna’s rhythm is disrupted when he loses touch with his origins. Additionally, Poorna has an innate quality of believing that ‘things are fine’, something Sahil attributes to Poorna’s Hyderabadi roots. “When he loses his limbs,” says Sahil, “that is the first time he starts questioning that belief, which in turn affects his mindset drastically and drives his story forward.”



Sahil Saluja (Poorna)

“Listening to and learning Carnatic music helped me explore Poorna further. The way he would learn beats/Talam in Carnatic music as a child (especially because his mother is a Carnatic music singer) influences his body language, gestures, and movement in a big way.”

Sahil found that his work with the voice and movement coaches, Geraldine Cook and Lyndall Grant respectively, played a massive role in shaping his character. He also believes that the playwright, Rashma, has woven a beautiful journey for Poorna, “from a simpleton who is happy being an outsider in Melbourne, to learning the ways of surviving in a markedly different environment”.



Sahil Saluja (Poorna)

“Losing his limbs obviously acts as a big catalyst to get him from point A to B, but the phone call from his mother in Act 2 makes him realise what a big burden a disabled person can be on his family in India. That pushes him to go against his own nature and try and settle down in Melbourne. That change in his ‘talam’ made him such a fantastic character to work on.”



Discuss Poorna’s journey

Discuss Poorna’s journey “from point A to B” that Sahil describes above. How is Poorna different at the end of the play? How has he ‘synched’ with Melbourne?



Jasminder

Jasminder comes from a lower socio-economic status region of India, which is clearly contrasted with wealthier characters in the *Melbourne Talam*. Actor Rohan Mirchandaney was acutely aware of Jasminder’s background when developing his character’s personality. His character’s unique relationship to the world is demonstrated in his body.



Rohan Mirchandaney (Jasminder)

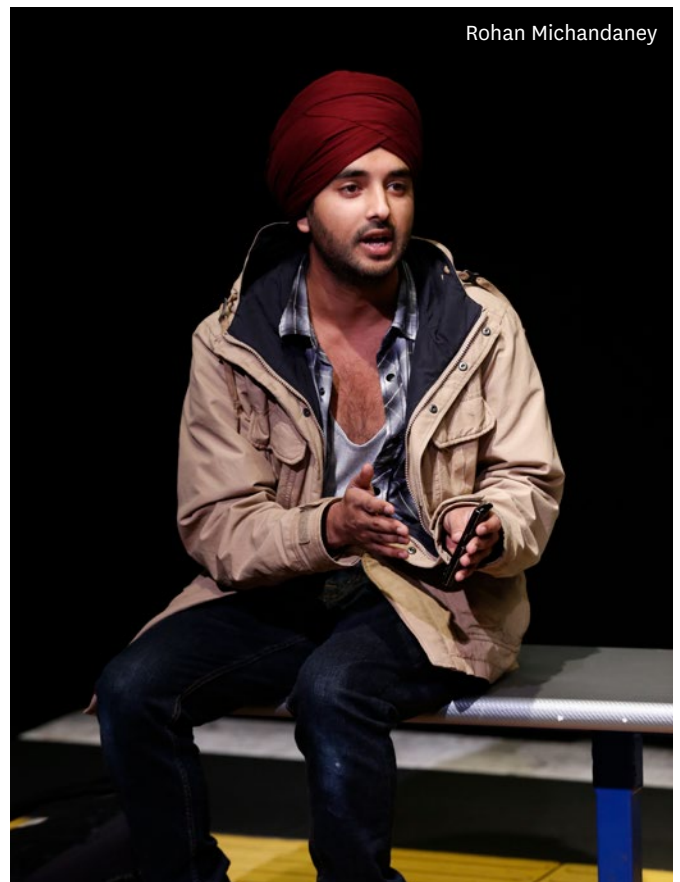
“Gesturally Jasminder is rather animated to highlight his positivity and high spirits. I find that since his ‘talam’ doesn’t quite sync with Melbourne Jasminder occasionally gets overwhelmed with the forces impacting his rhythm. In a way I see Jasminder constantly feeling as though the weight of the world is on his shoulders and therefore aptly decided to anchor him to the world by focusing weight and tension in his shoulders. Jasminder is sick throughout the play, so keeping this in mind and layering truthful moments of his ailments really distinguish him from the others furthermore.”

Rohan identifies “pride, courage, and fearlessness” as Jasminder’s driving forces. Having grown up hearing grand stories about certain older relatives (e.g. his uncle, Sarabjit Singh), Jasminder believes he too is destined for greatness. Jasminder begins the play very idealistic and optimistic, and over time we see that progressively whittled away as he continues to face hardships in Melbourne. Rohan says “persistence and fighting through adversity is a value Jasminder holds quite dear and often finds strength in remembering his family heroes’ successes”. Jasminder’s pride is very nearly his fatal flaw, as it exacerbates the situation he finds himself in.



Rohan Mirchandaney (Jasminder)

“Jasminder hits a rock bottom moment before a chance encounter shakes him out of his slump, an honest uplifting moment with a complete stranger gives him the strength to reconnect with Melbourne and ultimately himself. He discovers a lot about independence through his myriad of struggles of finding work, paying rent, studying abroad and being taken advantage of. Jasminder goes to a very dark place and comes very close to giving up, his pride and fear of shame of returning home without a degree really challenge who he is as a person. Overcoming this was one of my favourite things to explore, we see Jasminder stronger and more connected in the final scene, than any other point in the play. And personally I like to think he loses his sickness by the end of the play too.”



Discuss Jasminder

Discuss Rohan’s comments about Jasminder above. Recall the actor’s performance in this scene and identify how Rohan demonstrated Jasminder’s inner thoughts on stage.



The actors prepare

Head to our blog to read more about each actor’s approach to finding their character: mtc.com.au/backstage

Expressive Skills & Performance Skills

Each of the three actors uses their expressive skills (facial expression, movement, voice, and gesture) to create a variety of different characters. For example, Sonya Soares also plays the Boss and Poorna's Mother. In order to play multiple characters, the actors use their expressive skills in different ways to create clear and distinct characters. The actors also use their performance skills (timing, energy, focus, and actor-audience relationship) throughout the performance of *Melbourne Talam*. Sonya Soares (Sonali) says "timing is everything – it is how you land comedic moments and give weight to those that are emotionally charged".



Analyse expressive and performance skills

Write succinct responses to the following questions using specific adjectives and examples from the performance.



Sonya Soares – Sonali

- How did Sonya use her voice to distinguish between Sonali and the Boss?
 - What gestures did Sonya use to create the character of Poorna's mother?
 - How would you describe Sonya's movement as Sonali when she's walking along the station platform?
 - Describe Sonya's use of facial expression when she calls her father after the accident (Act 2, scene 1).
 - How did Sonya, as Sonali, manipulate the actor audience relationship when breaking the fourth wall?
-



Rohan Mirchandaney – Jasminster

- Describe Rohan's use of gesture when he's waiting on the platform for his train as Jasminster.
 - Contrast Rohan's use of voice to play Jasminster and Andrew.
 - How does Rohan, as Jasminster, use movement in the final scene of the play?
 - How does Rohan use facial expression to create the abrasive character of Andrew?
 - How did Rohan use the performance skills of focus and energy in the train accident scene?
-



Sahil Saluja – Poorna

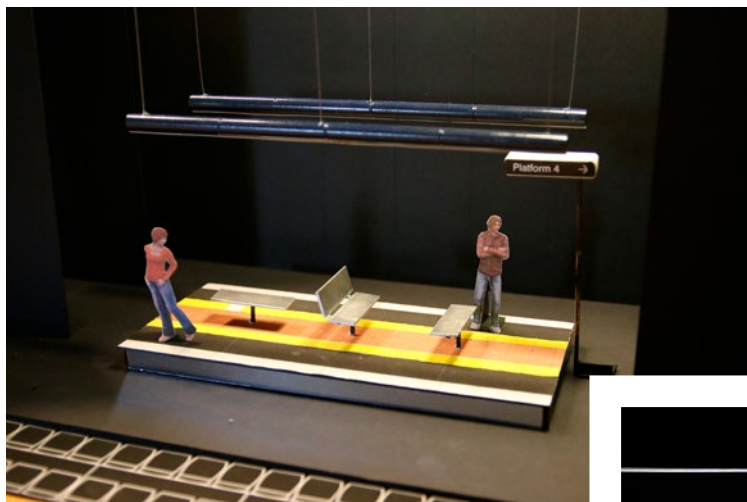
- Describe Sahil's use of gesture in the opening scene of the play as Poorna listens to Carnatic music.
- How does Sahil use movement in the climactic moment of the train accident?
- What does Sahil do with his voice when playing Ranbeer?
- Contrast Sahil's facial expression as Poorna before and after the accident.
- How did Sahil use timing in the crescendo and climax of the train accident scene?

Stagecraft – Set Design

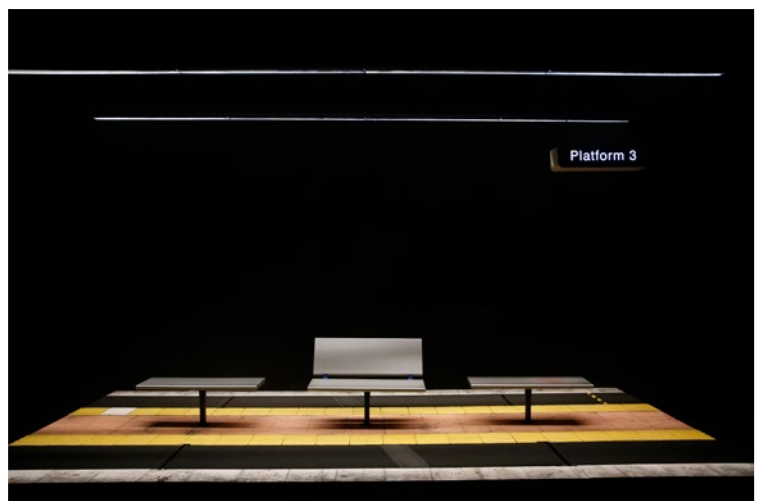


Andrew Bailey has created an evocative set design that captures the transient, intermittent nature of underground railway stations. The director (Petra Kalive) wanted a space that could transform easily, and the practical considerations of touring had to be considered too (i.e. the set has to fit in a truck). Early on, it was decided that Flagstaff Railway Station would be the key visual element to the set. Andrew conducted a site visit to the underground station, and noted that it was “a place you don’t hang around”. He also commented that the modernism of early 1970s design, elements of which are identifiable in the station, look a bit daggy and run down now. He describes the station’s overall look as a futuristic vision that the city never got to. As safety and technology have developed, the station has been hacked and added to, without regard to the original aesthetic. Elements of this real-world location that Andrew has mimicked in his design include the terrazzo tiles, metal benches with graffiti, and grimy tactiles. Rachel Burke (Lighting Designer) comments that the Flagstaff Railway Station location “bookends the play and underpins all of the design elements conceptually”. Concealed within the set are two treadmills that can “stretch out” the platform, and the benches can pivot to “close down” the set into smaller, more intimate spaces.

These dynamic benches are not automated, but are “actor-driven”, and manipulated by the cast throughout the performance. The set is surrounded by a mirror at its base, which coupled with the black masking in the theatre, creates the sense that this clean, cut-away slice of Flagstaff station platform exists in a void. Note: The Platform 3 sign only appears in the Lawler season.



Set Model by Andrew Bailey.

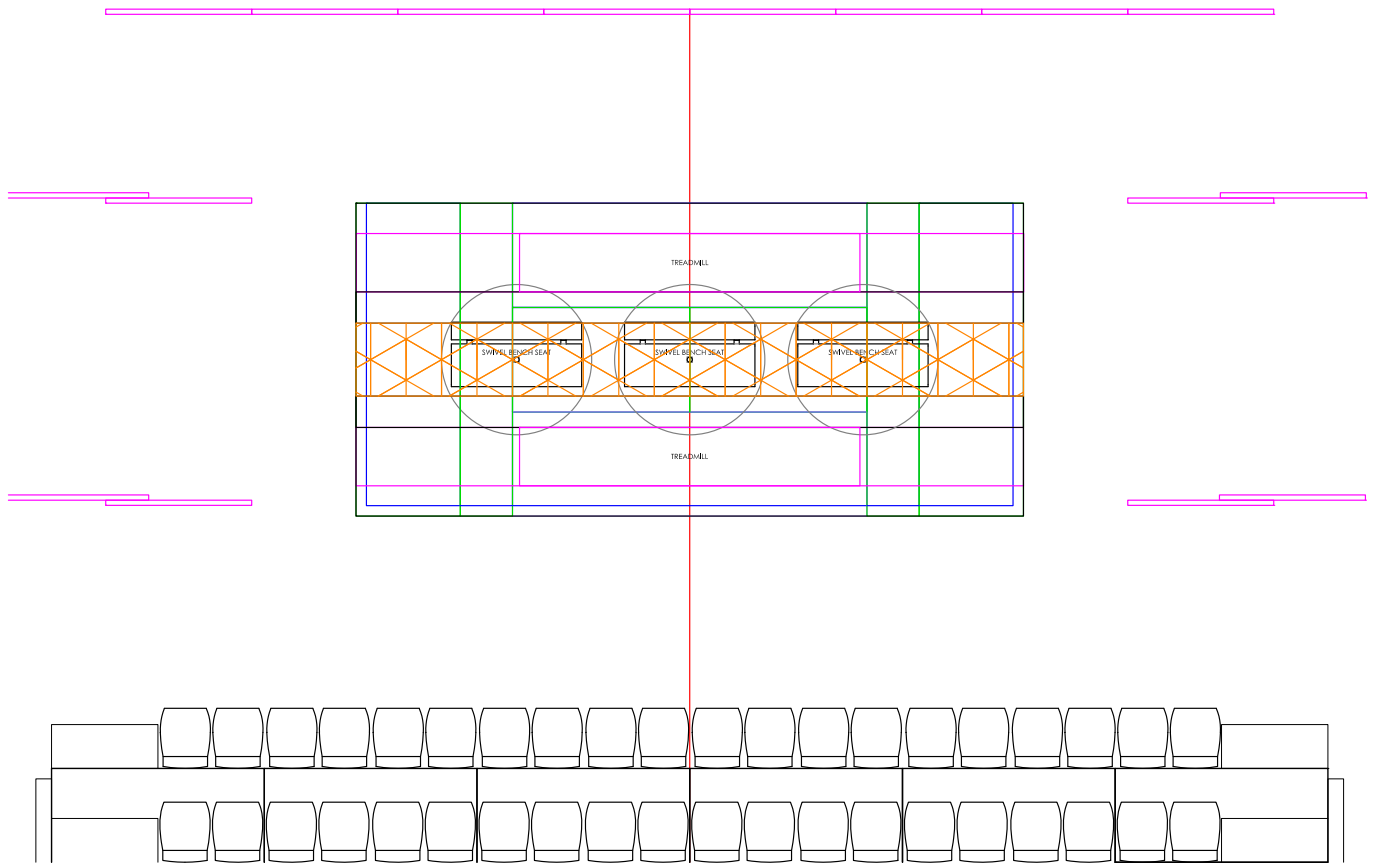


The set in the Lawler



Discuss set models

What is the purpose of a set model? Research the set design process and discuss how this model would be used by the director, actors, scenic artists, and production staff.



Ground plan of the *Melbourne Talam* set.



Andrew Bailey (Set & Costume Designer)

“Flagstaff station is a transitional and evocative space. Key events in the play occur at the station, so I wanted to ground the play in that location. It’s familiar enough that you’re able to forget it’s there – you switch your brain off and it becomes wallpaper.”



Discuss set design

What kind of experiences, memories and emotions do train stations evoke for you? When you were watching the performance, did the ‘reality’ of the train platform set give way to suspended disbelief for other locations?



Transform your classroom

Using masking tape and chairs, recreate a version of the Melbourne Talam set in your classroom. Move through the scenes in the play with actors on the “set”. Think about moments when actors are in close proximity, and when they are far apart. Remember that the actors spin the benches around to create new locations.

For Andrew, who has grown up in and around Melbourne, this play provides a unique perspective on the city he calls home. “It’s been an interesting insight into an experience of Melbourne I wouldn’t have been aware of,” he says. “This play is about their struggle, to fit in, to find belonging. Melbourne is seen as a step up.”

Scenic Art

The set for *Melbourne Talam* evokes a slice of Flagstaff Railway Station in realistic detail, floating in a black void. The central strip of terrazzo tiles is a key scenic element in creating the platform, along with the yellow tactile and worn platform edge. MTC Scenic Artist, Tansy Elso, created these elements over several days.

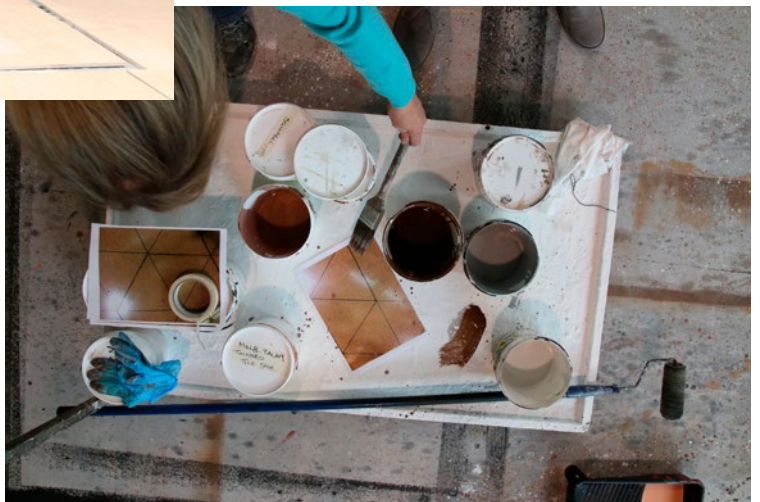


Andrew Bailey (Set & Costume Designer)

“We created a really detailed slice of Flagstaff station, because I wanted to show that these are real people, existing in real space. Even though what we do with the set in performance is very abstract, I wanted it to be grounded in reality.”



MTC Scenic Artist Tansy Elso painting the set for *Melbourne Talam*.



Scenic Art Step-By-Step

Head to our blog to see the step-by-step scenic art process used by Tansy Elso to recreate Flagstaff Railway Station: mtc.com.au/backstage

Props

The actors never leave the set, so there is really nowhere to hide. Props are stored within characters' costumes, and larger props such as backpacks and suitcases. Andrew Bailey (Set & Costume Designer) comments that "we tried to ensure that the props each character use wouldn't be out of place for them", and that "we tried to minimise the amount of 'stuff' on stage".



Discuss props

Make notes beside each of the props listed below about when and how they were used in the performance. Were these props used symbolically? Did they help the actor to play a secondary character?

Luggage case on wheels	
Pocket knife	
Chocolate cake	
iPad	
Blanket	
Scarf	
Trucker cap	
Headphones	
Backpack	
Mobile phones	
Umbrella	
Wine bottle	
Video game console	

Stagecraft – Costume Design

Andrew Bailey also designed the costumes for *Melbourne Talam*. Given the fact that this play is set in modern-day Melbourne, many of the costumes were purchased from local retailers, with MTC Wardrobe staff making small adjustments (e.g. padding in pants; Velcro in the red dress for the “rip” effect; compartments sewn into handbag for props). Other items, particularly Sikhism articles of faith like Jasminder’s turban, were manufactured by MTC Millinery.

MELBOURNE TALAM

By Rashma N. Kalsie

DIRECTED BY PETRA KALIVE

COSTUME DESIGN BY ANDREW BAILEY

JASMINDER SINGH (19)



SONALI CHUGH (28)



POORNACHANDRA RAO (24)

Costume design by Andrew Bailey

There is a colour palette at work in Andrew’s designs. For example, Jasminder’s turban matches with Poorna’s business shirt. Andrew hopes to create costumes that “sync with each other”.



Andrew Bailey (Set & Costume Designer)

“A lot of the design choices in the costume came from a practical place. For example, we couldn’t ask Sonya to wear certain shoes on a set with moving parts and gaps in the floor – it would be unsafe. Petra wanted to incorporate lots of movement in the production, so the costumes had to give the cast freedom to move. The decision to dress Sonali in culottes started with the action she had to perform – a dress was going to be too constricting.”



Discuss colour palette

Look at the colour palette in Andrew’s costume designs above. Why might he have chosen these colours? What do you associate with these colours? Did you notice any differences between the costumes on stage and those pictured in the designs?

MELBOURNE TALAM
“JASMINDER”

COSTUME DESIGN BY ANDREW BAILEY



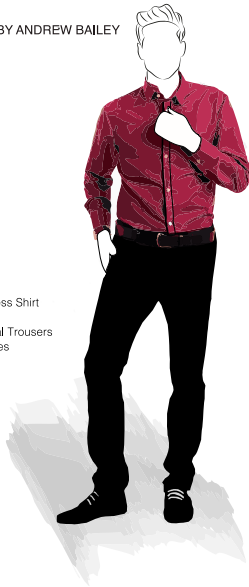
- Burgundy Turban
- Light Weight Rain Jacket, Well worn and ill fitting
- Checked Short Sleeve Shirt
- Silver Kada (Sikh Bracelet Around Wrist)
- Dark Worn Blue Jeans
- Brown Sneakers, old and scuffed



Rohan Mirchandaney

MELBOURNE TALAM
“POORNA”

COSTUME DESIGN BY ANDREW BAILEY



- Burgundy Business Shirt
- Black Belt
- Black or Charcoal Trousers
- Black Dress Shoes



Rohan Mirchandaney and Sahil Saluja

MELBOURNE TALAM
“SONALI”

COSTUME DESIGN BY ANDREW BAILEY



- Black Leather Jacket
- Gold Layered Necklace
- Navy and White Camisole
- Mustard Culottes
- Tan or Nude Wedge Heels



Sonya Soares and Sahil Saluja

Stagecraft – Composition and Sound Design



Darius Kedros (Composer and Sound Designer) has created an aural environment for *Melbourne Talam*. At times the sound design evokes a place with diegetic sounds, e.g. cars honking, trams dinging. At other times, non-diegetic sounds are used to enhance mood.



Darius Kedros (Composer & Sound Designer)

“The play is full of diegetic sounds – trains, trams, road traffic and phone sounds to name a few, but there are also many less obvious, non-diegetic sounds that are there to create atmosphere. I make lots of field recordings of weird sounds that I discover, and then in my DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) and other software I manipulate them to create textures that subtly shift the emphasis, move the story forward, or support the dialogue.”



Discuss diegetic/non-diegetic sound

Discuss how the stagecraft element of sound was used to enhance the performance. Provide two specific examples from the performance: one moment where diegetic sound was used, and another where non-diegetic sound was used.



Darius Kedros (Composer & Sound Designer)

“The play takes us to various bedsits, flats, and transport hubs in Melbourne, as well as teleporting the audience to several Indian cities and villages ... Unfortunately, the budget did not extend to me taking a two-week sound recording trip to India, so cast member Sahil Saluja kindly arranged for a sound designer friend of his in India to supply some authentic field recordings ... To make this believable I incorporated a lot of real recordings from these places, and embellished them only where necessary. This sounds like a simpler task than it is. It actually requires a lot of recording, editing, and mixing to get it working right.”



Discuss sounds

Discuss how sound helped the audience navigate locations throughout the performance. Were there specific sounds that you recognised as being from particular places? Make a list of these.



Darius Kedros (Composer & Sound Designer)

“For the end of Act 1 I created a tabla track from a sample library. I slowed it down over the course of about 32 bars using time stretch to make it feel like time was slowing down and degrading, which helps the scene to feel off-kilter. Apart from that, there wasn't much call for me to compose music for this play. It was more a case of remixing and editing or adapting music. I asked the Indian cast and writer to suggest appropriate Bollywood songs, and I spent some time researching Carnatic music.”



Anatomy of a scene

Recall the tabla track from the end of Act 1 as mentioned by Darius above. Write a paragraph analysing how the music enhanced the performance in that scene, referencing specific dramatic elements that were manipulated as a result.



Composition and Sound Design Interview

Head to our blog to read the full interview with Darius Kedros (Composer & Sound Designer) about his work on *Melbourne Talam*: mtc.com.au/backstage

Stagecraft – Lighting Design



Rachel Burke's lighting design for *Melbourne Talam* is a compact rig which has been designed to tour regionally in Victoria after the Melbourne season. Together with sound in particular, lighting is one of the main tools used to transform the set into different locations. Each different world has its own visual aesthetic achieved through lighting, with variations in colour, brightness, intensity, and movement. Rachel's lighting design is resolved around supporting the set design and set electrics to create the look and feel of Flagstaff station.

Andrew Bailey's set design features two lengths of suspended blue tube the width of the set, which evoke the fluorescent overhead lighting in Flagstaff Station. Rachel explains that these are dead hung approximately over the yellow tactile strips on the set floor at a height of 3800mm from the stage floor proper. She describes the set electrics as an "important visual component of the set design and the height has been determined to ensure the tubes remain connected to the world of the set without creating shadows from the rest of the lighting rig". The tubes house five strips of high output linear LED designed to be controlled in four sections or quarters of the stage. The LED sources are RGB (red, blue, green) x 2, warm white x2 and blue x 1. These continuous, linear sources are recessed in a rebate within the tubes and this also houses the control gear for the LED that will ensure smooth and uniform dimming. Many hours of work by the MTC electrics department has gone into researching, constructing and testing the set electrics with their multiplicity of functions and constraints.



Rachel Burke (Lighting Designer)

"The hospital intensive care unit and ward have luminaires dedicated to creating a central area with lighting filters chosen to lend a cool, surgical green quality to the light. This colour underpins the isolation and grief felt by Poorna after the accident. The crowded bus in India will be lit with dusty yellow light to create warmth and support the gentle humour of this scene. The lighting will help the audience to transport with the characters into their memories. Sonali's engagement party memory will be filled with saturated colour, smoke and beamage in the air to create a Bollywood aesthetic reminiscent of excitement and glamour."



Analyse lighting

Discuss each of the scenes and locations Rachel describes above and recall specific details about the lighting in these moments. Using your own recollections, and some of the language Rachel uses (e.g. "lit with dusty yellow light to create warmth"), write a paragraph that analyses how lighting was used in a specific moment to enhance the scene.



Rohan Mirchandaney,
Sahil Saluja and Sonya Soares

Rachel explains that her lighting design “strives primarily to support the action or choreography of the actors in space”. Lighting is particularly important in creating the climactic moment at the end of Act 1 with the train accident.



Rachel Burke (Lighting Designer)

“The accident uses movement and sound to create a sense of time suspended and the surreal. The lighting will shift in direction and colour to accentuate an ‘out of body’ experience and coalesce with the sound design. It will help direct the audience focus in much the way as focus pull or close up with a camera. The contrast between more naturalistic lighting states either side of the accident moment will be important in supporting the sense of catastrophe.”



Rohan Mirchandaney, Sahil Saluja and Sonya Suares



Discuss lighting in the train accident

Discuss the train accident scene in detail, particularly regarding lighting. How did the stagecraft element of lighting manipulate the dramatic element of climax? How was lighting used non-naturalistically in this moment? Use some of the language Rachel uses above in your response.

There are also a number of practical considerations that Rachel has had to be mindful of in her design, particularly due to the fact that this production tours to several different venues.



Rachel Burke (Lighting Designer)

“The rig must be kept small to ensure that the bump in can be achieved in the time available on tour and that each of the seven venues can support the lighting design in terms of equipment and rigging positions ... The set is raised and much of the lighting design uses booms or side lighting. Levels will be carefully plotted to ensure that the lighting remains comfortable for the cast and does not become blinding or disorienting. The smoke machine will be concealed under the set to remain out of the way of the cast for safety.”



Discuss practical considerations

Discuss the practical considerations Rachel describes above. Recall what lighting fixtures were visible to the audience. What else might you have to consider when designing for a touring production? Think about the time it takes to install and bump-out electrics.



Rohan Mirchandaney, Sahil Saluja and Sonya Suares

Using Stagecraft Non-naturalistically

Manipulating the benches

Throughout the performance of *Melbourne Talam*, the actors move the three benches into a variety of different configurations. Sometimes these set elements form part of a realistic Flagstaff Railway Station picture, while at other times they're used to represent other locations.



The benches

Draw bird's-eye-view diagrams of the set (like the ground plan on p.9) showing as many different configurations of the benches as you can remember. Annotate your diagrams to show what locations were created, and where actors were located.



How were the benches moved?

Discuss the transformation techniques used by the actors when manipulating the benches to create new locations. Would you describe the transitions as a snap or a morph? Did the actors move in character or as "stagehands"?



Rohan Mirchandaney and Sahil Saluja

Moving on the treadmills

Two treadmills are concealed within the platform element of the set. These are used at various moments throughout the production to create a sense of movement. Think about how these non-naturalistic elements were used in the production.



Petra Kalive (Director)

“I wanted to create movement and space. The characters run for trains and trams all the time. I wanted to capture this feeling of being in action and on the move. There is also something very disconnecting/disconcerting watching someone walk on a treadmill. These actors who are out of sync with their surrounds, don’t quite look at home as they ‘walk’ to their various destinations in Melbourne – I think this works with the physical vocabulary of the work. I also wanted to open up the space for some moments of comedy – and the treadmills help with that too.”



Sahil Saluja (Poorna)

“I believe that treadmills act as a character by themselves. For each of the characters, the treadmill represents their state of mind at that point of time. They hopefully help transport the audience into our world instantly.”



Discuss the treadmills

Discuss specific moments in the production where the treadmills were used. How did the use of treadmills in these moments enhance the production? Think about how that moment might have been different in the absence of the treadmills.

The treadmills are sometimes used for comedy in the performance, such as when Sonali ‘fasaos’ Andrew by ‘lassoing’ him and pulling him toward her. This action is reversed later on, when Andrew is slid away from Sonali as she describes the “quick and efficient” end to their date (Act 1, scene 9).



Rohan Mirchandaney and Sonya Suares



Sonya Suares (Sonali)

“We’ve all used treadmills before, but you’re not usually performing at the same time – much less dancing on them – so it becomes quite a technical exercise about how you are balancing your weight, turning your body and the reality of what you are visualising passing by. This goes back to establishing environments – if we see them clearly, hopefully you see them!”



Treadmill talam

Write a short paragraph evaluating how the treadmills enhanced the dramatic element of *rhythm* in the performance.

Transformation of time and place

The script for *Melbourne Talam* includes many different locations, however Flagstaff station is constantly visible in the set for this production. In order to transport the audience far from the city loop, direction and stagecraft elements work in tandem throughout the performance to transform time and place.



Darius Kedros (Composer & Sound Designer)

“The script jumps back and forth in time and place using a series of flashbacks that might be described as filmic in style. The dialogue, location, and the sound work together to set the scene in film, which allows jumps in time and place to make sense, but in a play there’s no time for snap set changes, or at least not without projections, so it largely falls to the sound & lights to shift the space in this production.”



Petra Kalive (Director)

“The locations are supported in the main by sound effects. Each scene has a different ‘sound-bed’ and snap cuts help us differentiate between the worlds of Melbourne and India and then more specifically the iconic sounds of Hyderabad, Gurdaspur and Delhi.”



Rachel Burke (Lighting Designer)

“There are many additional locations that the lighting helps to create by breaking the acting area into many smaller areas. The design is specific in focus and has an approach similar to that of lighting for dance in terms of lighting from low side positions. There are many lighting cues required to meet the needs of a rapidly shifting script across numerous locations and characters ... Colour filters and gobos have been selected to help create a sense of the many locations.”



Discuss transforming place

Discuss how light and sound were used to create specific locations. When was the stage fully lit? When were specific sections lit? What direction was the lighting coming from? When were sounds used to evoke a specific place? What kinds of sounds did you hear?

Many transitions in *Melbourne Talam* could be described as ‘snap changes’, particularly in Act 1. It could be suggested that a tonal shift occurs at the end of Act 1, in a ‘morph’ transition as Poorna leaves his boss’ office and heads to the train station.



Sahil Saluja, Rohan Mirchandaney and Sonya Soares

Dramatic Elements

There are a range of dramatic elements being manipulated by the actors in *Melbourne Talam* to shape and enhance meaning. When discussing the dramatic elements that you witnessed, use specific evidence and refer to moments in the performance.

Climax

One of the clearest examples of climax in *Melbourne Talam* is the train accident at the end of Act 1, and for a period of time it is unclear what exactly has transpired. However, there are other moments of high tension and conflict in the play, which could also be considered examples of climax. Each character also has climactic moments in their own narratives: for Sonali, when she recognises her aloneness on her birthday; for Jasminder, when he is backed into a corner by living expenses and pressures.



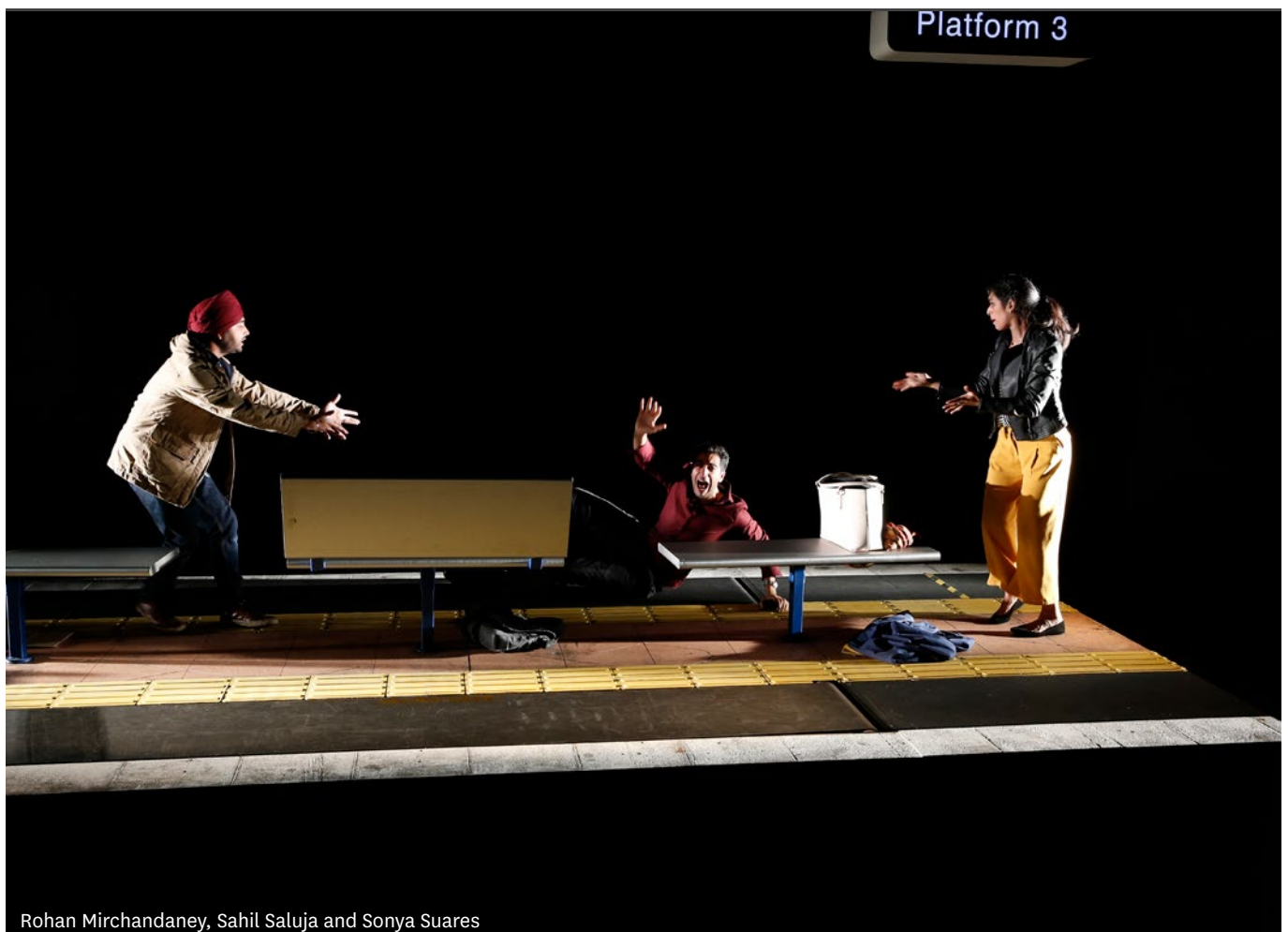
Graph the play

Draw a graph of the performance like a heart rate monitor. Label the X axis with the scenes, and the Y axis as conflict. Track the intensity of tension and conflict throughout the play to show how the dramatic element of climax was manipulated.



Discuss climax

Do you think *Melbourne Talam* had one climactic moment, or more than one? At what point/s? Discuss how the dramatic element of climax was manipulated.



Rohan Mirchandaney, Sahil Saluja and Sonya Soares

Conflict

Each of the characters in *Melbourne Talam* is struggling to reach their objective due to obstacles. This creates dramatic conflict. There is conflict between characters (e.g. between Poorna and his colleagues, Shashi and Shiva), and internal conflict (e.g. Jasminder in the kitchen, Act 2, scene 8).



Discuss conflict

How is conflict shown in *Melbourne Talam*? Physically? Verbally? Psychologically?

Think of specific moments from the play and describe how the dramatic element of conflict was manipulated

Contrast

There are many example of contrast in *Melbourne Talam*, an aspect Petra describes as “a defining element” of her direction. Petra has sought to show contrast between India and Melbourne, as well as contrast between the three central Indian characters. She also suggests that there is a contrast between “the characters we meet in the beginning of the show, and those we know at the end”.



Discuss contrast

With a partner, discuss examples of where you saw contrast in the performance. How do you think the characters changed during the course of the play?

Mood

Petra explains that Act 1 is tonally very different from Act 2. “There are many more moments of comedy, melodrama and slapstick in Act 1,” she says. “I wanted to allow the audience the chance to ‘breathe’ with the show, and give them permission to respond.” The train accident is a turning point in the production, and from that moment on the tone is much more dramatic and dark. She describes the characters as “wearing masks” in Act 1, which are stripped from them by the accident so that in Act 2 we see more of their true selves.



Sonya Suares (Sonali)

“Sonali is forced to shed her mask during the course of the play. I think Sonali has a tendency to believe her own hype and she is able to do that at the outset, despite her many setbacks in Melbourne. Witnessing the accident, however, forces her into a very truthful place and she has to confront the uncomfortable reality of her situation here.”

Stagecraft elements such as sound and lighting play a particularly salient role in enhancing the mood in this production, through the use of non-diegetic sounds that create atmosphere, and various lighting states that manipulate our response to the story.

.....



Discuss mood

Identify moments in the performance where you felt particularly strong emotions, whether they be happy or sad. Identify what contributed to this mood: were stagecraft elements involved? In what way did the actor’s performance create this mood?

Rhythm

Rhythm is essentially in the title of the play: *talam* (Tamil) or *tala* (Sanskrit) is term used in Indian music meaning the rhythmic cycle of a musical composition. You can think about the overall rhythm of the play, the individual rhythm of particular characters, and the changes of rhythm within scenes. Rhythm also appears throughout the production in the sound design, and in Poorna's gestures when clapping along with Carnatic music.



Sonya Soares (Sonali)

"This production is very technical because all three actors never leave stage and are constantly transforming into other scenes/ different environments so there definitely a pacey rhythm to it ..when we time it right!"



Rohan Mirchandaney (Jasminder)

"Each central character has a set rhythm as well as all supporting characters. They all sound different, speak differently accompanied by different mannerisms which really give you a stronger sense about who they are."



Discuss rhythm

Discuss how the transitions between, and within, scenes influenced the performance's rhythm.

Sound

Petra gave the cast some specific direction around sound in the performance, particularly in the climactic train accident moment. She asked the actors to vocalise their exhalations during the fall. It helps with their physicality in this slowed-down moment, but also adds to the emotion of the moment. Petra also asked the actors to vocalise (e.g. sigh) prior to delivering lines at the start of new scenes in order to direct the audience's attention.



Discuss sound

What other examples of sound can you recall from the performance?



Sahil Saluja and
Rohan Mirchandaney

Space

Petra has directed this production almost entirely within the confines of the raised Flagstaff Station platform. The actors endow this space with several different meanings, creating various locations. Some scenes make use of the whole platform (e.g. the opening Bollywood number; the train accident), while others use small sections (e.g. on the bus in India; in Jasminer's apartment).



Discuss space

Did you notice that the actors never leave the stage? How does this use of space influence the actor-audience relationship?

Symbol

There are many examples of symbol within the stagecraft elements seen and heard on stage. One symbolic gesture that audiences may not consciously notice is seen throughout the performance and has been deliberately directed by Petra. The chest-thumping dance move that we see in the opening Bollywood number is repeated in various moments later in the performance, such as a moment when Sonali is particularly distressed and frustrated.



Discuss symbol

What other examples of symbol did you notice in the performance? Think about the sound design, the props, and the 'floating set' look achieved with the mirrors around the edge of the platform.

Tension

While Act 1 is lighter in tone, with moments of comedy and slapstick, Act 2 uses tension to heighten the drama. One stagecraft element that contributes to this tension is the sound design, specifically the constant drone that hums underneath the action.



Discuss tension

Recall the moment when Jasminer is standing on the platform edge, staring into the abyss while his phone rings (Act 2, scene 9). How was tension manipulated in this scene? How are tension and climax interrelated?



List moments of tension

Make a list of other moments in the production when you felt the dramatic element of tension was evident. These could be dramatic or comic moments.

The examples listed in this section should be considered as starting points for analysing the dramatic elements in this production. There are many more ways you could identify and describe various dramatic elements being manipulated in *Melbourne Talam*. Use the images in this resource to recall specific moments in the production.

Themes

Culture

Melbourne Talam presents three characters from three different Indian regions: Telangana, Punjab, and Delhi. The script highlights the individuality of each character and their culture. In contrast to ill-informed perceptions of people from India being homogeneous, *Melbourne Talam* demonstrates that there are myriad different cultures within the Republic of India. The differences in **language** are one example (revisit Part A for more about Indian languages). There are also many different **religions** represented among the people of India: Hinduism is the most prevalent (80.5% of the population), followed by Islam (13.4%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.9%), Buddhism (0.8%), Jainism (0.4%), and others. The characters have different tastes in **music** related to their home (e.g. Poorna, a South Indian Brahmin, enjoys Carnatic music). Indian **food** and **fashion** are similarly diverse. What might be considered “Indian” is a beautifully complex amalgamation of cultures.

Source: Religions in India on censusindia.gov.in



Rashma N. Kalsie (Playwright)

“The themes of displacement, migrant experiences, alienation, and migrants’ attempts at cultural assimilation are at the heart of the play.”

Community

The theme of community and connectedness is evident in *Melbourne Talam*, mainly by presenting the absence of it. Each of the three central characters are without a robust community in Melbourne. Jasminder has selfish and transient housemates, Poorna has competitive colleagues, and Sonali is perpetually dating careless men. By contrast, Poorna in particular reflects on the strong community he had at home, and Sonali points out that she has not been invited to her cousin’s wedding.



Discuss housemates

Discuss Ranbeer’s reaction to seeing Jasminder with the knife in Act 2, scene 8. What do you think of Ranbeer’s behaviour? How else might he have responded? You can read more about how to have difficult conversations at beyondblue.org.au.

Choices

The characters in *Melbourne Talam* are faced with some difficult choices: will Sonali every make Melbourne home, or should she go back to Delhi? Should she move somewhere cheaper, or take a different job? Should Poorna tell his boss the truth about his competitive colleagues? Should Ranbeer have reacted differently when he saw Jasminder in the kitchen with the knife?



Discuss choices

To what extent do you think the events in the play are a product of choice or fate? Why? How might the characters perceive the events?

Journey

Each of the characters in the play have made their own journey to Australia from India, and each is still searching for what brought them here. Jasminder barely has time to study while trying to pay his bills, Poorna's job security is in limbo, and Sonali is still searching for her soulmate. More literally, with the ever-present public transport, characters are constantly taking small journeys on trains, trams and buses.

Sonya Suares and Sahil Saluja



Sonya Suares (Sonali)

“*Melbourne Talam* tells one of many immigration stories in Australia. My own parents made this leap a generation ago and there is a very real severing that happens when you migrate. All three characters are caught between their country of origin and the place they are trying to make their home, whether temporary or permanent. The dissonance between these two places is something they carry around with them all the time – they are constantly 'in between'. And as they are all quite young, they are trying to navigate their sense of identity and their dreams/ hopes for the future in this liminal space.”



Sahil Saluja (Poorna)

“*Melbourne Talam* is a tribute to all the migrants worldwide and their internal/external struggles when they land in the unknown. Personally, I remember going to the US when I was 17 and I had no idea where to start from. I was privileged to have resources available that helped me settle down a lot quicker but for a lot of migrants who come to Australia, it is extremely difficult for them to find their bearings. Whether it be money crunch, loss of a social support system or just an inability to connect.”



Discuss journey

Discuss each characters' journey in the performance. Where have they come from, where are they going, and where are they now?

Identity

The characters in *Melbourne Talam* each hold several simultaneous identities: they may see themselves as Indian, or as coming from a particular state or city, as wealthy or poor, as Australian, a student, lover, employee, outsider, Sikh, etc.



Rohan Mirchandaney (Jasminder)

“I think *Melbourne Talam* is about identity. Each of the central characters in the play experiences some strong disconnect with Melbourne and their own lives. They lose their rhythm and struggle to clash hard with their environment. It’s about rediscovering what home means, discovering how to find belonging in a foreign place and about overcoming hardships by adapting and persevering.”



Sonya Soares (Sonali)

“Australia is an immigration nation so it is vitally important that these type of stories appear on our stages. Hopefully, though, this show resonates beyond the specific experiences of Indian migrants to that of different groups who have travelled to Australia to make their home here...and further, as a story of three young people trying to navigate various social and parental expectations as well as their own in an alien environment.”



Sahil Saluja (Poorna)

“Furthermore, this play is about finding something new about yourself through displacement. Given that displacement is such a universal experience, I believe that everyone in the audience would somewhere be able to connect with this sense of displacement and hopefully through it, explore something about their own identities.”



Character identities

In character, introduce yourself to your classmates as either Jasminder, Sonali or Poorna. To begin, use the sentence structure “I see myself as... because...” to unpack their identity using evidence from the script. For example, Poorna: “*I see myself as Hyderabad because I am from Hyderabad in Telangana,*” or Sonali: “*I see myself as Australian because Melbourne is the city of my soul.*”



Rohan Mirchandaney

Sonya Soares



Belonging

As Poorna says, “If you follow the beats of the city, your life never goes off-key here” (Act 1, scene 1). Each of the characters is searching for belonging in this foreign city, to varying degrees of success.



Petra Kalive (Director)

“*Melbourne Talam* is about leaving home, belonging and identity. It is about finding your place in a world that doesn’t welcome you with open arms. It’s about making choices without the support of family or friends. It’s about discovering who you are when life tears you down.”



Discuss belonging

Discuss Petra’s comments about the themes in the play. What examples from the production can you identify where these themes are evident?



Belonging in the script

Read through the script and highlight quotes where characters speak specifically about home or belonging. Annotate these sections with information about how these moments were staged in performance.

The information in this section should be considered as a starting point for analysing the themes in *Melbourne Talam*. There are many more ways you could unpack the themes and broader ideas being explored in the production. Use the images in this resource to recall specific moments in the production.

Analysis Questions



The following analysis questions are offered to help you unpack the performance and make connections between components of the VCE Drama Study Design. These questions should be considered as a starting point. Discuss your responses with your peers and explore how other members of the audience may have perceived the performance differently. Make sure you use specific examples and evidence from the production to support your ideas.

The opening Bollywood sequence

- Explain how the dramatic element of mood was manipulated in the opening ‘Bollywood’ sequence.
- Analyse how one actor used one area of stagecraft in a non-naturalistic way to enhance this moment.
- Evaluate how the stagecraft element of sound was manipulated to enhance this moment.
- Contrast the opening sequence with final moments of the play.



Act 1, Scene 4 (Jasminder's flat)

- Explain how the stagecraft element of set enhanced this moment in the production.
- Analyse how one actor used one expressive skill to portray a character in this moment.
- Evaluate how space and the stagecraft element of lighting was manipulated to enhance this moment.
- Describe how a convention of the performance style(s) was evident in this moment.



Act 2, Scene 6 (Hospital)

- Analyse how one actor used one performance skill to enhance this dramatic moment.
- Evaluate how the dramatic elements of tension and climax were manipulated in this scene.
- Discuss how the conventions of a performance style were manipulated in this moment.
- Identify a theme in the play that could be connected to this scene.



Act 1, Scene 3 (Life in Hyderabad)

- Analyse how one actor used one expressive skill to enhance this dramatic moment.
- Evaluate how props were used to enhance tension in this scene.
- Discuss how the stagecraft elements of lighting and set were manipulated to transform the set for this scene.
- Describe how the dramatic element of rhythm is manipulated in this moment. Consider also this scene in relation to the entire play.





The script for *Melbourne Talam* by Rashma N. Kalsie is now available.

Studying the script will help your students go deeper in their analysis of the play, and sustain their memory of special moments in the production

To order your copy of this new Australian play published by Currency Press, email schools@mtc.com.au

\$19.80 EACH

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Script Changes

Rashma N. Kalsie worked closely with the director, cast, and other creative team members during rehearsals. Based on discoveries in the rehearsal room and feedback from MTC Literary Director Chris Mead, the following changes were made to the published version of the script:

Act 1 Scene 4, p13

CUT from “FLASHBACK” up to and including “CUT TO THE PRESENT”

Act 1 Scene 5, pp16–17

CUT from **POORNA’S MOTHER**: Chinna and nana...” up to and including “He disconnects the phone.”

ADD

POORNA’S MOTHER: Can you call your brother? He wants to become a beautician!

POORNA: Amma

POORNA’S MOTHER: A Telugu Brahmin boy waxing women's legs chi chi – how shameful

POORNA: Amma, Uuf, Shashi and Shiva will be here any minute – I'll have to do takeaway now. I've been eating pizza for one whole month.

Act 1 Scene 9, p25

CUT from “FLASHBACK” up to and including “CUT TO PRESENT”

REPLACE

SONALI: Ricky moved in with a high school girl" with **SONALI**: Then he moved in with a high school girl."

CUT Act 2, scene 3, pp33–34

CUT Act 2, scene 4, pp34–35

CUT Act 2, scene 5, pp36–37 (Act 2 Scene 5 FLASHBACK moved to Act 2 Scene 8 – see below)

Act 2 Scene 6, p37

REPLACE

NURSE: Hello Mr Poorna. Did you enjoy the walk?" with **NURSE**: Hello Poorna. How does it feel to be out of the ICU, did you enjoy the walk?"

REPLACE

POORNA: "Walk – what a joke!" with **POORNA**: A walk, without any legs? What a joke."

Act 2 Scene 8, p41

REPLACE

JASMINDER: Nothing is working out – Bauji tried talking to Sarabjit uncle but he is adamant. We can't mortgage the house without uncle's consent" with **JASMINDER**: Nothing is working out Sarabjit uncle refused to mortgage the house. I was hoping Ranbeer would help."

Act 2 Scene 8, p41

INSERT FLASHBACK from Act 2, Scene 5 pp36–37 after new line "I was hoping Ranbeer would help."

Next line after flashback will be "Now even my grandmother believes I am a loser."



Photo by Sarah Walker



When you visit Southbank Theatre, share your experience on Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag **#mtcMelbourneTalam** and tag **@melbtheatreco**



Like MTC Education on Facebook for behind-the-scenes information about our Education Program and discover ways for you to get involved with MTC. **facebook.com/MTCEdu**

Attendance Information

This production contains coarse language, mature themes and references to suicide. If you need to debrief with somebody about the themes in *Melbourne Talam*, your school wellbeing coordinator is a good person to ask. There are also helpful resources online at beyondblue.org.au.

Part A of this Education Pack is available on our website: mtc.com.au/education.

Duration

Approximately 75 minutes,
no interval.

Programme

Download the programme for *Melbourne Talam* at mtc.com.au/backstage

Bookings

Melbourne season:
Email schools@mtc.com.au
or phone 03 8688 0963

Regional Tour:
Visit [mtc.com.au/education/
on-the-road](http://mtc.com.au/education/on-the-road)

Enquiries

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