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ON STAGE
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O/P
Offstage

ONE CUE



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Genevieve Lemon, Josh McConville, Danielle King, Ash Ricardo, Marcus Graham, Tracy Mann and Alan Dukes, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

Compiled by Hannah Brown.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Hannah Brown is the Education Projects Officer for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on hbrown@sydneytheatre.com.au

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SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY AND QANTAS PRESENT

NOISES OFF

BY MICHAEL FRAYN

FREDERICK FELLOWES
ALAN DUKES

TIM ALLGOOD
LINDSAY FARRIS

LLOYD DALLAS
MARCUS GRAHAM

SELSDON MOWBRAY
RON HADDRIK

POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR
DANIELLE KING

DOTTY OTLEY
GENEVIEVE LEMON

BELINDA BLAIR
TRACY MANN

GARRY LEJEUNE
JOSH MCCONVILLE

BROOKE ASHTON
ASH RICARDO

DIRECTOR
JONATHAN BIGGINS

SET DESIGNER
MARK THOMPSON

COSTUME DESIGNER
JULIE LYNCH

LIGHTING DESIGNER
NIGEL LEVINGS

SOUND DESIGNER
KINGSLEY REEVE

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
HELEN DALLIMORE

FIGHT DIRECTOR
NIGEL POULTON
SCOTT WITT

VOICE & TEXT COACH
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

ASSISTANT VOICE & TEXT COACH
JESS CHAMBERS

PRODUCTION MANAGER
CHRIS MERCER

STAGE MANAGER
TANYA LEACH

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
TODD EICHORN

WIG, MAKE-UP & WARDROBE SUPERVISOR
LAUREN A. PROIETTI

HEAD MECHANIST
SHAYNE BURRELL

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER
GRANT SPARKES-CARROLL

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER
BRETT BOARDMAN

2 HOURS 20 MINS, INCLUDING INTERVAL

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT THE
DRAMA THEATRE, SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE,
ON 21 FEBRUARY 2014.

NOISES OFF WAS FIRST PRESENTED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH MICHAEL CODRON, AT THE LYRIC THEATRE HAMMERSMITH, ON 23 FEBRUARY 1982 AND ON 31 MARCH BY MICHAEL CODRON AT THE SAVOY THEATRE, LONDON. THE PLAY WAS REVIVED IN ITS PRESENT FORM BY THE ROYAL NATIONAL THEATRE, IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR THEATRE GROUP AND ACT PRODUCTIONS LTD. IT PREVIEWED IN THE LYTTELTON THEATRE ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2000 AND OPENED ON 5 OCTOBER. *NOISES OFF* WAS MOST RECENTLY REVIVED IN A PRODUCTION AT THE OLD VIC, LONDON WHICH PREMIERED ON 3 DECEMBER 2011.

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SYDNEY
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ABOUT ON CUE AND SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

On Cue

In 2014, STC Ed is developing a new suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season. Each show will be accompanied by an *On Cue* publication which will feature all the essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and learning experiences. For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA, DRAMATIC FORMS, STYLES, CONVENTIONS and TECHNIQUES, visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- podcasts
- worksheets / posters
- games / quizzes / surveys

About Sydney Theatre Company

Sydney Theatre Company was formed in December 1978, following the closure of The Old Tote Theatre Company the month before. The then Premier, the Hon. Neville Wran, approached Elizabeth Butcher, who had been seconded from NIDA to administer the Old Tote, and asked her to set up a new state theatre company, to perform in the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House. In June 1979, Richard Wherrett, then one of Nimrod Theatre's co-Artistic Directors, was appointed Artistic Director of STC to plan and organise activities for the 1980 season. The first STC-produced play was *The Sunny South*, 1 January 1980, by George Darrell, with music by Terence Clarke, directed by Richard Wherrett, assisted by John Gaden. After an extensive search, the derelict Walsh Bay Wharf 4/5 was chosen as STC's new home, immediately envisaging the capacity of the building to fulfil all requirements of space, location and additional venues.

Today STC is the largest theatre company in Australia. STC's vision, 'A place for ideas' is put into action every day as we perform in Sydney, around the country and around the world; as we partner with other organisations and other art form practitioners to explore the edges of theatre practice; and as we continue to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls - wherever people get together. We play a part in making a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.



Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll ©

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Years 8-12

SUBJECTS

Drama – Strong links to Comedy and Farce and the Dramatic Elements of Movement, Focus and Timing.

DRAMA STAGE 4 AND 5

Outcomes for Years 7-10

Outcome 4.3.1

A student identifies and describes elements of drama, dramatic forms, performance styles, techniques and conventions in drama.

Outcome 4.3.2

A student recognises the function of drama and theatre in reflecting social and cultural aspects of human experience.

Outcome 5.3.1

A student responds to, reflects on and evaluates elements so drama, dramatic forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques and theatrical conventions.

Outcome 5.3.2

A student analyses the contemporary and historical contexts of drama.

DRAMA STAGE 6

HSC Preliminary Course Outcomes

P3.1

Critically appraises and evaluates, both orally and in writing, personal performances and the performances of others.

P3.2

Understands the variety of influences that have impacted upon drama and theatre performance styles, structures and techniques.

P3.3

Analyses and synthesises research and experiences of dramatic and theatrical styles, traditions and movements.

HSC Course Outcomes

H3.2

Analyses, synthesises and organises knowledge, information and opinion in coherent, informed oral and written responses.

H3.3

Demonstrates understanding of actor-audience relationship in various dramatic and theatrical styles and movements.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Michael Frayn: A Dry Soul

*“Frayn’s satire, though acute, is of the gentlest sort: his characters, even the most minor and ludicrous, are not derided but affectionately ribbed, and their flaws only make them more loveable.” - Larrisa MacFarquhar, *The New Yorker**

In his book on philosophy, entitled *Constructions*, Michael Frayn quotes an abstruse line from the Ancient Greek Heraclitus: “A dry soul is best”. The same aphorism had struck a chord with D.H. Lawrence some decades earlier – Rupert Birkin drops it into conversation with Ursula in *Women in Love* – and it seems to reflect the pragmatic, moderate, diligent, cheerful British nature that Frayn emanates.

Frayn was born September 8, 1933, in the north-western London suburb of Mill Hill. His father, Tom, a commercial traveller and future asbestos salesman, had grown up in a working-class family that had moved to London from Devon; Frayn’s mother, Violet, had been a promising violinist before family misfortune

forced her out of her studies and into work as a shop assistant.

An adolescent flirtation with Communism led Frayn to learn Russian as part of his national service, though his language skills would eventually pay dividends in his translations of Chekhov rather than in international espionage. Similarly, his studying philosophy at Cambridge in the wake of Wittgenstein’s logocentric tenure gave him an ear attuned to language’s potential for comedy as much as philosophy.

He began his professional life as a reporter for *The Guardian* before becoming a columnist for *The Observer* in the 1960s. Having dabbled unsatisfactorily with writing a revue at Cambridge, Frayn had shown little more than contempt towards theatre until a friendship with playwright Peter Nichols and a professional relationship with producer Michael Codron reignited his interest. Still, it was not until 1977 that he wrote a full-length play – he was 44 years old.

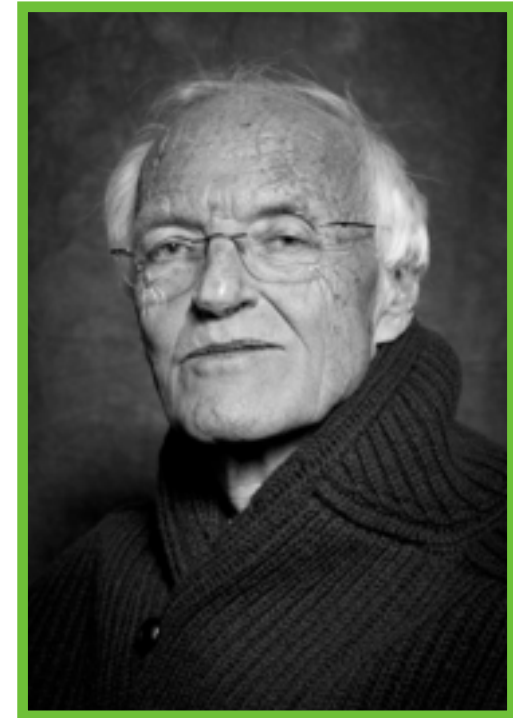


Image Jillian Edelstein ©

Sydney Theatre Company (2014). Noises Off, Program. Wharf 1 Theatre: Sydney.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Jonathan Biggins



When I was auditioning actors for *Noises Off*, I was surprised to find that most were desperately keen to be in the show – and not just in an “I need paid employment sooner rather than later” way. The play was a favourite; an endearing look at the craft of theatre making and a fabulous chance to get big laughs. One or two declined the opportunity, thinking Farce beneath them – a lucky escape for all of us, as they probably wouldn’t have struck the most helpful note in the rehearsal room. Comedy is often patronised as being superficial, but I beg to differ; to my mind, true

comedies offer us the greatest insight into the human condition in the most easily ingestible form. Laughter makes unpalatable truths readily acceptable.

But *Noises Off*? A play built around a third rate production of a creaky bedroom Farce with more double entendres than Molly Sugden doing the late show in Blackpool? Hardly deep and meaningful, surely. But of course, its collision of art and life is pure Pirandello, the inevitability of a curtain that never fully descends is straight out of Beckett and the structural complexity is late Stoppard. This is a play that teaches us that life is indeed no dress rehearsal; it’s a regional tour of a badly written script that no agent can get you out of. For all the laughter, there’s a point. I was pleased to discover that the playwright thinks the same way. In a series of essays on his work he wrote:

“The actors in *Noises Off* have fixed the world by learning roles and rehearsing their responses. The fear that haunts them is that the unlearned and the unrehearsed – the

great dark chaos behind the set, inside the heart and brain – will seep back onto the stage. The prepared words will vanish. The planned responses will be inappropriate. Their performance will break down, and they will be left in front of us naked and ashamed.”

He goes on to say that on one level the play confronts one of the great philosophical questions:

“The dilemma is this: the world plainly exists independently of us – and yet it equally plainly exists only through our consciousness of it. We are circumstantial specks, insignificant local anomalies, amidst the vast structured fabric of the objective universe. And yet that universe has vastness only in relation to ourselves and the things around us – has structure only in so far as we give it expression in our perception and language – has objective form only in so far as we conceive it from our single standpoint in time and space. We

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Jonathan Biggins

are everything and nothing. We are responsible for everything and responsible for nothing.”

It's a sentiment I can easily relate to. As someone who's played an 11am matinee in Casula, I understand existential bewilderment. And there's something in the essence of Farce itself that reflects human existence. Farce operates on the audience knowing things that the characters do not; we know the vicar is behind the door but the ingénue does not. We know why she's in her underwear and the husband's trousers have fallen down but his affronted wife does not. Therein lies the comic tension.

For much of life, we are an audience: observing, beginning to comprehend, making judgements on others based on the evidence we're presented with, being diverted, entertained or moved. Equally, we are often the unwitting characters, ignorant of others' motives and actions and the role we're playing in some greater story. We don't know who's

behind the door or who's about to make an entrance from the service quarters – we're part of a narrative over which we have little or no control. Mercifully, for all of us, the curtain comes down with a thud at some point. The existential sticking-point for the actors in *Nothing On* is that the curtain refuses to fly in and they are doomed to repeat their tawdry pantomime for all time. Hilarious, no? And I hope we're able to communicate these philosophical conundrums to you tonight (or this afternoon if you're an OAP who likes to get home before it gets dark) with looks and gestures – that's what acting's all about, to quote Lloyd Dallas in Act One.

(For further insights into the essential pointlessness of human existence and man's place in a godless universe, I would suggest a thorough review of *Man About the House*, *George and Mildred* and the entire series of *Carry On* movies, with especial attention to *Carry On Up the Khyber*.)

Quotations from Michael Frayn's Stage Directions: Writing on Theatre 1970 – 2008, Faber & Faber, 2009.



Sydney Theatre Company (2014). Noises Off, Program. Wharf 1 Theatre: Sydney.

SYNOPSIS

English comedy has trodden a fine line between the incisively witty and the earthily broad. Of course the greatest do both, at the same time, and with extra sardines. Enter *Noises Off*. Michael Frayn's comic masterpiece reveals the goings-on as a Z-list touring theatre company attempts to mount the somewhat dire bedroom farce, *Nothing On*. Will two separate love triangles, a dipsomaniac and lost contact lenses prevent the show from going on?



Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll ©

Synopsis (cont.)

ACT ONE

Noises Off is a play-within-a-play. The audience watches the rehearsal for a British bedroom farce called *Nothing On* that is opening the next night at the Grand Theatre in Weston-Super-Mare, England. It is the final dress rehearsal of *Nothing On* and the play is a shambles, much to the dismay of director Lloyd Dallas who halts the performance every few lines to correct blocking, locate missing actors or to give acting notes. Dotty, who plays Mrs Clackett, can't remember her blocking: should she put the phone down or leave the plate of sardines or take out the newspaper? Brooke, who plays the character Vicki, doesn't seem to know what the play is about. On top of this the actors themselves are distracted with a host of personal problems ranging from divorce, love affairs, alcoholism, missing contact lenses and nose bleeds. Ultimately Lloyd tells the actors that getting the show right, comes down to doors and sardines!



Ash Ricardo, Tracy Mann, Josh McConville and Alan Dukes, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

Synopsis (cont.)

ACT TWO

In this act the set has turned 180 degrees and the audience is now viewing the backstage area. Act Two is performed as a dumb show and is largely choreographic. The on-stage dialogue can be heard, however the focus is on the actors backstage, whose relationships have deteriorated along with the performance. The company has been on tour for a month and cracks in the social fabric are starting to appear. Garry and Dotty, who had previously been in a relationship, are fighting after Garry sees Dotty flirting with the clueless Freddy. Garry and Dotty both initially refuse to perform, while the stage manager, Poppy, tries to keep everyone happy. The chaos of the action that follows is pre-empted by the repeated front-of-house calls that have left the audience incredibly confused. Lloyd appears backstage after returning from *Richard III* rehearsals in Wales to offer comfort to his lover Brooke, while trying to avoid Poppy, with whom he has been having an affair. Lloyd brings with him a bottle of spirits

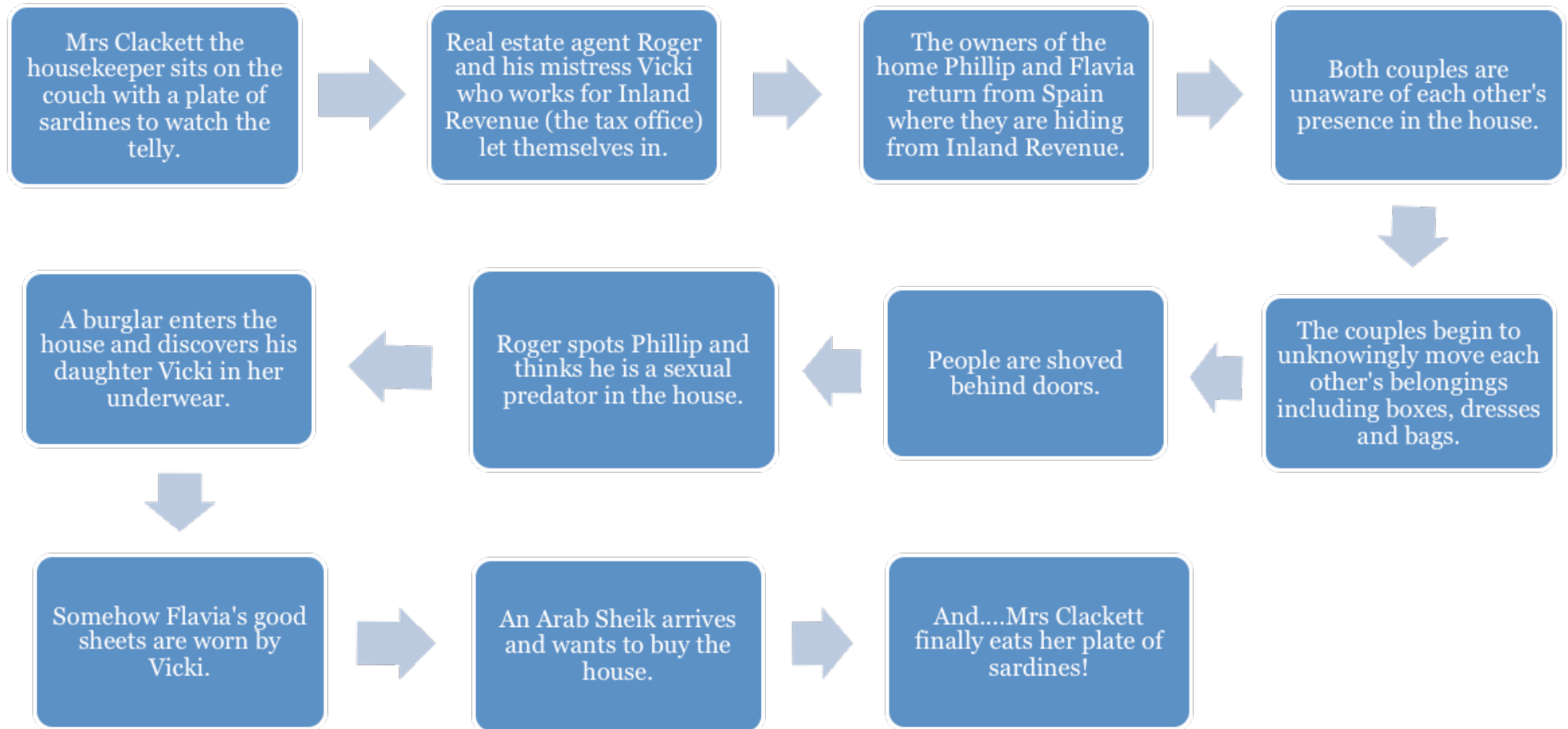
for Brooke, which is passed around and around the stage in a bid for it to avoid Selsdon's lips. Lloyd asks Tim, the stage manager, to buy some flowers for Brooke and to make sure that Poppy does not see them. Throughout the Act, Tim is forced to buy numerous bouquets of flowers as each bunch ends up in the arms of the leading ladies other than Brooke. Selsdon is desperate to get his hands on the alcohol and the tension between Dotty, Garry and Freddy is rising. The entire company is in a state of agitated disorder backstage which seeps into their performance on-stage and results in missed cues, muddled lines and general hilarity. The Act closes when Poppy announces to Lloyd that she is having his baby.

ACT THREE

A month has passed and the tour is reaching an end. The audience is at the front of the stage again, watching the performance of *Nothing On*. The show has deteriorated as the actors' personal problems have affected the performance. Dotty is extremely irritated by her off-stage relationship problems that have now progressed to involve Belinda too. The show is now only a vague impression of *Nothing On* as the actors make physical and verbal cracks at each other on stage, not to mention the phone in the garden and people behind all the wrong doors. The entire play is in a state of confusion - Tim, Lloyd and Selsdon all end up on stage as the burglar saying the lines at once. They skip, improvise, bluff, stumble and fast-forward to the last line delivered by Selsdon: "When all around is strife and uncertainty there's nothing like a good old-fashioned plate of...curtain!"

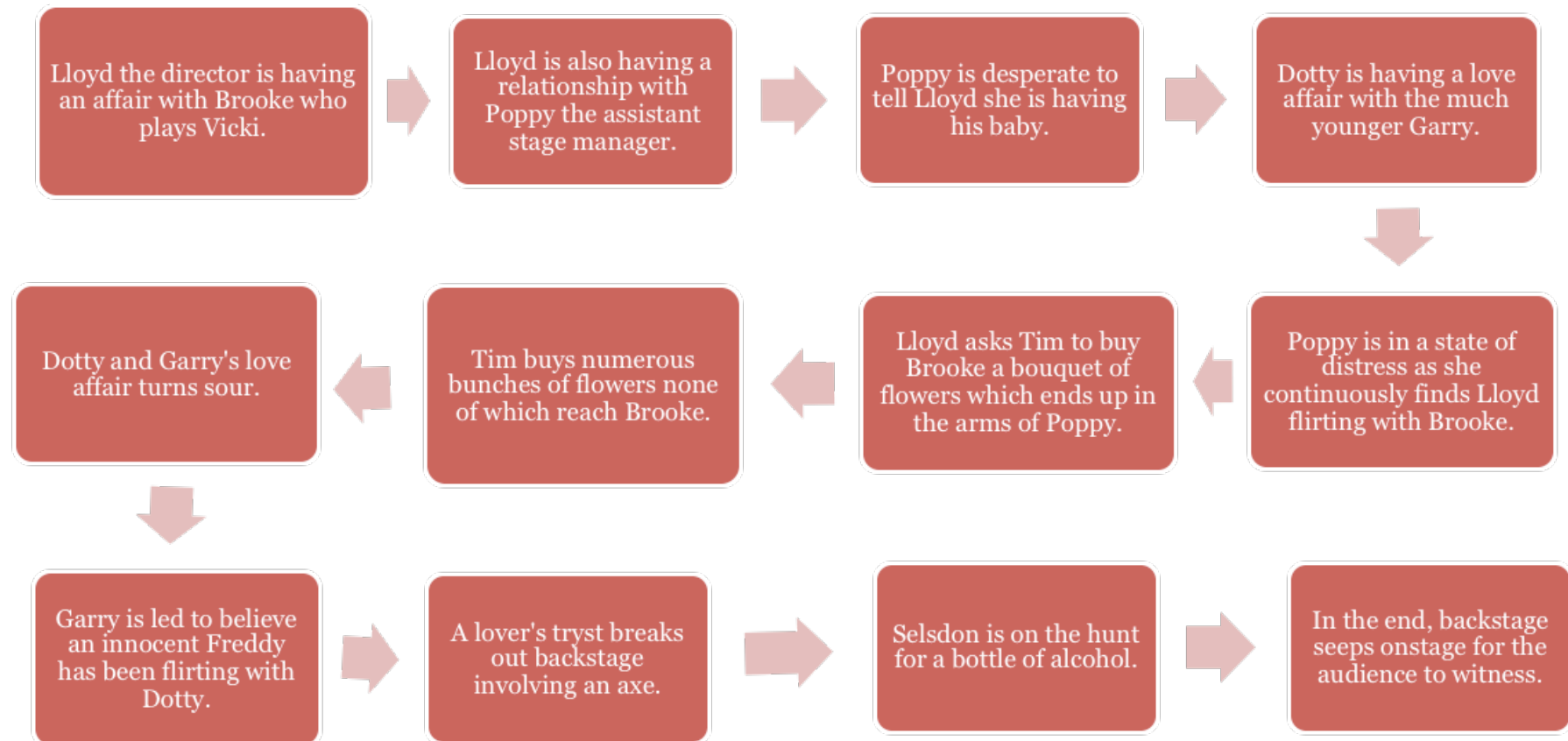
Synopsis (cont.)

Nothing On (On Stage)



Synopsis (cont.)

Noises Off (Off Stage)



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Biographies from the program of *Nothing On*

LLOYD DALLAS (DIRECTOR)

Lloyd has 'read English at Cambridge, and stagecraft at the local benefits office'. He has directed plays in most parts of Britain, winning the South of Scotland Critics' Circle Special Award. In recent years he has probably become best known for his brilliant series of *Shakespeare in Summer* productions in the parks of the inner London boroughs.



Genevieve Lemon, Marcus Graham and Tracy Mann, in rehearsals for *Noises Off*, 2014. Image_Grant Sparkes-Carroll ©

Character Analysis (cont.)



Genevieve Lemon, in rehearsals for *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll ©

DOTTY OTLEY (MRS CLACKETT)

Dotty makes a welcome return to the stage to create the role of Mrs Clackett after playing Mrs Hackett, Britain's most famous lollipop lady ('Ooh, I can't 'ardly 'old me lolly up!') in over 320 episodes of TV's *On The Zebras*. Her many stage appearances include her critically acclaimed portrayal of Fru Säckett, the comic character in Strindberg's *Scenes From The Charnelhouse*. Her first appearance ever? In a school production of *Henry IV Part I* – as the old bag-lady, Mrs Duckett.



Tracy Mann, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

BELINDA BLAIR (FLAVIA BRENT)

Belinda has been on the stage since the age of four, when she made her debut in *Sinbad The Sailor* as one of Miss Toni Tanner's *Ten Tapping Tots*. She subsequently danced her way round this country, Southern Africa, and the Far East in shows like *Zippedydooda!* and *Here Come Les Girls!* More recently she has been seen in such comedy hits as *Don't Mr Duddle!*, *Who's Been Sleeping In My Bed?*, and *Twice Two Is Sex*. She is married to scriptwriter Terry Wough, who has contributed lead-in material to most of TV's chat shows. They have two sons and three retrievers.



Danielle King and Ron Haddrick, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

Character Analysis (cont.)



Josh McConville, in rehearsals for *Noises Off*, 2014.
Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll ©



Ron Haddrick, in rehearsals for *Noises Off*, 2014.
Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll ©



Ash Ricardo, in rehearsals for *Noises Off*, 2014.
Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll ©

GARRY LEJEUNE (ROGER TRAMPLEMAIN)

While still at drama school, Garry won the coveted Laetitia Daintyman Medal for Violence. His television work includes *Police!*, *Crime Squad*, *SWAT*, *Forensic*, and *The Nick*. But he is probably best-known as Cornetto, the ice-cream salesman who stirs the hearts of all the lollipop ladies in *On The Zebras*.

SELSDON MOWBRAY (BURGLAR)

Selsdon first 'trod the boards' at the age of 12 – playing Lucius in a touring production of *Julius Caesar*, with his father, the great Chelmsford Mowbray, in the lead. Since then he has served in various local reps, and claims to have appeared with every company to have toured Shakespeare in the past half-century, working his way up through the Mustardseeds and the various Boys and Sons of, to the Balthazars, Benvolios, and Le Beaus; then the Slenders, Lennoxes, Trinculos, Snouts, and Froths; and graduating to the Scroops, Poloniuses, and Aguecheeks.

BROOKE ASHTON (VICKI)

Brooke is probably best known as the girl wearing nothing but 'good, honest, natural froth' in the Hauptbahnhofbrau lager commercial. Her television appearances range from Girl at Infants' School in *On The Zebras* to Girl in Massage Parlour in *On Probation*. Cinema goers saw her in *The Girl in Room 14*, where she played the *Girl in Room 312*.

Character Analysis (cont.)



Alan Dukes, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. [Image Brett Boardman](#). ©



Lindsay Farris, in rehearsals for *Noises Off*, 2014. [Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll](#) ©



Danielle King, in rehearsals for *Noises Off*, 2014. [Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll](#) ©

FREDERICK FELLOWES (PHILIP BRENT)

Freddy has appeared in many popular television series, including *Calling Casualty*, *Cardiac Arrest!*, *Out-Patients* and *In-Patients*. On stage he was most recently seen in the controversial all-male version of *The Trojan Women*. He is happily married, and lives near Crawley, where his wife breeds pedigree dogs. 'If she ever leaves me,' he says, 'it will probably be for an Irish wolf-hound!'

TIM ALLGOOD (STAGE MANAGER)

POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR (ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER)

STYLE AND CONVENTIONS

COMEDY

The STYLE of *Noises Off* is FARCICAL COMEDY. COMEDY exposes human folly and celebrates human survival (which in the case of *Noises Off* is the actors and the play surviving the tour!)



Josh McConville and Genevieve Lemon, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

Conventions of Comedy

- Language Comedy
- Physical Comedy
- Miscommunication
- Signposting/ Signalling
- Mistaken Identity
- Building of Dramatic Tension thereby heightening the Comedy

Style and Conventions (cont.)



Ash Ricardo and Josh McConville, in rehearsals for *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Grant Sparkes-Carroll ©

STYLE - FARCE

FARCE is a type of COMEDY. FARCE is defined by an improbable, outlandish plot that would not normally happen in real life. The DRAMATIC TENSION in FARCE builds and builds as the plot becomes more out of control. To illustrate FARCE, consider the idea of a speeding vintage car that crosses the train tracks just before the train steams by. This type of classic FARCE has its roots in the silent films of Buster Keaton with their outlandish plots that defy the realms of reality.

STRUCTURE OF A FARCE

In theatre, FARCE is created through out-of-control characters and a plot intricately constructed by the playwright. FARCE aims to entertain an audience through highly exaggerated situations. A FARCE usually has an elaborate plot, as there are lots of twists, a number of different sub-plots and random events along the way. This is most definitely the case for *Noises Off* that is a play-within-a-play, with two sets of characters. RELATIONSHIPS

in a FARCE are usually complex. This is even more so in *Noises Off* as each actor plays an actor and a character. On top of this there are plot twists that build the DRAMATIC TENSION and ultimately heighten the COMEDY.

Noises Off is a play-within-a-play, and a farce within a farce, which features actors, playing actors, playing characters.

Noises Off presents the world of the theatre, rehearsals, actors and directors for audience members to identify with and laugh at. Michael Frayn has said that he was inspired to write *Noises Off* while seeing a particularly bad production of an early FARCE of his own during which he began to speculate that what was going on behind the scenes was certainly more interesting than what the audience was seeing.

Style and Conventions (cont.)



THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA



Lindsay Farris and Marcus Graham, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

These 'Take Your Cue' scaffolding questions help students analyse the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA featured in *Noises Off*.

The Elements of Drama (cont.)

ROLE, RELATIONSHIP AND SITUATION STATUS

In FARCE, ROLES, RELATIONSHIPS and SITUATION contribute to the plot and the creation of COMEDY. Without the different ROLES, their RELATIONSHIPS and SITUATION, there would be no *Noises Off*! Frayn has included many stereotypical characters that could be found in the world of theatre in his play:

- the ditzy blonde
- the frazzled assistant stage manager
- the playboy director
- the diva stage matriarch
- the old drunk
- the exhausted stage manager

TAKE YOUR CUE - ROLE, RELATIONSHIP AND SITUATION:

- Using each character stereotype, map out how their RELATIONSHIPS and SITUATION in *Noises Off* contribute to the plot and ultimately the COMEDY.

FARCE and other comedies typically involve a loss of STATUS by the characters which in turn creates COMEDY. This is achieved in *Noises Off* by actors who the audience expect to seriously and eloquently portray truths about life and the world, who instead are reduced to complete helplessness and embarrassment. This occurs as a result of the actors not knowing their lines, and the lack of a supportive, organised and functional cast and crew – all the basic facets of theatre. When all this is taken away, chaos ensues.

STATUS is also found in COMEDY through the master/servant relationship. In *Noises Off*, Lloyd is the master, while the cast of *Nothing On* are the servants. Masters in comedies often lose their STATUS to their servants who 'get the better of them.' By the end of *Noises Off* Lloyd, as the master, wants to relinquish the STATUS that the cast continue to give him. Since going on tour the show has

descended so far into chaos that Lloyd now considers it to be beyond his help: "Listen, I think this show is beyond the help of a director. You just do it. I'll sit out there in the dark with a bag of toffees and enjoy it." (Frayn, 1982, p. 84) Despite Lloyd's attempt to lower his own STATUS, the cast continue to rely on him for instruction. Amid the chaos of the final act, Belinda still looks to him for leadership, pleading: "He's that nice man who comes in and tells us *what to do!*" (Frayn, 1982, p. 162).

TAKE YOUR CUE - STATUS

- What points in the play contribute to the cast as a whole losing their status as admired and professional actors?

The Elements of Drama (cont.)

DRAMATIC TENSION

All four TENSIONS (TASK, RELATIONSHIP, MYSTERY and SURPRISE) are operating within both *Noises Off* and *Nothing On*. As *Noises Off* progresses and the plot becomes more and more outlandish, the DRAMATIC TENSION builds. STATUS also effects the DRAMATIC TENSION. As characters lose their individual STATUS through forgetting lines, missing cues, hurting themselves or arguing with each other, TENSION OF RELATIONSHIPS is created. The TENSION OF TASK to have the rehearsal of *Nothing On* finished is also present in Act One. In Acts Two and Three, the TASK becomes trying to get through the play.

TAKE YOUR CUE - TENSION

- Deconstruct how the TENSION OF TASK and TENSION OF RELATIONSHIPS build in the play. Are they resolved? If so, how?
- At which points in the play does the TENSION OF SURPRISE occur?
- What is the flow on effect of the TENSION OF SURPRISE for the rest of the plot?

RHYTHM/COMIC TIMING

RHYTHM is the manipulation of timing through pace and tempo. The RHYTHM in *Noises Off* helps build the TENSION. As the TENSION builds and more and more outlandish situations start to occur the RHYTHM of the play intensifies, creating a heightened comedic ATMOSPHERE.

RHYTHM can also be interpreted as COMIC TIMING in the play. COMIC TIMING uses RHYTHM, pace and pausing to create COMEDY.

TAKE YOUR CUE - RHYTHM/COMIC TIMING

- What are three moments of exceptional COMIC TIMING in *Noises Off*?

The Elements of Drama (cont.)

ATMOSPHERE AND MOOD

The ATMOSPHERE and MOOD of *Noises Off* are chaos and hilarity. As the TENSION builds, the ATMOSPHERE intensifies along with the RHYTHM of the play. It is almost as if the speed has been turned up on the play as it hurtles towards the finish line.

TAKE YOUR CUE - ATMOSPHERE AND MOOD

- When the audience is positioned backstage in Act Two, what ATMOSPHERE is created when Dotty and Garry are having their lovers tiff?
- What CONVENTIONS OF COMEDY assist in the creation of this ATMOSPHERE? How do the set and props also assist in creating this ATMOSPHERE?
- What ATMOSPHERE is created in Act One when Seldson can't be found?
- How is this ATMOSPHERE created through the VOICE and MOVEMENT of the actors?

LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE is a main contributor to COMEDY in *Noises Off* (except in Act Two, which is mainly a dumb show, where MOVEMENT is a dominant element). The script written by Michael Frayn incorporates LANGUAGE COMEDY CONVENTIONS such as mondegreens (where words are swapped with similar sounding words), sarcasm and slips of the tongue.

TAKE YOUR CUE - LANGUAGE

- Give an example of where the different types of LANGUAGE COMEDY are used in *Noises Off*.

The Elements of Drama (cont.)

MOVEMENT


MOVEMENT brings PHYSICAL COMEDY to *Noises Off*. Throughout the play slapstick (trips, slaps, falls, kicks) are featured. On top of this, short, fast-paced physical sketches (also known as lazzi in COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE) involving props such as the flowers, the alcohol bottle and the axe also create PHYSICAL COMEDY. The archetypal characters all have physical mannerisms, gestures and walks that visually portray their personalities, that also create COMEDY.

TAKE YOUR CUE - MOVEMENT

- Describe the different mannerisms, gestures and walks of the characters that physically echo their personalities.

SYMBOL

Noises Off is a theatre term that refers to the sound effects coming from off stage. It is also used to describe a disruption that comes from backstage that can be heard by the audience.



Check out the worksheet about the Theatrical Conventions of Comedy on our website!

TAKE YOUR CUE - SYMBOL

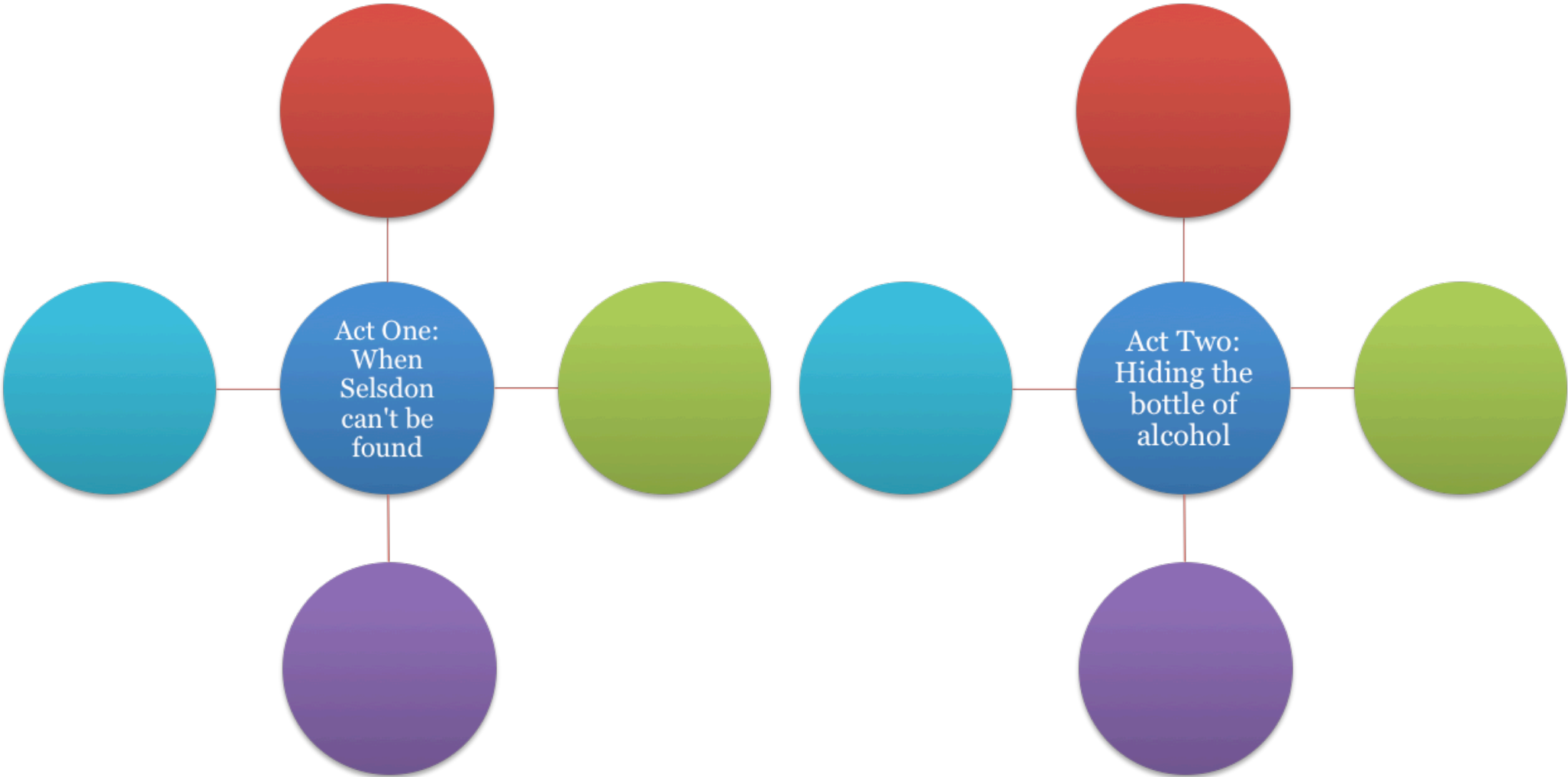
- Why is the title *Noises Off* a suitable choice for this play?
- Read the character analysis. How are these descriptions SYMBOLIC of the characters?

CREATING A COMEDIC MOMENT

When deconstructing *Noises Off*, it is important to realise that in any given comic MOMENT the THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS and ELEMENTS OF DRAMA are all operating together to create COMEDY and DRAMATIC MEANING for the audience. The elements never work alone! Take a look at the diagram that shows how the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA and THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS work together to create comedic MOMENTS in *Noises Off*.



Deconstruct how different comedic moments were created by filling in the below diagrams!



LEARNING EXPERIENCES

OUTCOMES OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Noises Off is a FARCICAL COMEDY. The purpose of these learning experiences is for students to explore how MOMENTS of COMEDY can be created. This is investigated through experimenting with 'lazzi' originally derived from COMEDIA DELL'ARTE. Students can investigate how the building of TENSION in a scene simultaneously builds COMEDY.



Genevieve Lemon, Josh McConville and Ash Ricardo, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

Learning Experiences (cont.)

ONE: Analysing how Comedy is manipulated through the set.

PRACTICE LINK: Appreciating

TAKE YOUR CUE: WRITE A PARAGRAPH

The set plays a large role in creating Comedy throughout *Noises Off*.

Read the interview with designer, Mark Thompson, on the following page and then answer one of the questions below in paragraph form. Include the following in your analysis: SPACE, LEVELS, DOORS, SIGNPOSTING/SIGNALLING, MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

Write a paragraph analysing how the set, designed by Mark Thompson, works together with the THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS to create COMEDY in *Nothing On* when Roger and Vicki think there are spirits in the house.

OR

Write a paragraph analysing how the set, designed by Mark Thompson, works together with the THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS to create COMEDY in Act Two when Garry and Dotty are fighting back stage and taking revenge on Freddy.



Tracy Mann and Ron Haddrick, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

INTERVIEW WITH MARK THOMPSON

Set Designer

Have you seen a production of *Noises Off* before? Does recalling other sets you've seen for a production help or hinder you?

I've never seen a previous production, but recalling other visuals related to the period and trawling through countless old back issues of *English House and Garden* and *Tatler* magazines from the 70s were a huge help.

With *Noises Off* taking place in the 70s around the rehearsals of a fictional show called *Nothing On*, your design is both a period piece and a set of a set. Can you describe some of the joys and challenges of making this happen?

The "show" set for *Nothing On* was always intended to be a pastiche of a badly manufactured, slightly cartoonish, shopping mall set with a "real" backstage set behind it. The show set needed to satisfy the specific demands called for in the script: many, many doors to very specific off-set locations and at

the same time suggest a heightened set of visuals to background the performers.

Were there particular 70s influences that you drew on for this design?

As someone who went to art school in the 60s and 70s, it was a bad trip down memory lane!

Farce tends to need doors. In your professional opinion, which doors tend to be funniest?

Farce ALWAYS seems to involve doors, this is especially so in this production. I've always had a predilection for double-action swing doors, but these have been deliberately excluded from our show. Too easy!

Apart from designing sets, you're also a successful painter and ceramicist. How do these disciplines cross over into your design practice, or are they quite discrete?

As with any creative endeavour, everything tends to cross-fertilise and inform all activities. All activities require thorough research and an accumulation of experience and information. One can never know enough, there is always more to discover.

How does the set design exaggerate the comedic style of the show?

This set was always intended to be a mere backdrop behind the actors whilst providing just enough visual information to place the cast firmly in their performance world. The very strict requirements found in the text demanded that there be no extra embellishment and that every textural nuance be slightly heightened. This show is famous for cast accidents and very strict attention has been paid to ensure that the cast can repeatedly appear to be in physical danger and be secure that we have attempted to reduce possibility of actual harm. But then...!

Sydney Theatre Company (2014). Noises Off, Program. Wharf 1 Theatre: Sydney.

Learning Experiences (cont.)

TWO: Lazzi (plural) or Lazzo (singular)

PRACTICE LINK: Creating then Performing

Lazzi originated in the improvised performances of COMEDIA DELL'ARTE from 16th century Italy. Lazzi are comic MOMENTS that use PHYSICAL, VISUAL or VERBAL COMEDY through extending a situation or comic MOMENT to the extreme. Quite often lazzi involve the use of an object.

Extending a MOMENT is to develop it further by elaborating, decorating and filling out the information. Advancing a MOMENT moves the story and the action forward.

TAKE YOUR CUE: WATCH AND DISCUSS

In *Noises Off*, there are several lazzi, particularly in Act Two, backstage with the flowers, the alcohol bottle, the axe and the sardines.

Watch the following clips from Mr Bean as examples of lazzi.

Mr Bean at the beach where he tries to get changed into his swimmers without taking his pants off. The object used in this lazzo is his swimmers.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWCSQm86UB4>

Mr Bean in church trying to eat a lolly without making too much noise and disturbing the congregation. The object used in this lazzo is a lolly.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZMgP2ai79Q>

As a class, discuss moments in *Noises Off* that could be considered a lazzo.

Learning Experiences (cont.)



Danielle King and Marcus Graham, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

A lazzo extends a small moment within a plot to create COMEDY. Lazzi are almost like 'pauses' in plays where the audience watches a comedic MOMENT before the dramatic action continues and the plot can move forward.

TAKE YOUR CUE: YES AND...PRACTISING VERBALLY

The focus of this whole class activity is to verbally extend the dialogue to create a lazzo.

1. Divide the class into pairs. Within each pair nominate a Person A and a Person B. Person A is a patient and Person B is a doctor.
2. Person A starts telling Person B about how they came to have a goldfish in their stomach. At any point Person B can say "Yes, and..." and Person A needs to give more detail about what they are talking about. By doing this, Person A is forced to extend the story they are telling.
3. Continue this activity for two to three minutes.
4. Show some of the scenarios to the class.
5. Swap roles.
6. This time the scene takes place in a family home. Person A is a husband and Person B is a wife. Person A is explaining to his wife-Person B, how he came to bring a puppy home from the park instead of their baby. At any point Person B can say "Yes, and..." and Person B needs to provide more detail about the situation.
7. Show some of the scenarios to the class.

Learning Experiences (cont.)

TAKE YOUR CUE: YES AND...PRACTISING EXTENDING PHYSICALLY

The focus of this whole class activity is on physically extending the action to create a lazzo.

1. Divide the class into pairs. This lazzo is entitled “The biscuit lazzo.” The scenario takes place at a job interview for the role of manager of the bird enclosure at the zoo.
2. Person A is the interviewer and Person B is the interviewee.
3. The interview begins with the interviewer offering the interviewee a cup of tea and a biscuit, only Person B can't stand orange cream biscuits and tries every way possible to get rid of it. Try four different ways before finally succeeding.
4. Continue this activity for two to three minutes, and then swap roles.
5. This time the scenario takes place at a school dance. It is entitled “The torn pants lazzo.” The lazzo is between a teenage boy and a teenage girl.
6. Person A is a boy and Person B is a girl. They begin dancing. The boy bends over only for his pants to tear. The remainder of the lazzo is spent trying to prevent the girl noticing, while also showing an interest in her!



Ash Ricardo, Josh McConville, Marcus Graham and Alan Dukes, in STC's *Noises Off*, 2014. Image Brett Boardman. ©

Learning Experiences (cont.)

THREE: BUILDING THE TENSION

PRACTICE LINK: Creating and Performing

TENSION in FARCE builds and builds and builds as the SITUATION becomes more and more out of control. In *Noises Off* the TENSION is the TENSION OF TASK to perform the play, *Nothing On*. Performing this play becomes more and more difficult (and hilarious) as the SITUATION backstage becomes out-of-control. The backstage antics are mostly driven by the TENSION OF RELATIONSHIPS.

TAKE YOUR CUE: WHOLE CLASS STORYBOARD

Choose one of the following titles for the story.

“The funeral that turned into a wedding.”

“The worst meal in the best restaurant.”

“The meeting, the principal and the naughty student.”

On a whiteboard, the class can brainstorm the five characters as well as a starting point for the scene, followed by four main turning points that lead to the end of the scene, each one more bizarre than the next in order to build the TENSION.

TAKE YOUR CUE: PRACTISE AND PERFORM

Once the story has been scaffolded, students in groups of five are to create the scene. Give the groups 15 minutes to practise, before performing in front of the class.

After the scenarios have been performed, take some time with the students to analyse in a class discussion what ELEMENTS OF DRAMA or THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS of COMEDY helped in building the TENSION and creating the FARCE.

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OTHER STC RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

- *Classroom poster or handout* - outlines how the story-within-a-story convention has been used throughout theatrical history.
- *Worksheet* - investigates how the Conventions of Comedy have been used in *Noises Off*.