



Riflemind

by Andrew Upton
Directed by Philip Seymour Hoffman

Teacher's Resource Kit

Written and compiled by Elizabeth Surbey

Acknowledgements

Sydney Theatre Company would like to thank the following for their invaluable material for these Teachers' Notes: Helen Hristofski, Tanya Leach, Andrew Upton, Laura Scrivano.

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Warning

There is in this production the use of offensive language and behaviour, as well as cigarette smoke and strobe lighting. And as you would also expect very loud music.

Image: Hugo Weaving as John in *Riflemind* Photographer: Brett Broadman

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Sydney Theatre Company

Sydney Theatre Company (STC) produces theatre of the highest standard that consistently illuminates, entertains and challenges. It is committed to the engagement between the imagination of its artists and its audiences, to the development of the art form of theatre, and to excellence in all its endeavours.

STC has been a major force in Australian drama since its establishment in 1978. It was created by the New South Wales Government, following the demise of the Old Tote Theatre Company. The original intention was to better utilise the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House and the new Company comprised a small central administration staff, technical staff, workshop and rehearsal facilities. Richard Wherrett was appointed Artistic Director from 1979 to 1990.

The Wharf opened on 13 December, 1984 by Premier Neville Wran, which allowed all departments of the Company to be housed under one roof for the first time. The venue was to become the envy of the theatre world. From 1985, the Company could perform in two locations throughout the year, the Drama Theatre and The Wharf. From 1990 to 1999, Wayne Harrison served as Artistic Director. A third regular venue, Sydney Theatre, administered and operated by STC, opened in 2004.

The predominant financial commitment to STC is made by its audience. Of this audience, the Company's subscribers make a crucial commitment. The Company is also assisted annually by grants from the Federal Government through the Australia Council and the New South Wales Government through the Ministry for the Arts. STC also actively seeks sponsorship and donations from the corporate sector and from private individuals.

Under the leadership Artistic Director Robyn Nevin, STC's annual subscription season features up to 12 plays including: recent or new Australian works, interpretations of theatrical classics and contemporary foreign works. In addition STC regularly co-produces and tours productions throughout Australia, playing annually to audiences in excess of 300,000. STC actively fosters relationships and collaborations with international artists and companies. In 2006 STC began a new journey of artistic development with the inception of The Actors Company, the STC ensemble.

To access detailed information on Sydney Theatre Company, its history and productions please contact our Archivist Judith Seeff at jseeff@sydneytheatre.com.au

Sydney Theatre Company Education

Sydney Theatre Company is committed to education by programming original **productions** and **workshops** that enthuse and engage the next generation of theatre-goers. Within the education programme Sydney Theatre Company produces its own season of plays as well as collaborates with leading theatre-for-young-people companies across Australia.

Often a young person's first experience of theatre is facilitated by teachers. STC ensures access to all of its mainstage productions through the **schoolsdays** programme as well as produces and tours theatre specifically crafted to resonate with young people.

STC works to support educators in their Drama and English-teaching practices. Every year dynamic **workshops** are held by leading theatre practitioners to support curriculum content, detailed resources are provided for all productions and an extensive work-experience programme is available to students from across the state.

The annual Sydney Morning Herald and Sydney Theatre Company **Young Playwright's Award** continues to develop and encourage young writers. The winning students receive a cash prize and a two-day workshop with a professional director, dramaturg and cast – an invaluable opportunity and experience.

Sydney Theatre Company has an extensive **on-line resource** for teachers and students. Visit www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education.

We encourage teachers to subscribe to regular e-news to keep informed as well as access **heavily discounted** tickets and special offers/

For further information on STC Education programme, please contact the Education Manager Helen Hristofski at hristofski@sydneytheatre.com.au

Production Credits

Riflemind

CAST

(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

JOHN	HUGO WEAVING
LYNN	SUSAN PRIOR
SAM	JEREMY SIMS
PHIL	MARTON CSOKAS
CINDY	SUSIE PORTER
MOON	STEVE RODGERS
LEE	EWEN LESLIE

DIRECTOR PHILIP SEYMOUR HOFFMAN
SET DESIGNER RICHARD ROBERTS
COSTUME DESIGNER TESS SCHOFIELD
LIGHTING DESIGNER DAMIEN COOPER
SOUND DESIGNER/COMPOSER MAX LYANDVERT
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR LEE LEWIS
PRODUCTION MANAGER ANNIE EVES-BOLAND
ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER TERRI RICHARDS
STAGE MANAGER TANYA LEACH
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER EDWINA GUINNESS
BACKSTAGE WARDROBE SUPERVISOR JANE SELDON
THEATRE TECHNICIAN CAMERON MENZIES

Production Photographer Brett Boardman

Riflemind Music Recorded by

Guitar Peter Black (from The Hard Ons)
Bass Raymond Ahn (from The Hard Ons)
Drums Robbie Avenaim
Guitar Stefan Gregory

THIS PRODUCTION OPENED 10 OCTOBER 2007 in Wharf 1.
THERE WILL BE ONE INTERVAL.

Summary

John (Hugo Weaving) was once the frontman in one of the world's biggest bands, Riflemind.

Now John and his wife Lynn (Susan Prior) are safe from the world in their walled country house. Money and anonymity, however, won't protect them from themselves or their past.

Fame and its attendant luxuries are addictive. Addictions almost ruined both their lives. Well away from that life they are now safe. Unhappy, silent, fragile, but safe.

Until the pressure of a comeback tour bears down upon John. And the band simply can not work without him. Crunch time. A weekend of music-making is planned at John and Lynn's estate. As soon as the band turns up – plus their associated spouses, lovers and hangers-on – it's a rock'n'roll circus.

Riflemind captures, with delicacy, precision and a beguiling black humour, a series of relationships languishing in the backwaters of co-dependent love, greed and need.

Despite, or because of, their apparent affluence, social privilege, preposterous egos, septic past and rock-god lifestyle, each of them struggles to find redemption.

Over this weekend they will open old wounds, lose their way, play great music and, perhaps, stumble into a more certain future.

The Writer – Andrew Upton

I can't read your mind,
I can't find the time.
I can't feel the thrill,
I don't have the will.

Well you know what it's like
I don't got to tell you –
Who puts up a fight
Walking out of hell now
When you fought piranhas
And you fought the cold?
There's no-body with you
Yes, you're all alone.

This material above could be lines from the music of the band *Riflemind* – they are the openings of the script by Andrew Upton – the first from an earlier draft of the play. The second is on the character page of the latest version.

Biography

From, *Currency Press*

Andrew Upton has established himself as a writer for both stage and screen. His play *The Hanging Man* was commissioned by the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) and premiered at the Wharf Theatre in 2002. The STC's 2004 production of *Hedda Gabler*, which starred Cate Blanchett in the title role, was Upton's third major adaptation for the stage after his celebrated adaptations of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Don Juan* debuted with the STC in 1999 and 2001 respectively.

He wrote and directed the short film *Bangers* and has developed a number of feature screenplays.

Andrew Upton took a Diploma of Art in Dramatic Art in Sydney, majoring in directing. Before moving to London he worked in continuity for a number of features including *Babe 2*, and as Second Unit Director on the Australian television series, *Big Sky*. He also directed two Writers' Studios at the Australian National Playwrights' Centre (1995 & 1996). He and Cate Blanchett made the short film *Bangers* together, and have set up a production company, Dirty Films, to develop feature projects.

CV

Current	DUPLICATE KEYS Feature adaptation of Jane Smiley's novel. Producer: Jon Finn	Working Title
2007	RIFLEMIND Original play. Director: Philip Seymour Hoffman	Sydney Theatre Company
2007	PHILISTINES Adaptation. Director: Howard Davies	Royal National Theatre
2006	THE CHERRY ORCHARD Adaptation. Director: Howard Davies	Sydney Theatre Company
2006	HEDDA GABLER Adaptation. Starring Cate Blanchett.	Sydney Theatre Company
2005/06	GONE Feature. Director: Ringan Ledwidge. Producer: Nira Park	Working Title
2002	FOUCAULT'S PENDULUM Feature adaptation of Umberto Eco's novel.	Fine Line
2002	DON JUAN Adaptation	Sydney Theatre Company
2002	THE HANGING MAN Original play	Sydney Theatre Company
1999	CYRANO DE BERGERAC Translation and adaptation. Director: Marion Potts.	Sydney Theatre Company
1999	BLUE EYES First draft original screenplay	
1998	BANGERS (Writer / Director / Producer). 35mm short film Co-produced by and starring Cate Blanchett	
1996	DEATH AND TAXES Play. Director: Yaron Lifshitz.	Australian Museum Theatre Programme
1995	SAGRADA TOMATA (Writer / Director). 16mm short film. Producer: Patrick Nolan	
1995	GATT THE FAX Play. Director: Yaron Lifshitz.	Australian Museum Theatre Programme
1994	LE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME Translation and adaptation. Director: Marion Potts.	Belvoir St Downstairs, Sydney

Context of the Play / Historical reference points / Form Style

Overview

(Including notes from the program with thanks Laura Scrivano STC)

The form is naturalism bound by an appreciation of Realism. Therein lies a Pinter and a Chekhov, a Shepard and a Kushner. The play is very much of our time though and its contemporary form reveals the characters in all their truth and raw brutality. They are rough and very, very real. They are the rock legends. And legends are not so black and white they can be completely understood – or believed. Yet these characters can be believed. They ‘grace’ the stage with their ever present history and a strange and circular timelessness. They will play this out again and again – they have before. Nothing changes yet everything might be different this time. The audience will have to make up its own mind. This is the beauty of the truly contemporary form – to trust the audience will decide for itself – based on their own level of knowledge and experience; their own ethics and moral code.

Yet Upton has written a world beyond us in so many ways – we are not rock stars or famous – even if we wanted to be – after this journey would we? We do know the place of these characters – they are friends and co-dependents and brothers and lovers – those who have been let down and picked back up again – those outsiders and insiders. We have all been there.

The swearing can only add realism to the text. It would be unrealistic NOT to have it in this rock world and music industry. The use of jargon / colloquial language (high modality) is in keeping with the tradition of realistic Australian contemporary theatre since David Williamson.....it is everywhere now – Nowra, Sewell, Tommy Murphy.

LEGENDS OF FREEDOM

OUR SITUATIONS WILL BE EPHEMERAL, WITHOUT A FUTURE:

PASSAGEWAYS

GUY-ERNEST DEBORD

At its limit, those words are the legend of freedom: the promise that one's words and acts will float free forever. Those words are themselves poetry; they can stay right where they are, in perfect balance, or they can lead anywhere, a motionless cause. In pursuit of a motionless cause – an idea of transformation so abstract it could hold shape until the world was ready to be challenged by it – the LI (Letttrist International) and the SI (Situationist International) tried to act out a legend of freedom, and at the most that is all they are now. Always, no matter how incisive their ruthless critiques of whatever existed there was that element of abstraction: an element that gave those critiques...a bewitching, negative power, the hint of an event and a language to come, which still keeps the story the groups tried to tell alive. As I tell the story, it all begins, and must be judged against, what once happened in a nightclub and was returned to another – just a what happened in those nightclubs must be judged against what for certain moments was taken out of nightclubs, written on walls, shouted, played out in buildings and streets that were suddenly seen as never before. For one perspective the line is easy to draw, just a line – for example, the LI's 1953 graffiti “NEVER WORK”, which reappeared as May '68 graffiti and was rewritten in 1977 for the Sex Pistols' *Seventeen*: “We don't work / I just feed / That's all I need.” But that connection - a one line LI manifesto, as featured in one-time situationist Christopher Gray's *Leaving the 20th Century: The Incomplete Work of the Situationist International* and passed down by Gray's friends Malcom McLaren and

Jamie Reid to Johnny Rotten – is tradition as arithmetic. To find its story one has to disrupt the continuities of tradition, even with the discontinuities of a smoky, subterranean tradition, with a certain simultaneity. For example: in a pursuit of a negation of their societies idea of happiness the Sex Pistols found themselves drawn again and again to the verge of dada glossolalia, into the realm of self destroying modern poetry. *Memoires* (by Guy Ernest Debord) reached the same spot on purpose, though the convergence was no accident, neither was it exactly the result of transference. Henri Lefebvre's words are worth recalling: "To the degree that modernity has a meaning it is this: it carries within itself, from the beginning, a radical negation - Dada, this event which took place in a Zurich café." Lefebvre was making an argument, not posing a riddle; this negation, he was saying, had persisted, not as an art tradition canalized into an invulnerable future, but as an unsettled debt of history, extending into an unresolved past. It didn't matter that as Lefebvre spoke in 1975 the Sex Pistols were forming, or that neither could ever acknowledge the other, as Lefebvre and Debord acknowledged each other as comrades in an attempt to make a revolution out of everyday life: the Sex Pistols, taking to the stage as an instinctive cultural impulse, with unknown roots in *Memoires*, a studied cultural thesis, brought the debt back into play. As they brought it back into play, they increased it – and then. As soon as they consented to disappear from history, the debt according to its terms made them too, a legend of freedom.

That bad paper is the only currency in this tale: lost children seek their fathers and fathers seek their lost children but nobody really looks like anybody else. So all, fixed on the wrong faces, pass each other by: this is the drift of secret history, a history that remains a secret even to those who make it, especially to those who make it. In the Sex Pistols' hands, and in the hands of those who turned up in their wake, all this appeared as a blind groping toward a new story, driven by the instinctive dada suspicion that ordinary language could not tell yet. In Debord's book, which presented itself as a grouping, yet so carefully arranged that a lightly constructed page could have the same effect as a violent pause in a piece of music, it was a conscious attempt to use dada language to tell the story that language had passed down to him: a story, and a language, that contained the most abstract and ephemeral legend of freedom he knew.

AN EXTRACT FROM *LIPSTICK TRACES: A SECRET HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY* BY GREIL MARCUS. REPRODUCED COURTESY OF GREIL MARCUS.

ROCK

"Music seeks to change life; life goes on; the music is left behind; that is what is left to talk about."

Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: The Secret History of the Twentieth Century*

"You can't always write a chord ugly enough to say what you want to say, so sometimes you have to rely on a giraffe filled with whipped cream."

Frank Zappa

"What remains irreducible about this music is its desire to change the world. The desire is patent and simple, but it inscribes a story that is infinitely complex – as complex as the interplay of the everyday gestures that describe the way the world works. The desire begins with the demand to live not as an object but as a subject of history – to live as if something actually depended on one's actions – and that demand opens onto a free street."

Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: The Secret History of the Twentieth Century*

“The piano has been drinking, not me.”

Tom Waits

“A twenty year old stands before a microphone and, after declaring himself an all-consuming demon, proceeds to level everything around him – to reduce it to rubble. He denies the claims of his society with a laugh, then pulls the string on the history of society with a shift of vowels so violent it creates pure pleasure.”

Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: The Secret History of the Twentieth Century*

“I’ll die before I’m 25, and when I do I’ll have lived the way I wanted to.”

Sid Vicious

“I’ve never had a problem with drugs. I’ve had problems with the police.”

Keith Richards

“Sometimes I am two people. Johnny is the nice one. Cash causes all the trouble.

They fight.”

Johnny Cash

YOU DON’T BECOME A ROCK STAR UNLESS YOU’VE GOT SOMETHING MISSING SOMEWHERE, THAT IS OBVIOUS TO ME. IF YOU WERE OF SOUND MIND OR A MORE COMPLETE PERSON, YOU COULD FEEL NORMAL WITHOUT 70,000 PEOPLE A NIGHT SCREAMING THEIR LOVE FOR YOU.

BLAISE PASCAL CALLED IT THE GOD-SHAPED HOLE. EVERYONE’S GOT ONE BUT SOME ARE BLACKER AND WIDER THAN OTHERS. IT’S A FEELING OF BEING ABANDONED, CUT ADRIFT IN SPACE AND TIME.

BONO

MADNESS

“I believe in a long, prolonged, derangement of the senses in order to obtain the unknown.”

Jim Morrison

“We have seen that the creative act always involves a regression to earlier, more primitive levels in the mental hierarchy, while other processes continue simultaneously on the rational surface – a condition that reminds me of a skin diver with a breathing-tube. (Needless to say, the exercise has its dangers: skin divers are prone to fall victim to the ‘rapture of the deep’ and tear their breathing tubes off – the reculer sans sauter of William Blake and so many others...) the capacity to regress, more or less at will, to the games of the underground, without losing contact with the surface, seems to be the essence of the poetic, and of any other form of creativity.”

Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*

“It’s better to burn out than to fade away.”

Neil Young

“Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”

TS Eliot, after recovering from a nervous breakdown.

“If a man comes to the door of poetry untouched by the madness of the Muses, believing that technique alone will make him a good poet, he and his sane compositions never reach perfection, but are utterly eclipsed by the performances of the inspired madman.”

Socrates, Phaedrus

“Writing is a form of therapy. Sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation.”

Graham Greene

“’Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we image, even as I do now.
What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,
Soul of my thought! With whom I traverse earth, Invisible but gazing, as I glow
Mix’d with thy spirit, blending with thy birth,
And feeling still with thee in my crush’d feeling’s dearth.”

Byron

“I think I have always had a pretty strong creative impulse. And that has probably saved me from abandoning myself completely.”

Nick Cave

ASTRAL WEEKS

“Now we get to three or four songs from a set by Van Morrison. He climaxes, as he always did in those days with Cyprus Avenue from Astral Weeks. After going through the verses, he drives the song, the band and himself to a finish which has since become one of his trademarks and one of the all-time classic rock ‘n’ roll set-closers. With consummate dynamics that allow him to snap from indescribably eccentric throwaway phrasing to sheer passion in the very next breath he brings the music surging up through crescendo after crescendo, stopping and starting and stopping and starting the song again and again, imposing long maniacal silences like giant question marks between the stops and starts and ruling the room through sheer tension, building to a shout of “It’s too late to stop now!”, and just when you think it’s all going to surge over the top, he cuts it off stone cold dead, the hollow of a murdered explosion, throws the microphone down and stalks offstage. It is truly one of the most perverse things I have ever seen a performer do in my life. And, of course, it’s sensational: our guts are knotted up, we’re crazed and clawing for more but we damn well know we’ve seen and felt something.”

“Van Morrison is interested, obsessed with how much musical or verbal information he can compress into a small space, and, almost, conversely, how far he can spread one note, words, sound or picture. To capture one moment, be it a caress or a twitch. He repeats certain phrases to extreme that from anyone else would seem ridiculous, because he is waiting for a vision to unfold, trying as unobtrusively as possible to nudge it along. Sometimes he gives it to you through silence, by choking off the song in mid-flight...It’s the great search, fuelled by the belief that through these musical and mental processes illumination is attainable. Or may at least be glimpsed.”

“You’re in trouble when you sit yourself down to explicate just exactly what a mystical document, which is exactly what Astral Weeks is, means. For one thing, what it means is Richard Davis’s bass playing, which complements the songs and singing all the way with a lyricism that’s something more for great musicianship: there is something about it that is more than inspired, something that has been touched,

that's in the realm of the miraculous. The whole ensemble – Larry Fallon's string section, Jay Berliner's guitar, Connie Kay's drumming is like that: they and Van sound like they are not just reading but dwelling inside of each other's minds. The facts may be far different."

"Maybe what it boiled down to is one moment's knowledge of the miracle of life, with its inevitable concomitant, a vertiginous glimpse of the capacity to be hurt, and the capacity to inflict that hurt. Transfixed between pure rapture and anguish."

"If you accept for even a moment the idea that each human life is a precious and delicate as a snowflake and then you look at a wino in a doorway, you've got to hurt until you feel like a sponge for all those other assholes' problems, until you feel like an asshole yourself, so you draw all the appropriate lines. You stop feeling. But you know that then you begin to die. So you tussle with yourself. How much of this horror can I actually allow myself to think about? Perhaps the numbest mannekin is wiser than somebody who only allows their sensitivity to drive them to destroy everything they touch – but then again, to tilt Madame George's hat a hair, just to recognise that that person exists, just to touch his cheek and then probably expire because the realisation that you must share the world with him is ultimately unbearable is to only go the first mile. The realisation of living is just about that low and that exalted and that unbearable and that sought-after. Please come back and leave me along."

Quotes from *Astral Weeks* by Lester Bangs (from *Stranded*, 1979)

Character Summaries

JOHN played by HUGO WEAVING

John is an Australian now living in West Sussex, England. John is the centre of the band Rifle Mind – he has the dominant position. He wrote the songs and lyrics and has the biggest cut from the royalties. He is a great musician (or rather ‘was’) he had a break down on the Japan tour some fifteen years ago. We meet everyone at his place. He has since married Lynn, who didn’t have a lot to do with the band. They are both recovering addicts – and keep away from alcohol as well. When the [play opens we see John in song writing or at least re-visiting mode. Re-experiencing the music of Rifle Mind.

LYNN played by SUSAN PRIOR

Lynn is somewhat Yoga mad these days in her addiction free state. She has a daily instructor and works on her yoga in the attic room. She comes across as someone who is in a fragile state and yet they (the other band members) know she holds the key as to whether John does the tour or not. She believes she has kept John on the straight and narrow. She is English.

SAM played by JEREMY SIMS

Sam is the band manager having come along once they were established and fairly successful. He has had a long time ‘crush’ or ‘passion’ for Cindy or Cin has she is affectionately known. She is now with Phil (the Bass player) yet Sam and she did get together in fairly recent times. Sam wants to do it again! He also wants this reunion tour to be a big gig and big success for everyone. Sam is the money man! Sam is a Pom.

PHIL played by MARTON CSOKAS

Phil is the bass player for Rifle Mind and is also Australian. He now lives in New York and is with Cindy. They have a child, Otto who is twelve. Phil is John’s older brother and their rivalry (sibling wise) is long standing. Phil didn’t have a break down. Phil has a solo career he has begun to establish.

CINDY played by SUSIE PORTER

Cin is an ex of John, mother of Otto, (is John the father?) and partner to Phil. She has had a dalliance with Sam. She is not therefore a groupie but a part of the band’s history. Australian living with Phil in New York.

MOON played by STEVE RODGERS

Moon is the Drummer of Rifle Mind. He is the butt of many of John’s inappropriate or ill-timed jokes. He has always put up with this position. He is the only member of the band still seriously playing gigs. He has stayed in the ‘scene’. He brings Lee along as an extra guitar player. Everyone wonders if John will be up to it – he was the one who quit / broke down on the Japan tour after all. He is an Australian living and performing in Los Angeles.

LEE played by EWEN LESLIE

Lee is a serious and much younger guitarist. He is here to ‘complement’ the band’s sound. But is he also here to stand in for John who may or may not play again? He is young enough to have some hero worship for John and the band yet good enough to stand on his own merits. Lee is an American from Los Angeles.

Philip Seymour Hoffman, Director *Riflemind*

Philip met Andrew Upton when his wife Cate Blanchett was working with Philip Seymour Hoffman on *The Talented Mr Ripley* in Venice. It was there that they began to talk about Andrew's ideas for such a play. That was almost 10 years ago. They became friends and as you can see from the outline below of what is LAByrinth theatre, you will see how first time premier projects appeal to Philip. It is the very basis of what LAByrinth does.

Mini Biography

Film and stage actor and theater director Philip Seymour Hoffman was born in the Rochester, New York, suburb of Fairport on July 23, 1967. After becoming involved in high school theatrics, he attended New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, graduating with a B.F.A. degree in Drama in 1989. He made his feature film debut in the indie production Triple Bogey on a Par Five Hole (1991) as Phil Hoffman, and his first role in a major release came the next year in My New Gun (1992). While he had supporting roles in some other major productions, his breakthrough role came in Paul Thomas Anderson's Boogie Nights (1997). He quickly became an icon of indie cinema, establishing a reputation as one of the screen's finest actors, in a variety of supporting and second leads in indie and major features, including Todd Solondz's Happiness (1998), Flawless (1999), The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999), Paul Thomas Anderson's Magnolia (1999), Almost Famous (2000) and State and Main (2000). He also appeared in supporting roles in such mainstream, big-budget features as Red Dragon (2002), Cold Mountain (2003) and the upcoming Mission: Impossible III (2006).

Hoffman is also quite active on the stage. On Broadway, he has earned two Tony nominations, as Best Actor (Play) in 2000 for a revival of Sam Shepard's "True West" and as Best Actor (Featured Role - Play) in 2003 for a revival of Eugene O'Neill (I)'s "Long Day's Journey into Night". His other acting credits in the New York theater include "The Seagull" (directed by Mike Nichols for The New York Shakespeare Festival), "Defying Gravity", "The Merchant of Venice" (directed by Peter Sellars), "Shopping and F*@%ing" and "The Author's Voice" (Drama Desk nomination).

He is the Co-Artistic Director of the LAByrinth Theater Company in New York, for which he directed "Our Lady of 121st Street" by Stephen Adly Guirgis. He also has directed "In Arabia, We'd All Be Kings" and "Jesus Hopped the A Train" by Guirgis for LAByrinth, and "The Glory of Living" by Rebecca Gilman at the Manhattan Class Company.

Hoffman consolidated his reputation as one of the finest actors under the age of 40 with his turn in the title role of Capote (2005), for which he won the Los Angeles Film Critics Award as Best Actor. In 2006, he was awarded the Best Actor Oscar for the same role.

IMDb Mini Biography By: Jon C. Hopwood - from <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000450/bio>

LAByrinth Theater Company

LAByrinth Theater Company was founded in 1992 by a group of actors who wanted to push their artistic limits, hone their craft, and create new plays that truly reflected their heritage and experience. Today, LAByrinth is comprised of almost 100 established and emerging theater artists from a wide array of cultural perspectives.

Led by Artistic Director John Ortiz, co-Artistic Director Philip Seymour Hoffman, and co-Artistic Director and Executive Director John Gould Rubin, the inclusive, multicultural ensemble encourages all members to write, act, direct, and design—supporting multidisciplinary growth and exploration in the creation of daring new work that celebrates the diversity of its New York City home.

LAByrinth Theater Company is dedicated to developing new plays through a unique creative process. Each play is first presented at the Company's annual Summer Intensive: a concentrated two-week retreat where members and invited guest artists create new material and develop current works in progress. After the Intensive, selected works advance in LAByrinth's development process and are presented as staged readings for the public, giving the playwright and his or her creative team further opportunity to rehearse and explore the text in front of an audience. Works presented are considered for further development as fully staged productions.

LAByrinth's 2007/08 season includes five new plays that have been developed through this process: *A View from 151st Street* by Bob Gladini, directed by Peter DuBois; *UNCONDITIONAL* by Brett C. Leonard, directed by Mark Wing-Davey; *The Little Flower of East Orange* by Stephen Adly Guirgis, directed by Philip Seymour Hoffman (a co-production with The Public Theater); *Penalties & Interest* by Rebecca Cohen, directed by John Gould Rubin and *Sweet Storm* by Scott Hudson, directed by Padraic Lillis.

Over the years, LAByrinth has developed hundreds of new plays and staged 47 productions including: *Jack Goes Boating* (2007), *A Small, Melodramatic Story* (2006), *Sailor's Song* (2004), *Dutch Heart of Man* (2003), *Dirty Story* (2003), *Our Lady of 121st Street* (2002), *Where's My Money?* (2001), *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* (2000), and *In Arabia, We'd All Be Kings* (1999). The 2007/08 season is LAByrinth's fifth in residency at The Public Theater. LAByrinth has also collaborated with The Public to develop new work, with such productions as *School of The Americas* (2006), *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (2005) and *Guinea Pig Solo* (2004).

For more information about LAByrinth Theater Company, go to www.labtheater.org.

The Design

SET

This play is very much about the dynamics of people moving in space. What does the room allow them to explore by way of their relationships and their power playing. The space was ultimately very important therefore.

The wharf is in the 'L' configuration that gives the space a depth and scale befitting the status (at least financial) of the hosts John and Lynn.

The characters step into the kitchen (open plan) and living space of this large estate. It is modern and contemporary yet speaks also of their wealth. There are art pieces casually adorning the bench. Primitive art. There is a very modern print from a famous photographer. Behind the kitchen in the entrance corridor can partially be seen a huge canvas. Again contemporary, in black and red. Cin at one point makes reference to the gothic objects around and suggests they are Lynn's influence. There is a Victorian (?) red velvet covered chair that sits somewhat out of place with the rest of the 'look' demonstrating a rather eclectic collection of tastes. The kitchen is chrome and stainless steel on a raised marble platform. Off down stage right is the STUDIO - When it is in use a red glowing light flashes announcing the presence of its inhabitants.

SOUND & LIGHTING

This is not a play about music, Andrew Upton clearly states at the briefing. It is about the people. The score therefore has had more play and pull on the transitions between scenes or more as they are written as time changes. The location never changes – happening mostly across one long weekend. But time moves there world and their references to each other.

In a tech rehearsal in the space I witness the opening of act 2 (after interval) and there are planned flashes of light to reveal in its strobe effect the 'band' re-surfacing after a successful 'jam'. Philip Seymour Hoffman loved the look, they had to tweak the timing of each flash and the timing of the actors entrances (there was also a crew member to mask as she pre-set the Chinese takeaway – more evidence of time shift). Then he (the director) had a thought – could we have a 'sound' with each flash as well? Some minutes later (after the sound designer saying he would have to source something later) the flashes were tried again this time with a flash bulb crash sound behind them – Yes we will use that!!!

The play is ultimately realism/naturalism. The scene and time shift transitions are indicated with light and sound changes. Sound is often an echo of the band Rifle Mind. Not so much an identifiable tune – but more the jamming of superior musicians - Huge chords and guitar riffs. The size of the sound playing on the atmosphere of the scene just played – jarring the audience into a reaction, encouraging the audience to feel the tensions of the players in this ensemble.

Scene changes are often (as suits the contemporary form) not produced with a cut and dried blackout. This is wonderful for our students to appreciate. The lighting state shifts – there are French doors to play with external lighting influences – and the fourth wall has evidence of huge windows only shown through the lighting. The final scenes transition will hold you enthral to the effect light can have on time in the theatre.

POSTER / PROGRAM

The poster revealed Hugo Weaving in a reclined pose – very comfortable and evidently at home. This was marketing to pique interest in the actor / character perhaps and revealed less about the play. Then onto the program the designer has chosen the gun site target – this motif can also be seen on the inner left arm of the band's members – a special link for them of Rifle Mind and its insignia.

Stage Management role – (see appendix – prompt copy pages)

You can see from the attached Prompt copy pages how busy a preset for a show can be – with standbys and presets and LX cue and SFX Cues and numbers and 'Go' highlighted....using radio mic for Hugo Weaving's character for example.

There are visual cues for the SM to go from as well as timings and aural cues for sound cues. Can you find some examples? All marked in the Prompt copy as SD Q's and LX Q's. You can immediately tell how busy backstage is as well with instructions for stage crew to 'take off Hugo's mic' and say 'ready' etc.

It would be of benefit for drama students for the teacher to go through the prompt copy pages and look for signs of the Stage Manager's role and define it further as well as identify other very busy points of the play technologically, once they had seen the play. It is written in pencil and there is much evidence of rubbings out!

In the earlier tech rehearsal much was going on and the actors had to be patient as they were just waiting for the technical parts of the production to be cemented and locked in. At one point the Director, Philip Seymour Hoffman noticed a prop / art work was missing and asked generally where it was. The Stage manager said there was still some work to be done on it and then noted it had been accidentally broken during the set building and was being repaired. The stage manager has to be ready throughout this process to take special notes and add things into their role if the Director gets a new idea perhaps. (See above in regards to sound effects/SFX)

From the briefing

Chekhov may resonate as of direct and indirect influence on Andrew Upton the writer. Upton also writes about Life and people, in one location, trapped or stuck and searching. The past becoming more powerful in your mind – subtle yet potent and powerful. He writes about sustainability in the face of fame whilst still / inevitably losing touch with your audience.

Can we control the uncertainty of the future? Make money – yet still recapture the zeitgeist. Can we stop the clock and halt the sand in the hourglass? Marton Csokas calls the play 'existentialist'. He is not far wrong. There is, in this play, complex and sophisticated writing about existence. The actors trust the writing and are allowing the process to be organic.

A long way to the bottom

John McCallum

REVIEW

ANDREW Upton's bleakly comic new play, which opened in Sydney last night, is given an oddly domestic, low-key production by Philip Seymour Hoffman, particularly as it is about rock n' roll dreams. It has superb performances by a star cast, led by Hugo Weaving and Susan Prior as the angst-ridden, drug haunted couple at its centre.

The tone is bitter and romantic. This is the downside of the rock dream. The scattered members of a once-great band, Rifle Mind, meet up 10 years later at the English country estate of John, their rich troubled-genius leader (Weaving), and over a weekend try to persuade him to join them on a comeback tour. They find they can still play together, but almost everything else is anguish or regret "We're good when we play and we're f.. king horrible when we don't" says the much-maligned drummer (Steve Rogers is terrific). It's a line that sums up 50 years of rock n' roll legend.

Each of them is trying to work out a new life in middle age, but none can see that what they need is not to look back but to go on. Upton's terse, fragmented script, full of bleak phrases and interrupted, half-expressed thoughts, captures their existential confusion. Hoffman's direction finds its rhythms and flows.

Weaving is superb brooding, trapped, and trying to break out, or break through. Most of the humour is supplied by Jeremy Sims, funny as the spiv manager, but even he is defeated by the band's despair.

The romance of the rock legend spirals down in the second half, especially in a confrontation between John and his brother Phil (Marton Csokas) not a charismatic genius like John but the workhorse behind their old music.

John's wife (Prior) returns from a drug binge at the end, and there is a standoff between them that might just offer a hope for the future.

Riftemind, by Andrew Upton, The Sydney Theatre Company. Wharf 1, Sydney, until December 8.

Aim a little off

Daily Telegraph, Friday, 12 October 2007

Riflemind Wharf 1 Review O Andrew Upton is about to take over as O co-creative director of Sydney Theatre Company with his wife Cate Blanchett.

With another year before their first program hits the stage, this might indicate what's in store. Outgoing STC boss Robyn Nevin has given Upton a stellar cast and director Philip Seymour Hoffman.

We begin in the dark, red light streaming from a door. Enter Hugo Weaving as John, barefoot, babbling in an artistic trance. He's talking sound production and half-singing, "I loved you, when I thought that you were famous". He stalks out, muttering, "Still famous".

The next scene is in the stately English home where John lives with Lynn (Susan Prior).

John is awaiting the rest of his once-great rock band Riflemind. The former frontman has invited his bass playing older brother Phil (Marton Csokas) and drummer Moon (Steve Rodgers) for a reunion. Riflemind's old manager Sam (Jeremy Sims) and Phil's partner and groupie Cindy (Susie Porter) are also on their way, anxious for things to go smoothly.

Smooth is unlikely where John's involved. From his first prickly interactions with a nervous Lynn, he's difficult. When Sam, Phil and Cindy arrive, he ignores them. Next Moon arrives. Rodgers is a highlight as the comical, lovably dopey drummer who can't wait to play. John hasn't touched a guitar in three years.

Moon's brought young guitarist Lee (Ewen Leslie), who worships John. Sam badgers Cindy into a quickie despite her being Phil's partner. They hit the studio.

The scene is set for something big, but after this the story goes into a weird, weightless orbit around themes of love, loyalty, addiction, creativity and wanting to be "there", again at the peak of one's powers.

The hollow, enigmatic ending is like a mouthful of nothing after a meaty entree. Does *Riflemind* hit the mark? It won't blow your head off. Yet there is something insistent about its buried longing that lingers. It's like being shot from a great distance, not noticing until later when the blood starts flowing.

SIMON FERGUSON

Cranky rockers plug in, tune up and fall apart

Bryce Hallet, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday, 12 October 2007

THEATRE RIFLEMIND Sydney Theatre Company Wharf 1, October 10 Until December 8

THE skewed world of Andrew Upton's fractured and downcast play about a once-great rock band clinging to glory and lurching towards oblivion covers familiar ground when it comes to the famous and fallen. Most effectively, the skittishness, emptiness and loathing born of addiction and fear.

When the mid-40s members of the band Rifle Mind gather at the English country estate of their frontman, John (Hugo Weaving, they contemplate a comeback and another chance to soar like gods, if only to escape disharmony and the ravages of time.

After bitter quarrels, brain addled banalities power games and vacant stretches the smug warrior John reflects on the seemingly joyful quest before the genuine became fake. "On our first gigs we couldn't count on hotels and beer" he tells his comrade and acolyte Phil (Marton Csokas). "Cut of the door pay for your own PA. We scratched around on people's floors, friends. Parents. And then at some point, we were in this streamlined machine. Hurling along. And the less I saw of life? The less I felt. It all just felt less And so it is that the director Philip Seymour Hoffman, and his design team, Richard Roberts (set), Damien Cooper (lighting and Tess Schofield (costumes), conjure an impersonal "streamlined" space where the ageing rocker and his disconnected wife, Lynn (Susan Prior), have found comfort, or the illusion of it.

When they open the door to the past they let in disloyalties, demons and doubts. Almost all the characters are hard-bitten or disenchanting. The cracks, they suggest, will vanish in the collective act of creation when they are pulled back from individual panic and defeat.

Upton has his sights set on fascinating ideas about creativity and the chasm between the public and private, appearance and pain, as well as the little things that can trip people over the edge. The production gives the ideas breathing space but with too often that the drama, much like the characters, get stuck in a rut.

Weaving's portrayal is adroitly crafted and he cuts a complex and commanding figure by the end. Hoffman's staging is sharp, clear and loud, yet not thrillingly inventive.

Jeremy Sims impresses as the money-obsessed, sex-crazed Sam. Prior excels as the serene yet strung-out wife, although it's a difficult role to negotiate given the shift from the pithy and whimsical to the overlaid and deranged. But, then, that about sizes up the play given its bald patches mood swings and discordant notes. Curiously, *Rifle Mind* conveys more when characters falter and have little to say, than in the hot-headed, sarcastic rants when it's just words, words, words sometimes delivered loudly and to little effect.

Activities

Before the Play

- Who are your favourite *Australian* bands and why do you like them?
- Why do people listen to music?
- What do you know about the life of rock 'n' roll stars? What do you presume? Brainstorm as a class.
- What does **sex, drugs and rock'n'roll** mean as an industry or a lifestyle?
- Why do you think people take drugs? What is addiction?
- What constitutes a power play between people? Is it different for family? Why? How?
- Discuss the images from the poster and the program. What do they say to the potential audience?
- Write a scene between two characters. It could be about an event (like a birthday) that each recalls differently. Neither character can say more than 3 words at a time. What happens to the dynamic between them?

After the Play

- What do you think the name of the band means? Can you think of different band names – real or made up that you like or think says 'something' to you?
- What would you put in the program to contextualise the play?
- Every character has an 'agenda' they bring with them to the weekend jam. What do you think those are? How do they play out?
- In character preparation what are the important things you discovered about the characters? Choose one character to write about in more detail – do a character profile for them.
- Why is Hugo Weaving's character radio mic'd for the opening sequence in the red light of the studio? What does it say about his character?
- Discuss the use of sound and lighting in the play – especially for transitions. Is it effective? Did you like the design overall? Why? Why not? (set, sound, lights, costume)
- What is going to happen after the play finishes? Will they go on tour?
- What impact does the language have on an audience? What does it say about the characters and their relationship?

Reviewing

Below is a guideline for reviewing productions, possibly for a log book in Drama or as a journal entry in English. If you attend a play, film, concert, opera, musical, school production, etc. - write about it critically.

1. Did you enjoy it? Why?
2. What was good or effective? What was bad or didn't communicate with you?
3. How is a good production, and this one in particular, achieved?
4. Did the rest of the audience enjoy it?
5. Was the plot communicated clearly?
6. Was the acting good? (What is good acting?)
7. Set and costumes: Credible? Bad or good? Too much or too little? If the set and costumes play too much of a part in the drama, this is considered an imposing or negative thing.
8. Was the play convincing, dull, funny, hilarious, dark, mediocre? Why? Why not?
9. Was the script/play credible?

APPENDIX – Sample Script

(Script from page 72 – 75)

In the script attached is an example of the group dynamic. Most of the players are present and the tensions rise. Perhaps John is testing the waters rather than overly defending Moon really. Moon is present but will retaliate later. He is rather listening. It is about the 'stakes'. They are high. Who holds the ultimate power in regards to the group and the potential for a reunion tour and a future at all? John has perhaps felt the group begin to take the reigns and take over. He needs to rise up and regain his rightful place at the pinnacle. Will they let him?

Also revealed in these pages is the use of the writer's (simultaneous) tool. Where rather than put dot dot dot (...) to indicate someone speaks over the other person, he has some parts of speeches spoken across others. It is quite effective. It is personal censorship – over the top / interrupting / censorship / unsure what they want to say and stopping themselves. You might liken it to the way David Mamet or Caryl Churhill write.

Also when he wants to indicate a character is searching for words and deciding as they speak what they might say next (as happens to all of us in real life) he uses indicative punctuation – or caesura; a full-stop mid thought perhaps. Again and again during one characters speech. This is a very effective tool / device to show the thought processes of the characters. It creates and indicates levels of tension and reaction as well.

Here is a piece featuring a fine example of Andrew Upton's caesura / discontinuity / punctuation / disruption / pause for the character Lynn.

Lynn: A film. I went to a film.

I know, sorry. I should have said but I just had to. Up and Leave. It was one of those things. The time. Didn't I say?

I remembered. Suddenly.

The film was only on last night. This one session.

Students should have a go writing their own piece that demonstrates this contemporary style that Andrew Upton uses to show his characters thought processes.