

THE STONES

by

Tom Lycos & Stefo Nantsou



NOTES FOR TEACHERS

by Stefo Nantsou

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ZEAL THEATRE

T H E S T O N E S

By

Tom Lycos & Stefo Nantsou

“THE STONES” is a dramatization of a true story where two boys faced manslaughter charges after kicking rocks off a freeway overpass and killing a motorist. Writer/director/performers Tom Lycos and Stefo Nantsou of ZEAL THEATRE developed the script with the assistance of Victorian Police officers and detectives who were in charge of the case. The play fictionalizes the characters and weaves in other true stories from similar incidents from around the world.

“THE STONES” premiered in Melbourne in May 1996 and has since been performed over 1,000 times around Australia, North America, Europe, Asia and Africa including seasons at the Royal National Theatre in London, the New Victory Theater in New York and Theater Kazemoko in Tokyo. The play has also been translated and performed in over 20 countries with Lycos and Nantsou having directed the play in Germany, Canada, Wales, Holland, Hungary and Denmark.

“THE STONES” has received numerous national and international awards with Zeal Theatre being awarded the prestigious ASSITEJ International Directors Choice Award for ‘excellence in the theatre for young people industry’ in Montreal in 2005.

ZEAL THEATRE

artist biographies

Stefo Nantsou

Has written 40 plays, directed more than 70, and has acted in over 100 productions in his almost 30 year career. After co-founding the Ship-O-Fools Clowns in 1980 and working as an ensemble actor/writer with Freewheels T.I.E. ('83-'84) and Sydney's Sidetrack Theatre ('85-'87), Stefo founded Zeal Theatre in 1989. Zeal has created 40 original productions, notably "TATAU" (co-production with New Zealand's Pacific Underground, seasons in Auckland and Sydney, 1996), "JOYRIDE" (over 600 performances throughout Australia & New Zealand 92-96) & the world-renowned "THE STONES" (performed over 1000 times throughout Australia, Asia, Europe and North America including seasons at the National Theatre in London and the New Victory Theater in New York). He has also directed his plays in Holland, Hungary, Canada, Germany & Denmark. Zeal Theatre received a NSW Frater Award in 1998, the Don Mackay Award in 1999, and the prestigious ASSITEJ President's Award in Montreal in 2005. He received 2 Australia Council Literature Fund grants for "ENERGY" ('93) & "THE BIG TOMORROW" ('94), co-founded Melbourne's The Torch Company, writing/directing "THE ESSENTIALS" ('97), "MECHTRON" (Green Room Award nominee '98) and "THE TORCH" ('99). He wrote "WONDERFUL WARD" for the 1999 Melbourne Comedy Festival, wrote/directed/acted in "DEBTS" at the Adelaide Fringe Festival (1992) and has been commissioned three times to create a new work by the Sydney Theatre Company ("GRONKS", "AUSTRALIA V SOUTH AFRICA" & "TABOO"). Stefo's T.V. credits include a guest role on ABC's "Something in the Air" in 2000.

Tom Lycos

After two years performing and writing with renowned Dutch company KISS in 1983-'84, Tom returned to Australia to join the Sidetrack Theatre ensemble as actor/musician/writer for 5 productions (1985-'88) including "ADIOS CHA CHA", "KIN" and "THE RUNAWAYS". In 1988 he played the lead male role in Jane Campion's film "SWEETIE" before joining the world famous Circus Oz as acrobat/musician/performer. Between 1989-1991, he toured regularly with Circus Oz throughout Australia, South East Asia, Europe and the U.S.. He was then actor/musician in two stage musicals, "BUDDY" and "ESCAPE FROM THE FORBIDDEN PLANET" (seasons in Sydney & Melbourne '91 and '92). He also performed in theatrical productions with Melbourne Theatre Company, Arena Theatre, Griffin Theatre, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Back to Back Theatre and Kinetic Energy. In 1994 he was co-deviser/actor in the Burning House production of "THAT EYE THE SKY" with Hugo Weaving and David Wenham. His T.V. credits include roles on "Home and Away" ('91-'92). In 1996, Tom joined Zeal Theatre co-creating 5 original productions including "THE STONES", "A SECRET PLACE", "MOUSE", "SIDE EFFECTS" (which has played in London, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Melbourne & Sydney) and most recently "TABOO" which was commissioned by the Sydney Theatre Company. Along with co-collaborator Stefo Nantsou, Tom also received the ASSITEJ Presidents Award in 2005.

“THE STONES”

DRAMA

"THE STONES" utilizes quite a few theatrical techniques and employs a variety of skills.

storytelling

Simply telling a story to a group of people, nothing flashy or fantastic... just being able to communicate a story clearly to an audience is a skill in itself. A story can be told in a serious way, or a comic way, or both....no rules...as long as it is clear and concise. The actors in "THE STONES" on numerous occasions during the show actually tell the audience what happened. They do not 'act it out', they just tell the story.

EXERCISE 1 (Good for all Drama students)

Get each individual member of the class to tell a simple story.
Then get them to tell the same story, but as another character.
Then get them to tell the same story, either in character or as themselves, once in a comic way, then in a serious way.

EXERCISE 2 Each student should try different ways of telling a story...

- i) Using direct audience eye contact.
- ii) Not looking at the audience.
- iii) As a soliloquy (ala Shakespeare).
- iv) In different languages.
- v) Without words, only mime.
- vi) In poetry.

EXERCISE 3 Four students tell the same story from their own points of view.

- i) Each one telling the audience separately.
- ii) Telling each other (not referring to the audience).
- iii) Arguing their stories with the audience involved.
- iv) One story being funny, another being very serious.

acrobatics

Throughout "THE STONES", the actors are employing physical and acrobatic skills. Tom Lycos is a teacher of acrobatics and has trained with many experts, having performed in the past with CIRCUS OZ. Acrobatics, physical work, sweating, energy, zeal – all of these elements combine to give a production more dynamic, more power, more strength.

EXERCISE 1 (Good for large classes) Through a range of body shapes, balances, and formations, the class should create a series of places...

- i) A jungle.
- ii) A large city.
- iii) Mars.

EXERCISE 2 In groups of 3, 4 or 5, each group should tell a story with as much acrobatic, physicalizing as possible.

EXERCISE 3 (Years 11 & 12 in particular) In groups of 3, create a non-verbal storytelling style, with a particular focus on body shapes and balances.

"THE STONES"

DRAMA

dual characterisation

Playing one part in a play is standard. Playing two or more roles in a play can be more challenging. Switching quickly from one role to the other can be fairly interesting. Switching from one role to another, without any costume change, without any pauses, can be quite difficult. In "THE STONES", the actors switch very quickly from one role to the other, without hesitation, without leaving the performing area.

- EXERCISE 1 Each student should attempt to create a character highlighting...
- i) body shape (posture, stance).
 - ii) attitude.
 - iii) the situation they are in (where are they?).
 - iv) then a typical thing that character would say.

Each student should then create a second character. Depending on the situations each student has chosen, they should try to make both of their characters have some kind of conversation or interaction.

- EXERCISE 2 "Jesus & the Devil"
- Each student takes it in turns sitting in a chair as themselves. They then slowly "turn into" their impression of Jesus Christ. Once they "are" Jesus, they slowly turn into their impression of the Devil.

- EXERCISE 3 Two boys and two girls, on "a date".
- In groups of two, students should attempt playing all four characters, switching between the two boys, then the two girls, then one boy and one girl, then the other pair, etc...

music

All Zeal Theatre shows have their musical 'angle'. "THE STONES" features electric guitars, sometimes the two actors playing an instrumental together, other times the music being used to heighten a monologue, or as sound effects behind a scene. Music is a potent force in film and television, and theatre as well.

- EXERCISE 1 Each student should write (or find) a monologue for a particular piece of music (preferably something they are not familiar with). Each student should then write (or find) a monologue for a piece of music of their choice.
- In groups of 2, one musician, one actor, each pair present a story.
(NOTE: Music, sound effects, noises, no rules, let the imagination run wild.)

- EXERCISE 2 In groups of 4 or 5, present a short 6 minute scene with an appropriate soundtrack. Try performing the same scene with dialogue, the music as merely backing mood music. Then try the scene without dialogue, emphasizing the mood created by the music.

- EXERCISE 3 (for students with musical abilities) Have one student play a soundtrack live for a scene involving 2 or more actors. Add more musicians for the same scene.

"THE STONES"

ENGLISH

"THE STONES" is a theatrical presentation of real events and real people. It uses the facts of a story then retells the story as fiction, making up new characters, and new events. The play as a text employs many variations of writing, from monologue to direct audience address, traditional "4th Wall" dialogue scenes, and non-verbal scenes with only the stage directions being written down.

EXERCISE 1 Using the daily newspaper, allow each student to select a story from the paper and write a short play about that story. Specific focus should be placed on....

- i) who are the characters (or, what characters do you "need")?
- ii) where are the scenes going to take place?
- iii) how are the characters going to look, speak, behave, etc?
- iv) How will the play start, and how will it end?

EXERCISE 2 You select a specific story from the newspaper and allow each member of the class to write a play about that story.

- i) You select the characters and the situations, the students have to write the dialogue and 'what happens'.
- ii) The students are free to select the characters and events from the story and focus specifically on them.
- iii) Allow the students to experiment with particular writing styles...
 - a) rhyming poetry
 - b) monologues
 - c) non-naturalistic dialogue
 - d) making up their own words (eg. "Jabberwocky")

EXERCISE 3 Tell the class a story. Have each student select one moment/scene/piece of your story and have them write out that scene in script form.

group devising

"THE STONES" was group-devised. There were two writers working together on the script's development and final draft. Different scenes were written by different writers, some scenes are a product of two versions being amalgamated, some monologues were written by one person, and the other person would then edit it. There are many ways and means of group-devising. Each group usually works out its own method. The best formula for good and hassle-free group-devising is that a group should agree on what they are writing about. Sometimes this is the greatest hurdle.

EXERCISE 1 Repeat the story from the newspaper exercise, only this time have groups of 4 undertake the processes of group-devising a script based on the news event.

EXERCISE 2 In groups of 4 or 5. Give each group a story. The story should involve 4 or 5 characters (according to how big the group is). Each student should then write only the dialogue for 1 of the characters in the story. The script is then built by everyone.

"THE STONES"

YOUTH & THE LAW

ZEAL THEATRE has tackled numerous youth-and-the-law style issues and themes in their productions. "JOYRIDE" looked at the complex relationship between youth crime, homelessness, family breakdown and the links to joyriding, drug and alcohol abuse. It was also fixed in the 13 to 18 age group as its "target audience". "THE STONES" is about 2 boys, one aged 13, one aged 15, on trial for manslaughter for killing the driver of a car by throwing rocks off, a freeway overpass. It is not a strict recreation of, events, but rather an "example of a story" that shows where kids, cops and the legal system are at this present point in time... it's a modern fable.

legal questions from "The Stones"

QUESTION 1 Can a 13 year old boy be held responsible for his actions?
Is he too young for a conviction? What should his sentence be if found guilty?
What if the boy was 15? 17?
What should the penalty for manslaughter be for someone who is 18?

QUESTION 2 Are boys more reckless than girls? Why
Are kids getting more and more reckless?
Has there always been a recklessness in young people?

QUESTION 3 What is bail? (ANSWER: Money paid as security that a person accused will face trial, is allowed free until such times as their trial commences.)
Why are some people granted bail and some are not?
Why are the two boys in "THE STONES" granted bail?

QUESTION 4 What do you think of our juvenile justice system?
Is it working?
Should it be a State Government responsibility?
or should it be a local Council responsibility?
or should it be a Federal Government responsibility?

QUESTION 5 Do we have a strong Police Force in our State?
How can the the Police Force better their services?
What kind of Police Force would you set up?

QUESTION 6 Do we live in a free and equal society?
Should young people between the ages 13 and 15 have more input in the juvenile justice system?

QUESTION 7 Are people attracted to illegal activities and drugs because they are "illegal"?
Is "crime" addictive?
Is "danger" addictive?
Does jail, or the threat of jail, stop young people from committing crimes?
Does "punishment" work?

QUESTION 8 How often do young people endanger other people's lives?

BOYS ON DEATH CHARGE

Two boys charged over a rock throwing incident that killed a freeway motorist have been granted bail.

However, one boy was still in custody last night as his family sought to provide a \$5000 surety.

Both youths face up to 15 years in jail if convicted for manslaughter.

The teenagers, who cannot be identified, appeared in a Children's Court yesterday each charged with one count of manslaughter of Dr. Malcolm Goodall.

The boys, a 15 year old from Northcote and a 14 year old from Yarraville also face 7 charges of engaging in conduct endangering life relating to other alleged rock throwing incidents.

The older boy was accompanied in court by his grandmother, the other was with his mother and uncle.

Neither boy was required to enter a plea

yesterday. Homicide squad detectives charged the pair early yesterday after investigating the death of a motorist on the Eastern Freeway.

The two boys shuffled into court escorted by uniformed police officers. The 14 year old took a seat next to his uncle and his teary eyed mother. The 15 year old mate whose grandmother was in court sat at the end of the opposite front row.

The clean-cut baby-faced youngsters looked stunned when brought into the packed courtroom through a heavy door which leads to the holding cells. Dressed casually in windcheaters, trackpants, jeans and runners, the boys did not look at each other during their brief appearance.

Their lawyers said their clients wanted to be released on bail, and the police did not oppose it.

By ALLISON HARDING,
Magistrates Court Reporter
Herald Sun, June 1994

Boy, 11, found guilty of killing pensioner

By Sandra Barwick

A boy of 11 was found guilty yesterday of killing a pensioner by pushing a concrete block off an 11 storey block of flats. The boy, who can not be identified, chewed on a sweet and gazed around the courtroom as the verdict of manslaughter was announced, apparently unaware of what it meant. But his mother sobbed on a bench beside him in Leeds Crown Court after the unanimous decision of the jury of eight women and four men. Sentence was deferred to await reports.

The block, which weighed 19lb fell directly on Edna Condie, 74, who was waiting by the side entrance to her flats and smashed her skull killing her instantly. Another boy who had been on the roof last August 29, had told the court when the boy, then 10, had been told he had hit someone he had laughed as he ran away.

Det. Ch. Insp. Bob Browell of West Yorkshire Police who had led the investigation into the killing said the crime had many victims, including the boy himself. The first victim, of course, had been Mrs Condie, he said, her husband George, 76, and daughter Janice Smith, 43, who had been standing near her when she was hit, together with another female friend. "But the defendant himself and the two children who were with him were victims themselves" he said. He hoped they would be able to put the case behind them and look forward to a future.

Grahame Stowe, the solicitor for the boy, said he was unsure how much of the case was taken in by a child so young. Last summer, the court was told, children and teenagers in the area of the Grayson heights flats in Kirkstall, Leeds, had formed the habit of playing and sometimes throwing stones from the top of the block. The boy was one who had been up there before, gaining entrance by a door which had probably been kicked in. He was,

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though, according to a teacher who gave evidence, of average intelligence, very immature and anxious. Like many children who turn to dangerous acts, he did badly at school, he could barely read, he had emotional problems and could not concentrate on schoolwork.

Police officers who first interviewed him said he barely knew his date of birth. His achievements were so poor for a ten year old that, according to one teacher: "he could not attempt schoolwork for fear of failure". His frustration and anger took familiar forms, he had tried to make himself seem bigger and feel better by taunting other children. He was, according to others on the estate, mocked himself for his family background and for his backwardness. If he excelled in anything it was in being troublesome. On the whole his bullying was verbal, though he once smashed a bus window. So, when his friends, then aged 9 and 11, suggested they all go up on the roof for 'a lark' he readily agreed.

Once on the roof there was little restraint. One boy had thrown an orange at a car and hit its roof. The 10 year-old had thrown a stick, and then showing off to his friends, carried a lump of concrete over to the parapet. His friends leaned over the top. The 10 year old could not see who was below, and it was not clear from the friends' accounts whether they told him before he pushed or just after. One boy saw the old lady fall and heard screams. Then they all ran away.

Yesterday near the flats, a woman who found Mrs Condie dead said "There are still people doing it. A car battery was thrown out of the window one day. A few weeks ago someone threw a three-litre bottle at a friend of mine who was cleaning windows". "They do it for a laugh".