



Things I know to be True.

by
Andrew
Bovell

A Comprehensive Guide for
students (aged 14+), teachers &
arts educationalists

Written by Scott Graham
with contributions from the creative team
Compiled by Frantic Assembly

**FRANTIC
ASSEMBLY**

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How to read this pack

This resource pack has been designed to be interactive using **Adobe Acrobat Reader** and has a number of features built in to enhance your reading experience.

Navigation

You can navigate around the document in a number of ways

- 1 By clicking on the chapter menu bar at the top of each page
- 2 By clicking any entry on the contents and chapter opening pages
- 3 By clicking the arrows at the bottom of each page
- 4 By turning on Page Thumbnails in Acrobat

Hyperlinks

For further information, there are a number of hyperlinks which take you to external resources and are indicated by blue and underlined text or **YouTube**.

Please note: You will need an internet connection to us this facility

Video and Sound

There is a video and a soundclip embedded in the pack. You will need to click on the main image for the sound or video to play. You do not need an internet connection to use these facilities.

When to read this pack

This pack is designed to be read **AFTER** you have seen the show. It contains some **SPOILERS** that would be a great shame to divulge before seeing the production.



*Ewan Stewart (Bob), Natalie Casey (Pip), Richard Mylan (Ben), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie).
Photo Manuel Harlan*

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A photograph of a stage performance. Six actors are standing on a stage, each looking down at a mobile phone. The stage is dimly lit with several bright blue spotlights shining down from above. The background is dark with some floral arrangements. The overall mood is somber and focused on the characters' interaction with technology.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Things I Know To Be True resource pack

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*Imogen Stubbs (Fran), Matthew Barker (Mark),
Ewan Stewart (Bob), Richard Mylan (Ben),
Kirsty Oswald (Rosie), Natalie Casey (Pip). Photo Manuel Harlan.*

Welcome to the *Things I Know To Be True* resource pack

I hope this pack offers access and insight into the creative process of myself and my collaborators. As ever with these packs my intention is to take you into the heart of this creative process and attempt to demystify it. It is important to know that inspiration comes from a throw away remark, a joke, a film, a song as much as it comes from endless chin scratching.

I want to thank my collaborators, Geordie Brookman, Andrew Bovell and Geoff Cobham for their generous input. I also want to thank the tireless Frantic team who have led on the creation of this pack, especially Fiona Darling. It is so exciting and reassuring to know that I have a team that shares my belief in the importance of these resources and their genuine connection to what happens in the rehearsal room.

I hope you find this resource illuminating.

Scott Graham



COLLABORATION

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Scott Graham, Jonnie Riordan, Ewan Stewart (Bob), Matthew Barker (Mark), Natalie Casey (Pip), Richard Mylan (Ben), Imogen Stubbs (Fran) in rehearsals. Photo Helen Maybanks

Co-directors: How does that work?

I have a lot of experience of collaborating with a co-director and I know it works best when you can both bring something different to the table. I had directed *The Believers* on my own and had loved the level of collaboration it afforded with the rest of the creative team. My reworking of *Othello* was a similar experience. So when Geordie called about co-directing with him I had to ask myself some questions. As I set out making work as sole director of Frantic Assembly do I want to be back co-directing? What makes this an interesting project?

One of the first things Geordie mentioned was the desire from Andrew to have his process challenged by this experience. Geordie and I recognised that this was exactly the reason why we should be doing this. Not to provide Andrew with that challenge by simply bringing our bag of tricks but to enter into that **challenge ourselves and learn from each other**.

I don't believe being good co-directors is about the ability to finish each other's sandwiches, sorry, sentences. Yes, it is great when you are on the same page **but the spark of inspiration is when one of you sees something that the other does not**. For that to happen you have to give each other space.

At the beginning of rehearsals Geordie promised the cast that there will be moments when both he and I contradict each other. This is not a sign that our parent's marriage is on the rocks. If this happens the actors should flag it up and we will talk about it. These moments are important because it will be an opportunity for one or both of us to learn something from the other about this play that we had not thought of.

And that is why we came to this collaboration in the first place.

Scott Graham



Geordie Brookman and Scott Graham. Photo Helen Maybanks

The main element of co-directing is about proactively making space for each other. The hardest bit was having to write the directors note, neither of us enjoy that normally so we both kept trying to get each other to do it. Co-directing *Things I Know To Be True* has been an absolute pleasure.

In terms of planning and leading rehearsals, we're both quite methodical. It is literally a case of starting at the start and working our way through to the end and then going back and doing it again until we find the level of detail we are after. Sounds boring but that's rehearsals for you. We generally split the days in half between strength training and physical work in the morning and then scene / text work in the afternoon. **We generally interchange fairly smoothly in terms of who leads what**. At a certain point we're usually able to work two sections at once. Scott might be refining a physical sequence while I do detail work on a section of text. It's a good combination.

Geordie Brookman

Interviews with collaborators

Andrew Bovell is the writer of *Things I Know To Be True*



BIOGRAPHY

Andrew Bovell is a critically acclaimed Australian playwright and screenwriter.

His recent theatre credits include *The Secret River*, (Sydney Theatre Company, 2013 Sydney Festival and 2016 national tour) winner of six Helpmann Awards including Best Play, as well as Best New Work Sydney Theatre Awards, *When the Rain Stops Falling* (Brink Production/State Theatre Company, 2008 Adelaide Festival), Almeida Theatre, Lincoln Centre NYC, winner of five Lucille Lortell Awards. Earlier works include *Speaking in Tongues* and *Holy Day*.

Film credits include *Strictly Ballroom*, *A Most Wanted Man*, *Edge of Darkness*, *Blessed*, *Lantana*, and *Head On*.

Q Did you have any expectations or apprehensions about this collaboration?

A Of course. I was worried about how Frantic's movement language would sit with the play's realistic language and setting. I soon lost this fear as I watched Scott bring movement to the work. It felt entirely natural and theatrical. **We all agreed that I shouldn't write to the movement**, but the idea of a series of monologues or arias or eulogies for each character at the beginning of each season arose out of me understanding that monologues would lend themselves to a more physical or abstract or movement based realization than the more dialogue driven scenes.

Q This story is about a family. You have previously described the idea of family as being something that you want to escape from and escape back to at the same time, can you explain what you mean by this?

A This is perhaps based on my own experience. I felt like I escaped the enormity of the familial love that I grew up with. It was wonderful but it was overpowering and came with certain obligations and responsibilities. I needed to move away, to a different city, to become the person I needed to be. And yet **I have spent my life yearning for the thing I ran away from**, and indeed in marrying and in having children I went about creating a very similar family structure to the one I escaped... loving, overwhelming, emotionally fraught but also perhaps a little claustrophobic and so now I have watched my children run away to become the people they need to be. This is how it is. This is the cycle of life. And so sometimes I feel like Bob, being left in the garden thinking where has everybody gone. And sometimes I feel like Fran and think, right, what next? Family? It's nuts.

Q How involved have you been in the rehearsals?

A I try and deliver a script that is solid and ready for rehearsal so that precious rehearsal time is not spent on trying to solve the dramaturgy of the play but on the making of the show. So **in the rehearsal room, I step back and give the directors and actors the room to discover the play**. But **I am around, as a resource, tightening and polishing the script, making it as good as it can be, hearing it in the actors' mouths, throwing a line in or taking one out when it helps make the action of the play clearer**.

Interviews with collaborators

Geordie Brookman is the co-director of *Things I Know To Be True*



BIOGRAPHY

Geordie Brookman is the Artistic Director of the State Theatre Company of South Australia.

For State Theatre Company, his directing credits include *Machu Picchu*, *Kryptonite* (both with Sydney Theatre Company), *Betrayal*, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Little Bird*, *The Seagull*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Speaking In Tongues*, *romeo&juliet*, *Knives In Hens* (with Malthouse), *Ghosts*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *Toy Symphony* (with Queensland Theatre Company). For Sydney Theatre Company *Spring Awakening: The Musical*. For Belvoir *Baghdad Wedding*, *Tender*, *Disco Pigs*.

Geordie's productions have won or been nominated for Helpmann, Greenroom, Sydney Critics Circle and Adelaide Critics Circle awards.

Q Can you tell us about your relationship to date with Frantic Assembly?

A I had read a lot about the Company's work while I was at university so when a production of mine was invited to the Edinburgh Fringe I sent a 'hail Mary' email to Scott and Steven asking if I could meet them on my way back through London. To my surprise they said yes and even invited me in to observe on their development rehearsals for *pool (no water)*. I went on to direct the Australian premiere of *Tiny Dynamite*, Abi Morgan's play that was first performed by Frantic. After that we stayed in touch and I came back over to assist Scott and Steven on Abi's play *Lovesong*.

Andrew Bovell was one of the first writers I called after being appointed Artistic Director of State Theatre Company in mid 2012. **He was keen to write something for us but mentioned that he'd like his usual process challenged in some way. That led me to thinking of Scott and Frantic.** Another phone call and we were up and away.

Q What has this process opened up for you and how has it done this?

A I think it has reminded me of how much I love being part of making projects from the absolute ground up and it's also **reaffirmed that there can be a great connection between devised work and playwrights. I've learnt how physical exertion helps focus the mind. I've learnt that openness and flexibility create the best pieces of theatre. That the local truly is global.**

Q *Things I Know To Be True* premiered in Adelaide in May. How did it feel to remake the show with a different cast so soon after the opening in Australia?

A It was great. It meant that the emotional architecture of the play was fresh in my mind and that we had firm ideas about what worked and what could be improved. It was delightful getting surprised and have the boundaries of the play shifted by two completely different sets of artists. The UK rehearsal process has been very similar to the Australian process, just more efficient. **We knew exactly how we wanted the space to work this time in terms of physicality, rhythm etc but the detail within was brand new.** We tried new ideas and were presented with new provocations every single day.

Interviews with collaborators

Geoff Cobham is the designer of *Things I Know To Be True*



BIOGRAPHY

Geoff Cobham is State Theatre Company's Resident Designer and has worked as a Production Manager, Lighting Designer, Set Designer, Event Producer and Venue Designer.

For State Theatre Company, his recent Set & Lighting Design includes; *The Events*, *Betrayal*, *Little Bird*, *The Seagull*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Kruezer Sonata*. Other Set & Lighting Design credits include; *Nothing to Lose*, *Never Did Me Any Harm*, *The Age I'm In* (Force Majeure).

His recent Lighting Design credits for State Theatre Company include *Mortido*, *Volpone*, *The 39 Steps*

He received a Helpmann Award for Best Scenic Design of the production of *Little Bird*.

Q Has working on *Things I Know To Be True* been similar to your usual way of working on a production?

A I have worked on many devised shows before so was quite at home with this process. For this production **I have been involved since the first Research & Development. I appreciate being able to be part of the development of the piece and it allows the set and lighting to sit within the play rather than be imposed later on.** I love this way of working which seems the most natural way to make theatre; it is so exciting to watch the work evolve from the actors improvisations, and is a great example of true collaboration.

Q Throughout the show, the actors build the set around the action. Where did your initial idea for this design concept come from?



Ewan Stewart (Bob), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie). Photo Manuel Harlan

A One of our influences was the Talking Heads film, *Stop Making Sense*. I am a big fan of this movie which is basically a concert that starts with a blank empty theatre and ends up with a full blown concert; the audience get to see the

technical set up happen as part of the action. This is also a development of a style Geordie and I have been working on together, which aims to put the actors at the centre of the design.

Q Did your initial design ideas change during the rehearsal period and if so, how did you adapt it?

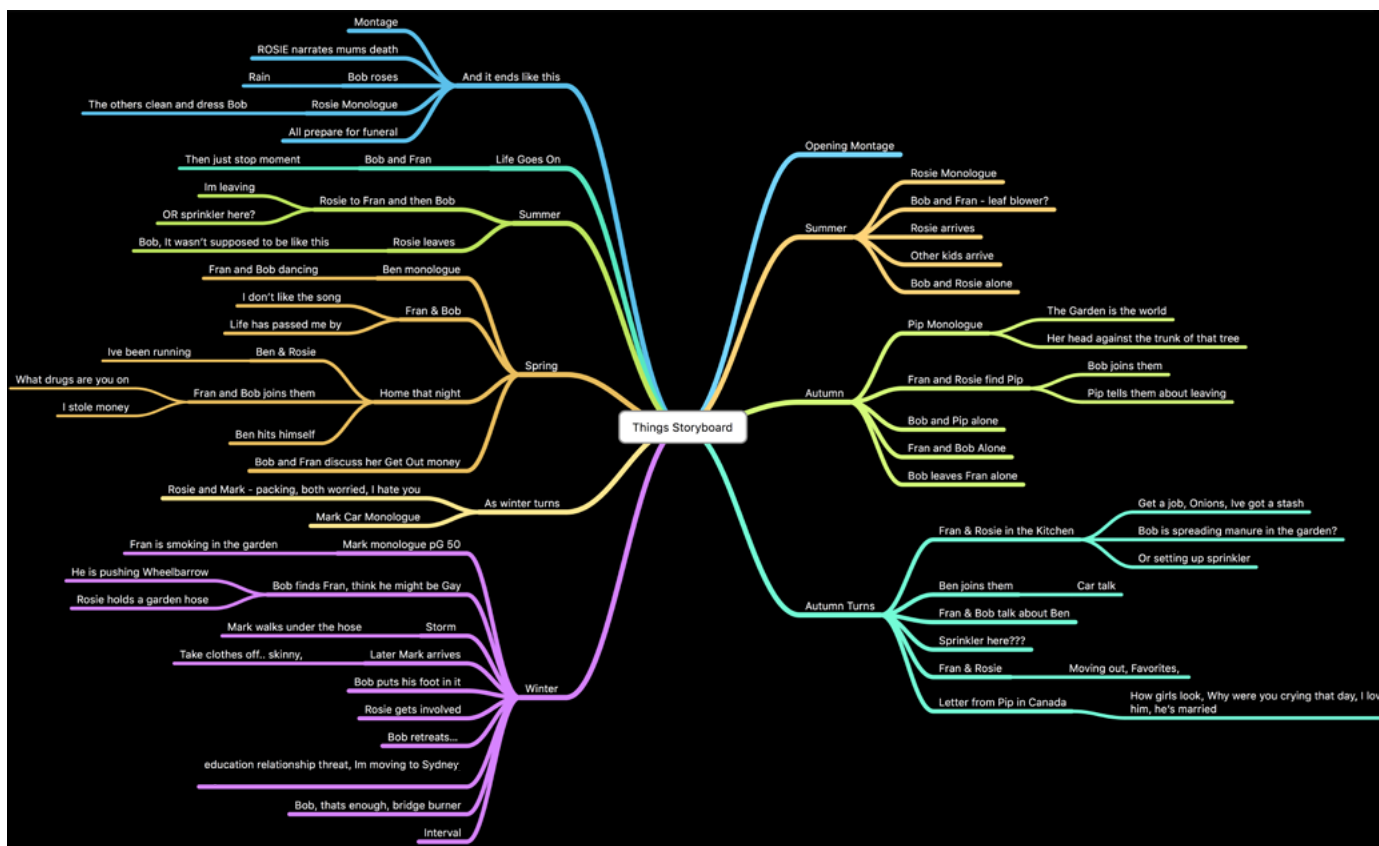
A The fundamental ideas and concept were in place but the actual detail of what items would make up the world was in flux. We knew we needed tables and chairs and a garden but the actual style and make of these developed as they rehearsed. Our workshop is right next door to our rehearsal room and the staff there were on call and were literally able to make props as they were dreamt up. They could also adjust them to suit the changing uses.

Q The design is dominated by the lighting, can you tell us your reason behind this?

A My background is in lighting and the idea with this design was to take the normal into the heightened surreal world of Gregory Crewdson's photos. His images are often dominated by beams of light. I find that if I can tell the emotional story in light then we can strip the scenery back to the bare essentials. This minimalist approach allows the audience to focus on the performances

Q Are there any specific emotional reactions you hope to evoke with elements of the set?

A The stage is enveloped in a "cave" of 131 light bulbs. These represent the bubble that Bob the father lives in. He has never travelled and is trying to keep his family and life contained in this small romantic cave of the family home.



Geoff Cobham

An Australian Story on an International Stage

The heart of this play, while principally Australian, is not something that only sits down under. It is about family, love, loss and dreams that are exposed to be nothing more than that.

This has been a rare and privileged opportunity to have been part of the birth of a new Australian play, and it is a very Australian play. It unashamedly captures the social economic shift of an Australian working class family. It understands the provincial mores of the Adelaide suburbs and the concerns of a generation that sacrificed so much to give the following generation a life that they never knew themselves. All of this plays out in the back garden that has hosted the family's various life events as the bushes and gum tree grows around them.

Australian audiences saw themselves and their families in this play. They laughed with recognition and then went home and phoned their loved ones.

So far, so Australian, but **right from the beginning** **Geordie and I** were convinced that these themes were **universal**. I saw myself and my family and wanted to call my loved ones. Gum trees and specific Adelaide suburbs were mere details. The important thing was the tree that saw it all and grew with the family and the familiarity of the home town. The same social economic shifts happened in the UK. Bob and Fran were vivid and real. The heart of this play, while principally Australian, is not something that only sits down under. It is about family, love, loss and dreams that are exposed to be nothing more than that.



Nathan O'Keefe (Ben), Tilda Cobham-Hervey (Rosie), Eugnia Fragos (Fran), Paul Blackwell (Bob) in the Australian production. Photo Shane Reid

An Australian Story on an International Stage

Knowing that we were going to remake the show for the UK there was a moment when we explored what the UK equivalent setting would be and should we be changing all references and set the play in the UK. I was leading on this process and felt that I had that equivalent but then found myself strongly feeling that we should not change a word and **trust a British audience to see beyond the specifics and find the universal**, just as I did when I engaged with the play. It also felt like the right thing to do, politically. Australia has imported so much culture from the UK. We should hold our nerve and be proud of exporting this new Australian play to the UK.

Many people presumed we would be resetting the play in the UK. When we said we would not the next presumption was that we would be doing Australian (or more specifically, Hallett Cove, Adelaide, South Australia) accents. This felt like a fraudulent and purely technical barrier to the heart of the play. Surely we did not have to present what might be awful generic Paul Hogan accents to put across the brilliance of this play! Geordie and I held our nerve once more and decided to ask the cast to use their own voice and build from there. We didn't want the technicality of mastering a specific accent get in the way of the actors giving their all. We didn't ask the Australian actors to do this and they came from all over the country. All we really asked was that the actors listen to each other and allowed their voices to naturally merge a fraction. Capturing the right social demographic was much more important than a specific geographic setting. **The social demographic was the specific and the geographic seemed to us much more universal.**



Kirsty Oswald (Rosie), Matthew Barker (Mark), Natalie Casey (Pip), Imogen Stubbs (Fran), Ewan Stewart (Bob) in the UK production. Photo Manuel Harlan

Music as a collaborator

We needed music that could be subtle and beautiful. At times it needed to be light and flitter around our cast and at others it needed to reflect the love and the breaking heart of the play.

As ever with Frantic Assembly music is a vital element of the show. *Things I Know To Be True* is at times genuinely harrowing and, I believe, heart breaking and the music needed to chart a fine line between supporting this and challenging it. If it merely reinforced the emotional trauma then we would run the risk of bludgeoning our audience around the head with sentiment.

Both Geordie and I immediately gravitated to artists under the Erased Tapes record label. They have a beautiful minimalism that seemed perfect. But some were more perfect than others!

Nils Frahm became our choice because of the range of his work. We did not know which tracks we would use or where we would use them but this range of material gave us more freedom. He also had a lighter touch than, say, Max Richter, whose stunningly beautiful compositions may have swamped the production.

In the rehearsal room there was still a question about whether Nils Frahm would work. We were 90% confident it would but **I believe that you have to find that one perfect connection between scene and music that then informs you how you can use the rest of the range.**



I believe that you have to find that one perfect connection between scene and music that then informs you how you can use the rest of the range.

It becomes your reference point. Once that is in place, how you use the rest of the music becomes clear. In [The Believers](#) it was *Is That What Everybody Wants?* by Cliff Martinez. On [Othello](#) it was *Just For Today* by Hybrid. On *Things I Know To Be True* it was the track *More*.

From here, the rest of the music could fall into place.

Our relationship with music is crucial. At best it is a brilliant, wise and reserved collaborator. At worst it is a chance to you to indulge in your favourite tracks and smother all your actors good work.

I sometimes talk about crafting a moment to the point where the denying the movement places the potential for movement in the mind of the audience. It makes the next flinch or look of the actor become explosive. It is the same with music. **Sometimes silence is beautiful and the only thing that needs to be said or heard.**

Nils Frahm

Nils Frahm is a German musician, composer and record producer.

Click the link below to listen to *More* by Nils Frahm

[**Click here to check out some more of his tracks which were in the show**](#)

It Was Really, Really Grey
Stolen Car
Keep
Tristana
Snippet
Said and Done
Corn
Ambre
For Peter – Toilet Brushes – More

*Written by Nils Frahm
Published by Manners McDade
Music Publishing Ltd.
Administered by Hebbes Music Group*

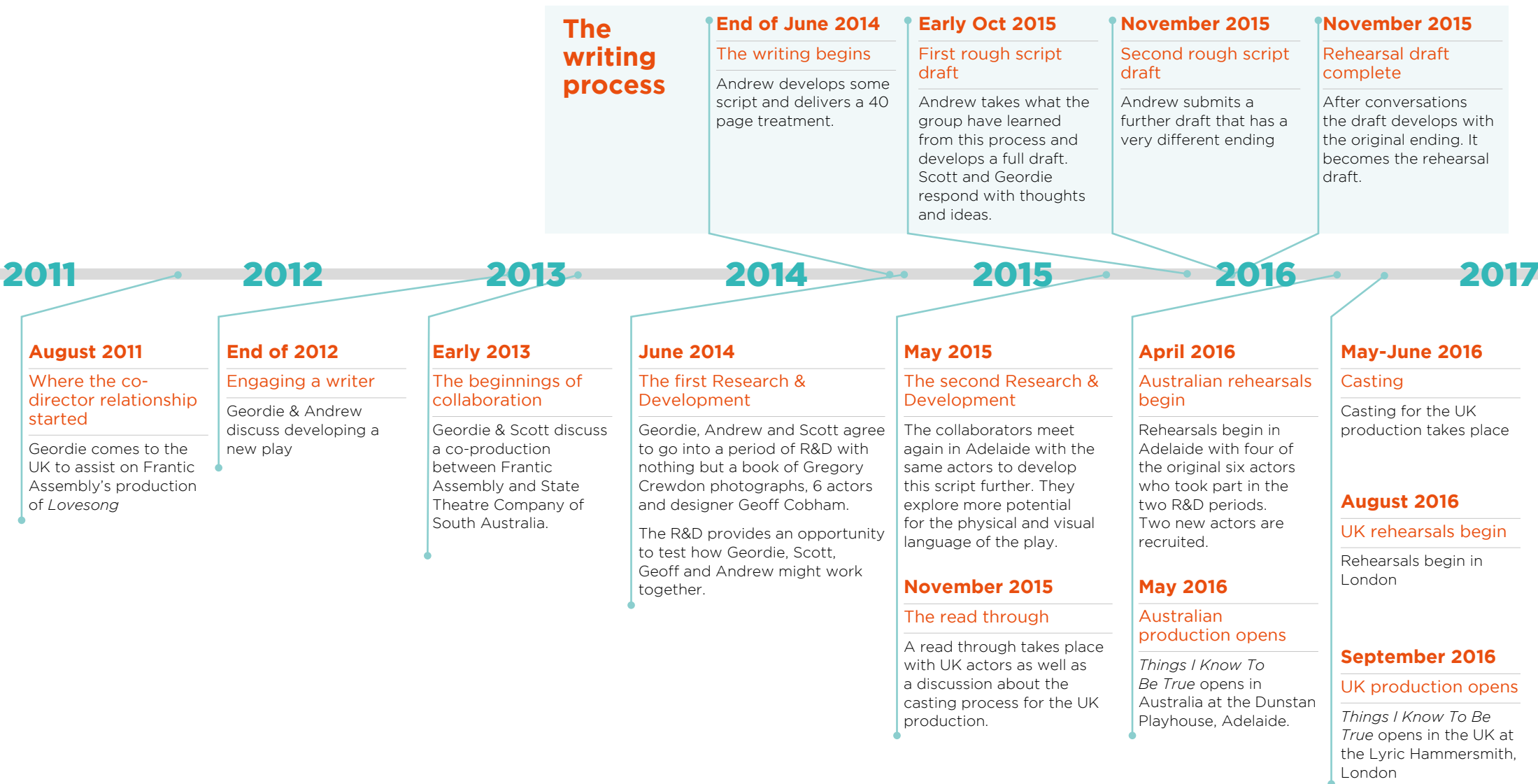


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*Scott Graham and Imogen Stubbs (Fran) in rehearsals.
Photo Helen Maybanks*

Process timeline



From Nothing to Something: The process of creating a show

The process of creating *Things I Know To Be True* was about stripping things back and building from nothing. By that I mean all creatives held back all notions of what kind of show we wanted to make and just came into an empty room with an open mind. Oh, and a book of Gregory Crewdson photos (*Beneath The Roses*).

This book is very important because it gave us something to focus on.

It is so hard to make the first strokes on a pristine canvas. That pristine canvas might be a new notebook or a state of the art rehearsal room. While it remains empty, the endless possibilities it presents can be crippling for the creatives. That is why we decided to take something we shared a fascination with (Crewdson's images) into the room as it would at least begin a conversation and stop us just staring at each other or dominating conversations towards the show we might have wanted to make. To do that would have been to miss the opportunity.

I was in a room with a brilliant writer who explicitly wanted to be challenged and a director who wanted to make work in a way he had never done before. It would have been stupid of me to have just provided that challenge while just doing what I have always done. **Working with Geordie and Andrew was an opportunity for me to listen, observe and grow.** By focussing on Crewdson initially meant we could begin that dialogue.

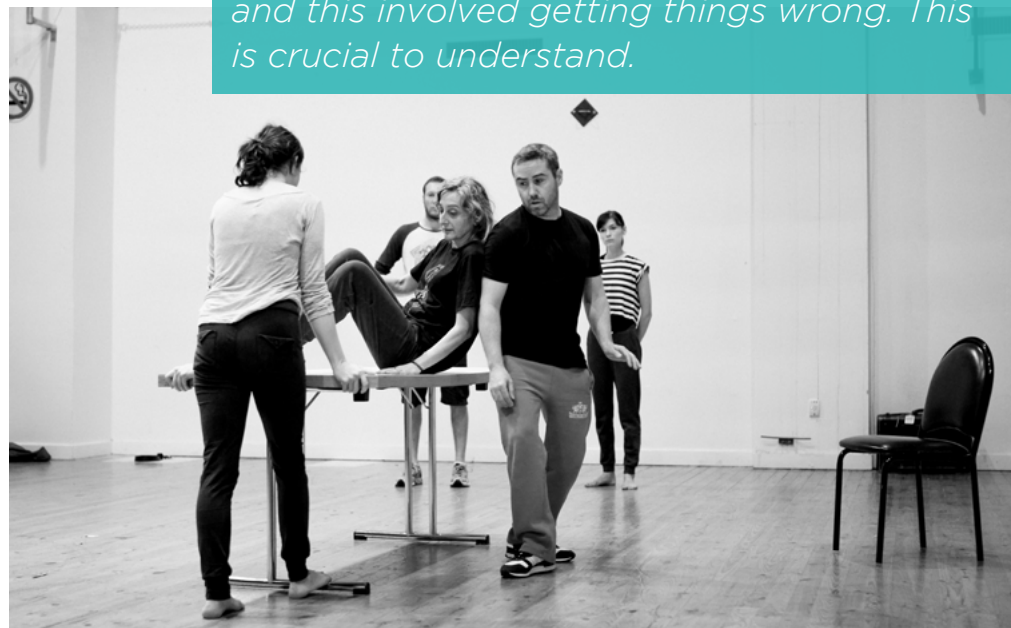
In the room: Research & Development

To begin, we were joined by 6 performers and designer Geoff Cobham and we talked about the images and why they fascinated us. This showed us not just the complexity of the images but the complexity of projection (what we project onto an image) as we all had slightly different ideas about what we saw. As we chatted we developed more of a consensus. We talked about how the images seemed to present a faded American dream and a kind of paralysis; no one seemed capable of escape – car doors remain open, school busses are flipped on their side, strange lights from the sky hold people in their grip, etc.

This opened our conversation up to generational tensions and the different dreams each generation are sold. The work ethics, the different moral codes, what matters in life.



This was all part of our collaborative learning curve. At this stage Andrew was not writing words and I was not setting anything. We were not throwing these worlds together. We were exploring a potential palette of options and this involved getting things wrong. This is crucial to understand.



Alison Bell, Eugenia Fragos, Scott Graham, Nathan O'Keefe, Tilda Cobham-Hervey in the first R&D. Photo Shane Reid

From Nothing to Something: The process of creating a show



Nathan O'Keefe (Ben), Tilly Cobham-Hervey (Rosie), Eugenia Fragos (Fran), Paul Blackwell (Bob) in rehearsals. Photo Scott Graham



Read more about the theme 'From Nothing to Something' in the context of a scene in the production

Improvisation

Our cast were made up of people ranging from 19 to 60 and this allowed Andrew to explore these generational tensions through improvisation. He would give the actors different scenarios which would inspire these extended improvisations where the complexities of family life and the expectations contained within became apparent. Geordie and I would chip in when it felt useful but spent a lot of time absorbing what was being unearthed. Andrew's instinct was that we should be focussing on and presenting a family.

Exploring Physicality

In parallel with this, I was working on a choreographic, physical world where the themes we had unearthed could be explored through tension, movement and proximity. It is important to point out that we were showing each other possibilities. This was all part of our collaborative learning curve. At this stage Andrew was not writing words and I was not setting anything. We were not throwing these worlds together. We were exploring a potential palette of options and this involved getting things wrong. This is crucial to understand. You can assault and smother an emerging idea by throwing everything at it. We were careful to keep allowing ourselves the room to be enlightened and inspired.

At the end of this session Andrew felt secure in the world that he/we wanted to explore. He was also confident that the physical and visual language we were exploring could help tell this story.

When do Ideas come?

“Some ideas come very early in the process. Some ideas come very late and can be moments of pure inspiration or can be reactions to other people’s comments and actions. The crucial thing is to hold your nerve and keep interrogating what might be the best possible way of telling the story of each moment.”

“When do ideas come?” This was a question one of our actors asked the other day. They wanted to know how they were formed and then how they come to the stage. I found it quite difficult to answer but it did remind me that there is often a preconception that the formation of an idea is something that is immaculate and private. You have some kind of epiphany, write it down in your sacred notebook that contains all the world’s secrets, and then bring that magic into the rehearsal room.

Of course it does not happen like this.

Much of it is instinctual though. Geordie and I both felt that the work had to be minimalist. This also led us to the music of Nils Frahm for the soundtrack. Designer Geoff Cobham must have concurred as he immediately suggested the Talking Heads film *Stop Making Sense* as a source of inspiration. Andrew’s work was so rich that it inspired this crucial response from the creatives.

Andrew’s work is poetic and precise but it is also naturalistic. **My instinct was that this naturalism could also sustain flights of visual fancy. The deep love at the heart of the play must be able to soar and explode. We must be able to achieve what we call theatrical ‘lift off.’** This must have been in Geordie’s mind too and was probably one of the reasons why he suggested we work together with Andrew.

The problem with naturalism is that it is often rooted and ‘normal.’ My aim was to make these heightened ‘lift off’ moments just as normal.

I began to explore how the stories might escape gravity. I wanted **Rosie’s** thrill of being with Emmanuel to be beautiful and seductive for an audience. I wanted her to float up into the stars.



Kirsty Oswald (Rosie). Photo Manuel Harlan

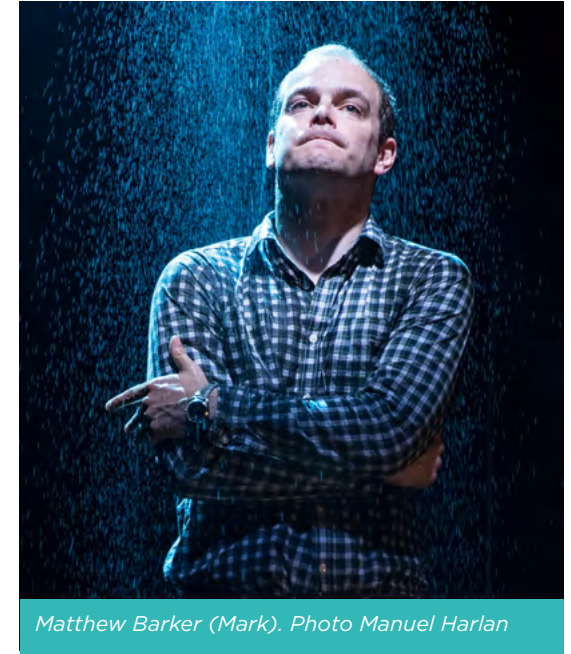
When do Ideas come?

I also felt that **Bob and Fran** dancing should be seen through the romanticising eyes of their children, allowing them to be weightless and free. I pictured Fran flying through the garden and up onto the shed but this did not seem right. There is talk within the play of observing the world from the tree that dominates the garden but that is only expressed through a painted backdrop. I wanted to explore how we might create this perspective using ladders and the garden shed but I could not quite make this work.



Natalie Casey (Pip), Matthew Barker (Mark), Richard Mylan (Ben), Imogen Stubbs (Fran), Ewan Stewart (Bob). Photo Scott Graham

I kept having the image of **Mark** soaking wet from the rain he walks through on the way to talk to his parents. This felt right to me, despite going against the content of his speech being about being up a tree and watching his family. I felt it was important to link his speech to what he was about to do (tell his family about his transgender) and not have it sit in isolation. We talked about him being stood in a paddling pool in the garden. Again this idea never made the cut. Late in rehearsals it occurred to me that we could still give Mark the perspective of being up the tree and soaking wet if we placed him on the shed and made it rain on him.



Matthew Barker (Mark). Photo Manuel Harlan

It took quite a while to come to this solution and it was about letting the niggling thoughts and ideas just work their way into some clarity. Some ideas come very early in the process. I find it is best to keep them simple at this stage and always be open to the possibility that they might not be as good as they seemed when you first thought of them. Some ideas come very late and can be moments of pure inspiration or can be reactions to other people's comments and actions. The crucial thing is to hold your nerve and keep interrogating what might be the best possible way of telling the story of each moment.

Most ideas are a collaboration. They begin as a suggestion or a provocation and are then built upon through other people's responses and actions. That is why so many ideas are originally presented as tasks.

You have some hazy thought and you might be best to articulate it through the task that allows others to inspire you towards some clarity.

Just like the co-directing collaboration it comes down to creating space for others to work in and for you to observe and build stronger ideas.

A writers experience of the process

Written by Andrew Bovell

The writing process began with a series of conversations between Geordie Brookman and myself. In the context of these conversations it was proposed that it be a collaboration with the company Frantic Assembly. I was interested in the marriage between text and movement. I was interested in finding a way to push my own work into a theatrical and visual space. We then had a series of conversations with Scott Graham where we spoke about some broad parameters of how we might work together. We identified a common point of reference – the contemporary American photographer Gregory Crewdson. The three of us had all drawn on Crewdson’s stunning visual and emotional landscape in previous works.

Research & Development

A creative team was assembled including myself, the two directors, Geoff Cobham, the designer and six actors – Paul Blackwell, Eugenia Fragos, Alison Bell, Luke Mullins, Nathan O’Keefe and Tilly Cobham-Hervey. We came together for our first workshop, which lasted for a week. This was our research and development stage. As well as the Crewdson series, *Beneath the Roses*, I asked the actors to bring in three images and a piece of text that they had to explain the meaning of. From this body of material we talked, discussed, told stories and constructed a series of improvisations that began to build character and relationship. At this stage we had no idea what the play would be about or the form it would take. It was very exploratory work.

During this week, Scott worked with the ensemble training them in the Frantic approach to making work. **I was watching this and working out how best to write for it. Scott said don’t necessarily write “for” it. Don’t pre-empt what we might do. Let us come to the text with our approach. In other words don’t anticipate “Movement”.**

By the end of the week we had a lot of raw material but nothing concrete or too structured. It was now my job to go away and write the first draft. After some time of avoiding it, a necessary part of any process, I relooked at the material. One key improv we had done involved a series of encounters between adult children and their parents in which each child presented their parents with



I was interested in the marriage between text and movement. I was interested in finding a way to push my own work into a theatrical and visual space.

a crisis that challenged the status quo of the family. I gave one actor the task of telling their parents that they were leaving their husband and children. I gave another the task of telling them they were going to change gender. During the workshop I had asked the actors to tell me stories about moments of closeness and distance between them and their families. Tilly, one of the actors had told a beautiful and simple story about being in Europe and having had her heart broken by a guy and being incredibly homesick.... **The idea of “home” soon emerged as a key theme.** To settle herself, Tilly made a list of all the things she knew to be true. **I tucked this story away into my box of ideas. That idea eventually came to frame the play.**

A writers experience of the process

“So the personal was drawn into the work”

At about this time my mother became ill and died quite quickly. We gathered around her hospital bed, me and my three sisters and an Aunt and told stories and shared laughs and heartbreak as Mum slowly left us. It was a moving time. I had left home and the city where I grew up at 20, thirty years ago. **I was overwhelmed with a sense of the passing of time. So the personal was drawn into the work...a story about the loss of a mother, the exploration of home as a theme and the key-child parent relationship.**

The idea of structuring the play around a series of seasons came out of that sense of the passing of time and the cycle of life, as one child grows toward adulthood and discovers the things she knows to be true, her father grows toward “being older” and the things that he thought were true start to become less certain. This is Rosie and Bob’s story. It sits at the centre of the play. But really it’s about resilience. The death of the mother blindsides this family and yet life goes on. It is one of the things that we come to know that is true. That we will lose the ones we love and yet we must go on.

After Mum died, I went back to the three houses where we had lived as I was growing up and I looked over the fences and into the back yards. They had changed so much and yet they were full of memories of all the things that had happened. These were the places where the life of the family was played out. And so the back yard became the iconic setting for the play.



Imogen Stubbs (Fran), Ewan Stewart (Bob), Richard Mylan (Ben). Photo Manuel Harlan



The idea of structuring the play around a series of seasons came out of that sense of the passing of time and the cycle of life,

First draft of the script

And so I wrote the first version of the play, a series of scenes, ideas and fragments titled *The Price of Love*. We came back together as a group for another week’s workshop. Rosie’s monologue had virtually been written at this stage, as had other key scenes for Pip and Mark but not for Ben. Ben remained a mystery. We talked. We worked the scenes. Scott and Geordie started to discover movement sequences that might be a part of the play. A body of work was built up around text, movement and visual ideas and the six characters that made up the family. They all hated the title. I hated them for hating it. For a moment, and then Geordie suggested *Things I Know to be True*. It made perfect sense.

Finalising the script

I then went away. I procrastinated. And then I wrote it. I showed Geordie and Scott versions. They gave me feedback. But essentially I had my shape. I knew my characters. I knew where I was going. And because of all the work we had done collectively in the room, and my own recent experiences of grief and growing up in a close but difficult family, I had a rich emotional world to draw on.



FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM

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*Matthew Barker (Mark), Imogen Stubbs (Fran),
Richard Mylan (Ben), Ewan Stewart (Bob),
Kirsty Oswald (Rosie) in rehearsals. Photo Helen Maybanks*

The Presumption of Weight: Building Blocks

As ever, we started rehearsals by going back to the first building block. If I wanted my performers to fly then I needed them to understand the complexities of contact, balance and weight.

One of the presumptions that many performers have is that they are too heavy to be lifted and they instinctively try to make themselves lighter in the lift, almost willing themselves to float! You have to convince people that **the key to being light in a lift is to actually give your weight so that the lifters can take the weight through their frames**. If they are taking it all into their muscles they are quickly going to tire no matter the weight of the person being lifted.

You have to convince them that the person being lifted should push down into the point of contact with the lifter. This is the counter intuitive aspect that you have to really fight. From this point the lifter has to then engage their core strength.

For example, if two people are lifting you above their heads you should push down into their hands and keep your back straight and stomach muscles engaged. This makes it much easier and you will feel much lighter to the lifters. Think about how much easier it is for two people to lift a table from either side than it is to lift a similar sized mattress from the same positions.

As using the lifters frame is crucial to the ease of the lift you should try to find an economical way to getting the weight into the final position that does not drain the lifters muscles.

Sometimes a little visualisation helps. I encouraged the performers to think about image of an Amish community constructing a barn, (referencing the film **'Witness'**)! Random, I know but what I was trying to get them to see was how in that example the frame does not bend and then have to push the weight up directly like a weightlifter. That is exhausting! The weight to be lifted is moved laterally towards the optimum position. The solidity of the frame is being employed from the beginning and it is much easier to get the weight up to the final position.

(Of course, I could have referenced the iconic lift in 'Dirty Dancing' but I would much prefer to talk about Amish barns)



Richard Mylan (Ben), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie), Matthew Barker (Mark), Imogen Stubbs (Fran) in rehearsals. Photo Helen Maybanks

[Click here to see the video](#)

The Presumption of Weight

YouTube

Breakthrough moments in the rehearsal room

I wanted to write a section that touched on crucial decisions and expands on the traditional Bibliography of Inspiration I put at the end of the resource pack. In doing so I thought this might cast a bit more light on how ideas develop, why those references were made and how they pushed things forward.

Rosie's trip to Europe

Araby by James Joyce. A short story from *The Dubliners* (1914)

In a discussion with Tilly Cobham-Hervey, playing Rosie in the Australian version of *Things I Know To Be True*, we were trying to get to the complexity of Rosie's feelings about her aborted trip to Europe. To do this we had to get beyond the heartbreak of what happened with Emmanuel and to work out what she actually had invested in that 'Great European Adventure.'

She talks about how she thought it would help her grow up and understand life but there was also a romanticism that probably led to her dropping her guard. As she says, she can tell when an Australian boy only wants to have sex but she totally fell for the Spanish boy when he only wanted the same. So what level of humiliation does she feel having returned from this experience? What was clear was the obligation she had to her mum and dad to have a good time and say all the right things but there was still something missing.

Geordie and I talked to Tilly about the short story, *Araby*, and the boys desire to run to the wonder of the fair. When he gets there late it is all being packed away and he sees it for what it is. More importantly he understands something about himself.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

This reference was not designed to capture all of the meaning and complexity of thought around Rosie. It was suggested to open up the possibilities of understanding for the actor and collaborators.



Natalie Casey (Pip), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie), Matthew Barker (Mark), Ewan Stewart (Bob).
Photo Scott Graham

Breakthrough moments in the rehearsal room

Bob's confrontation with Ben

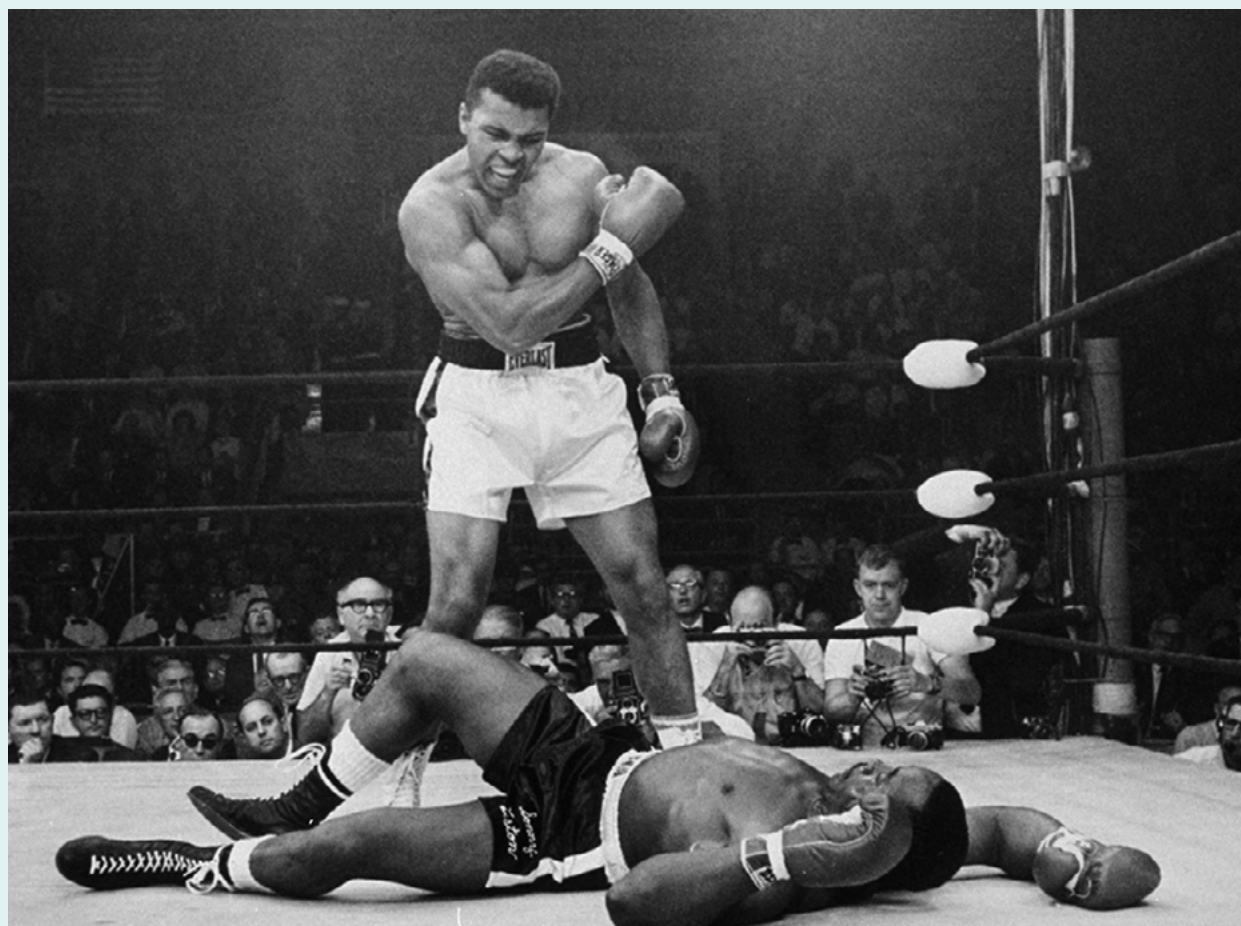
The image of Mohammed Ali v Sonny Liston

A simple reference here but it is an image that has intrigued people for years. To be honest the image is probably a lot more complex than the moment within the play that is connected to it.

I mentioned to Ewan Stewart that, in Bob's confrontation with Ben, they should both get to the position of Ali and Liston. Not just get into the positions arbitrarily, but find a way in which it is right for Bob to be dominant of a prone Ben and for Ben to accept this as right and deserved.

The image has captivated observers for years because it is brutal but also complex. The moment depicted is the aftermath of what some call the phantom punch. The suggestion is that Sonny Liston took a dive meaning the fight was fixed by the mafia. This obviously taints 'the noble art.' I think this is what is captured in the moment Ali stands over Liston, knowing he has not connected with a punch and is heard yelling 'Get up and fight, sucker!' Both men are tainted by what Liston has brought into the ring - the corruption of the Mafia.

Of course this is one theory and it is always tempting to believe the most interesting theory rather than the simplest but the reference felt applicable to the situation Bob and Ben find themselves in. It also helped give the actors that little push needed to take the scene a little further.



Mohammed Ali, Sonny Liston. Photo Neil Leifer, 1965

Breakthrough moments in the rehearsal room



Natalie Casey (Pip), Imogen Stubbs (Fran), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie). Photo Manuel Harlan

Pip sitting in the garden

Just by Radiohead

This is a reference to the video directed by Jamie Thrives. In the early stages of working on the scene where Pip is found sitting in the garden there were discussions about whether she would be sitting on a chair or, if not, how long would she be sitting on the ground for on a cold Autumn morning. I felt this was missing the point. I felt she should be on the ground for as long as she could cope with talking to her mother.

'This was a bad idea'

Initially, Georgia Adamson, the actor playing Pip in Adelaide felt weak or it felt odd but I was trying to tell them that I thought there was a power to be found from this position. It is, in itself, a statement that something is wrong. It affects the people that converge to speak to her. It makes them nervous and somewhat powerless to help.

The video articulates this beautifully and takes it a lot further. Pip does go on to articulate her situation much sooner than the man in the video but the reference did its trick in helping Georgia understand the power of the setting, that the strangeness was an important discombobulation for the family.

It also steered everyone away from sitting on an energy sapping, theatrically dead chair!

Breakthrough moments in the rehearsal room

Bob's roses

Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Poem (1977).

I have referred to this poem before. It came up during rehearsals for Rabbit by Brendan Cowell. This time it came up in conversations about Bob and his roses.

The roses are a matter of great pride. They are a symbol of order and the security the home offers. Bob has nurtured and tended them through the seasons and will do the same year on year. As they grow they are testament to his care and expertise.

What he does not realise is how much Fran hates them and what they represent to her!

FRAN. I hate those roses

ROSIE. Mum!

FRAN. They're just an excuse for not living.

The roses become his folly. In his despair at the loss of Fran the image of them taunt him and he sees them in a different way. He then destroys them. What we are left with is a distraught and heartbroken man lying in the dirt with all the roses pulled from the ground. His kingdom is in ruins.

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains: round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*



Ewan Stewart (Bob). Photo Manuel Harlan

Weightlessness

See [Presumptions of Weight](#) for how we developed the lifting within the show.

Famous Blue Raincoat by Leonard Cohen

This is an odd one because this song plays a massive part in the play yet we have never played it in the rehearsal room.

I think this is because it is a very slow and heavy track and, as this play is so harrowing at times, we have deliberately made sure our rehearsal room is light and fun. We have always sought to energise our cast, making sure that they do not get seduced by the melancholy of the play. All of that heart is there in the writing but we have to fight it and show people trying to get on with life using humour, anger, love, etc. and not just giving in to the weight of the situations they find themselves in. That means when they do crack under pressure it is often even more affecting for an audience.

I will encourage the cast to listen to it in their own time as they need to know how that song resonates through the family, from Fran who thinks of a potential lover, to Pip, who sees some deep rage in her mother, to Bob, who feels some fresh and unexpected betrayal.

It is a fantastic song but it is rubbish for warm ups.

Breakthrough moments in the rehearsal room

Bob & Fran's dance

Chagall

This one is a bit cheeky as it was not a moment of inspiration and goes against the ethos of the Bibliography of Inspiration. This one came as an after-thought. I had already created the move where Fran flies around Bob in the romantic dance section and then added a little kiss between them as she passes over him. One of the cast said it was very 'Spiderman' and I tried to shame them by saying it was actually a homage to a Chagall image. In truth I had only just seen the Chagall image a couple of weeks before in a display at the Kneehigh show *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk* but at least it made me sound clever for a minute or too.

To be fair, our image was definitely more Spiderman.

Looking through some more Chagall I noticed that he must have stolen some other images from *Things I Know To Be True!*



The Birthday, Chagall (1915)



The Promenade, Chagall (1918)

The Crewdson Images

The photos from *Beneath the Roses and Twilight* may have been the launch pad but despite how our focus moved from small town Americana to suburban Adelaide the images still resonated and informed the process.



Gregory Crewdson is an American photographer. Click here for more information.

The images, although still, have so much tension. Throughout many of Crewdson's images there appears to be a crisis of paralysis. Escape or movement seems impossible, whether this is because a car has stalled across a junction or because the school is overturned or simply a beam of light from above holds you transfixed. A particular favourite of mine is the image on this page, from Crewdson's *Twilight* series.

The girl is (to my eye) fixed in her mother's judgemental gaze while a younger sister watches the humiliation from the car. The girl's state of undress suggests something possibly risqué or taboo and here she stands, caught out by her returning mother.

This picture said everything about the relationship between Pip, Fran and Rosie. There was a moment in the rehearsal room where we had almost talked ourselves into a standstill with the complex relationship between Pip and Fran. I remembered the impact the image had on me and encouraged the performer playing Pip to absorb that image and refer to it, be haunted by it in moments of confrontation with Fran. It became a short cut reference to a scarring episode in their history. Maybe the sunbathing/Rosie falling from the ladder episode. Maybe some other unspecified trauma. The point is, it stopped all the talk that was in danger of becoming unproductive and gave the performer something tangible and consistent to refer to.



Image from Twilight, Gregory Crewdson (1998 - 2002)

In the image the younger sister is the observer that unintentionally helps humiliate the older sister. In the scene in the garden when Pip talks about Rosie falling from the ladder and Fran's violent response, Pip

recreates this triangle using the younger sister to this time humiliate the mother. Somewhere in between these moments sits the Crewdson image. It serves as the link and the motivation for Pip to confront her mother.

From Nothing to Something: The Building Blocks of Rosie's monologue

“In Rosie's first monologue, it must look like Rosie is effortlessly floating on the love of Emmanuel and her family and not just being lifted. If we can get the technique correct then an audience will only see the float and not the effort of the lift.”

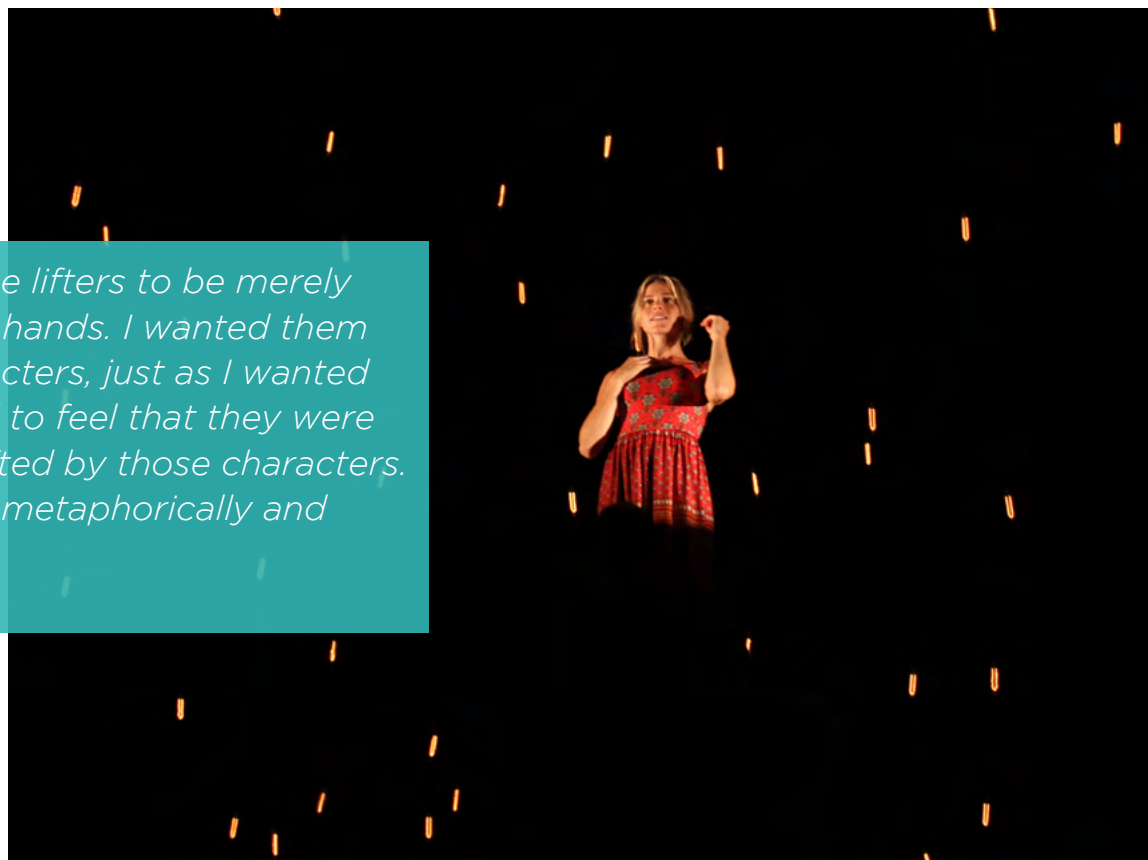
My instinct was that however far away this family went from each other they would always be connected. Whether that connection is love, guilt or trauma, it meant that I was just as interested in how a character was feeling once they were in Canada or on their own in Sydney and that they should remain present to the action on stage and not just disappear to the dressing room because their words had finished!

This helped create an ensemble feel that allowed me to use performers to execute lifts and flights in other people's scenes while still remaining in character. This felt important to me. I did not want the lifters to be merely functional stage hands. I wanted them to be their characters, just as I wanted the person lifted to feel that they were actually being lifted by those characters. Not literally, but metaphorically and emotionally.



I did not want the lifters to be merely functional stage hands. I wanted them to be their characters, just as I wanted the person lifted to feel that they were actually being lifted by those characters. Not literally, but metaphorically and emotionally.

This is probably most clear in Rosie's first monologue. She is alone in Berlin and is thinking about all the events that have got her here and how much she wants to be home in the safety of her family. In these memories, the warmth of the family's embrace is palpable. I wanted to put that warmth on stage. I also thought it would be a useful way of quickly introducing the characters and getting audiences used to our fluid, physical and visual style of story telling.



Kirsty Oswald (Rosie). Photo Scott Graham

Nothing to Something: The Building Blocks of Rosie's monologue

Even before I mentioned where it would go in the production, I was working on the required movement quality with the cast. **In Rosie's first monologue, it must look like Rosie is effortlessly floating on the love of Emmanuel and her family and not just being lifted. If we can get the technique correct then an audience will only see the float and not the effort of the lift.**

To combine this kind of movement, where the person speaking is being lifted high above the heads of the rest of the performers, with text, takes time. We rehearsed them separately, never telling the performers that they would be combined. This keeps the ambitions for the physicality high and stops the performer playing Rosie from worrying about how the moves will impact the performance quality. A premature knowledge of how they might be used might lead to a compromise on quality from either text or movement, or even both.

Contact between performers was key. I started with simple tasks asking the performers to explore quality of contact and how information can be passed and received through touch. I got them exploring lifts and highlighting how active the person being lifted has to be to make the lift seem effortless.

As the performers became more confident I started putting strings of material (lifts and moves) together always focussing on lifting one person, in this case, the performer playing Rosie. These strings remained separate. They were just examples of what we were capable of. I then put them all together and made them one sequence. When the team were proficient at this I told them where this would be happening in the show and that one of them (Rosie) would be speaking throughout. By this point we had already done a fair bit of work on the speech and the performer was confident about it.

This confidence allowed them to embrace the movement without making the text sound strange. Similarly, the movement was not compromised by the text. We could always make adjustments when we became certain we wanted specific moments to coincide with specific text but the important thing here was the building blocks approach that allowed.

[Click here to see the video](#)

[Rosie's Monologue](#)



[Click here to read more about the theme 'From Nothing to Something' in the context of a Creating a play](#)

Kirsty Oswald (Rosie), Natalie Casey (Pip), Richard Mylan (Ben), Ewan Stewart (Bob), Imogen Stubbs (Fran), Matthew Barker (Mark) in rehearsals. Photo Helen Maybanks

Battling instincts

As co-directors, much of our combined ambition was to create a clear and palpable tension onstage. Movement had to be earned otherwise it would be dangerous and exposing.

Stillness was the key. Often actors would want to move and this was always worth interrogating but sometimes this was only because they had to or because they felt that they had been still too long. Sometimes this was simply because the actor was a little lost and felt that a move would help them get back on track or cover this awkward moment.

Referring to the Crewdson images helped us convince the actors about the power of stillness. We could all feel the tension in the images and once we had persevered and captured this stillness on stage, it made the slightest gesture or movement completely dynamic.

Setting a play in a domestic setting can make it feel familiar and sometimes we can crave all those familiar details. We were very keen to strip back a lot of the set and paraphernalia. In the past I have found that if you put a table and chairs on stage, an actor will always sit down. Something becomes heavy. It takes significant motivation to get back out of that chair. Also everyone gravitates to it and the theatrical world becomes very small.

Crewdson presents a vast canvas and we wanted to keep that space between people that exposes us and our insecurities. It also makes any movement towards or away from someone clear and dynamic.

This led to certain theatrical language with the table and chairs. We never wanted them rooted to the spot. We never wanted them to sit in the one place and define that as kitchen or dining room. We wanted something much more fluid than that. Therefore, tables and chairs would slide on and instantly create a new image, a new setting and a new perspective for the audience. We would not be stuck with the logic of the table always facing the same way as this could ultimately lead to a naturalistic scene where



Imogen Stubbs (Fran), Natalie Casey (Pip), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie), Richard Mylan (Ben), Matthew Barker (Mark). Photo Manuel Harlan

the family are all gathered around one side like Da Vinci's Last Supper! Instead, we thought of each shift as a change of camera, effectively allowing our audience to circle the action at the table.

The table and chairs should only be present if absolutely crucial. If they were to remain they just become energy sappers, enticing the actors to come and sit. And this is very seductive. **Standing still on a stage is hard. It is awkward and exposing. Sitting at the table feels right, it is what people do, it is safe and recognisable. But it is not brave. The moment is not alive. It can be theatrically dead.**

Our task as directors was to present a family drama that sets itself up around a kitchen table and chairs and then take it to a place where those items are not needed. The table and chairs help tell the story where needed and eventually become redundant. It was very satisfying to find that we had lost them well before the interval but the setting felt no less domestic and no more sparse.

We had successfully **battled the instinct to clutter and make familiar. We had also convinced our performers of the power in stillness.** This helped develop what Geordie referred to as the tense steel wire that existed between characters, so evident in the Crewdson images.

Pip's Letter

Pip's letter to Fran is a very important part of the play. It was an early and important directorial/choreographic decision to think about that moment in a particular way.

It struck me that it might take Fran 10 minutes to read a letter it has taken days, if not weeks, to write. Those weeks would have been filled with doubt, rage, fear and hundreds of revisions in her head. Pip would have carried all of that stress around with her as she travels to work, as she sits at her desk and as she returns home to her flat in the evening.

We wanted to place Pip, full of these thoughts, among oblivious people just going about their day. As she does this we have sometimes placed Fran in her eye line or sitting at the same table. **We wanted to express that gulf between them, the oceans and continents, is just as great if it were the distance across a table.** The gulf is also what connects them.

This comes back to another instinct about the family. No matter how far apart they are, they remain connected. This is not a sentimental thing. This connection can be a deep love but it can also be an ability to irritate, frustrate and get under the skin.

We talked about what Pip's day might be filled with. We were particularly interested in the mundanity of sitting on a bus or a queue to get a coffee or finding yourself in a lift. Basically all of those places that could be anywhere in the world.

I also thought it would be interesting if these places were created around Pip showing her to be preoccupied in thought and possibly moving through the routine of her day without much awareness of her surroundings.

We played with ways of making sense of these environments with real economy. Tables and chairs would glide in to only complete a picture in the final second. They would disperse to create a new environment, ending with her alone in her flat, staring at the empty chair that she hopes her lover will come over and fill. But it is her mother that takes the chair, as the thoughts she struggles with fill her space and time.



Natalie Casey (Pip), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie), Richard Mylan (Ben), Matthew Barker (Mark), Ewan Stewart (Bob). Photo Manuel Harlan

In the making of this scene we talked about the days it took to write the letter but then we also talked about that particular moment when you send it and there is nothing you can do but wait for a response. With an email that response can be instantaneous but with a letter posted from Canada it could be an insufferable wait as that letter makes its way across the world, eventually being sorted in a depot in Adelaide, before being delivered to Fran Price. All of that waiting, whether for a lover or for the bomb to drop, went into Pip's letter scene.



[Click here to read about the significance of the letter](#)

Connecting hands

I had a sudden idea that I wanted to see the family connected physically in the simplest form. This meant simply holding hands.

I wanted this to be a surprise, like a sudden electrical connection when they all touched.

I had everyone move towards each other from several different angles and all connect at the same time. This was actually trickier than it looks and took a bit of time. The effect was pretty satisfying, however. It convinced me that we needed to see it again at the end as the family gather their strength to proceed with the funeral.

BEN. The car's here.

BOB. Are we ready?

PIP. I think so.

BOB. Right then... Let's go.

It became a physical representation of how the family found their strength or found their place within the unit. This eventually became a stage direction.

They hold hands as they leave... whatever seems right between them.

The significance of this image helped solve another crucial moment in the play. I had encouraged Andrew not to be held back by writing for movement but this left us with a tricky transition into the moment where Rosie announces she is leaving for Brisbane. I thought it might be interesting to see how Rosie builds up to this moment. I wanted her to take in the garden as if saying goodbye to it ('this garden was the world') before she speaks to her parents. Then I realized that she had to get her strength for this moment from somewhere.

Her siblings have all left and encourage her to grow and move on. It occurred to me that what this moment before she announces her departure needed was for us to see that support. I wanted Rosie to conjure this support and bring her siblings from wherever in the world they were to be with her in this moment. As they join her on stage they all hold hands again. It is this electrical charge that gives Rosie the strength to move on with her life.



Matthew Barker (Mark), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie), Richard Mylan (Ben), Natalie Casey (Pip).
Photo Manuel Harlan

Hugs Exercise: Building Blocks

In Rosie's opening monologue she talks of the pull of her family on the other side of the world. We represent this with a series of intertwined embraces between the other members of the family. It's a projection of what she imagines the family to be doing. It's them at their best and it's the version of them she longs for.

In rehearsals, we used the following steps to create our sequence.

This was our starting point for creating this moment in the show:

Step 1

In groups of at least 4.

Begin by experimenting with the following ideas. Don't set anything, just experiment.

[Click here to see the video](#)

[Family Hugs](#)

Step 2

Hugs, touches, embraces

Start with a really simple hug, two people face to face arms around each other.

From this point explore as many different variations of hugs, embraces and human contact that you would recognise as genuine things you would do with family or friends. (think holding hands, arms around shoulders, touching someone's face).

The more real these images are at this point, the greater the impact later.



Natalie Casey (Pip), Richard Mylan (Ben), Matthew Barker (Mark) in rehearsals. Photo Helen Maybanks

Hugs Exercise: Building Blocks

Step 3

Transitions; offering a hand

Whilst in an embrace one person can offer a hand to another member of the group, pulling them into a hug as the previous partner finds a way to leave.

Experiment for 1 minute.



Ewan Stewart (Bob) and Matthew Barker (Mark) in rehearsals. Photo Helen Maybanks

Step 4

Make contact with the person you want to hug

When you arrive to take someone's position, whoever doesn't have contact with someone else has to leave.

This can get exciting when two people begin to hug and the space closes and the previous partner has to escape.

Step 5

Not always using your hands

Some really useful transitions can be about placing heads on shoulders, or rolling into hugs an embraces rather than always manipulating each other into hugs.

After experimenting with your group start to set a sequence.

TIPS

Around 2 hugs per person is a useful starting point.

It doesn't always have to be 2 people in a hug, it could be 3 - 4 people in a group image.

Use a variety of transitions, make it continuous. Don't make it sentimental, the room can get quite heavy and low energy! Choose some [upbeat rehearsal music](#), nothing sad and treat it as a joyful sequence. Once its established then you can experiment with the tone.

From Nothing to Something: An actors perspective

Tilly Cobham-Hervey is an Australian actor who played Rosie in the Australian version of *Things I Know To Be True*.

I had been a long time admirer of Frantic Assembly's work before working with Scott and Geordie on the production of *Things I Know To Be True*. I have worked on devised shows with Gravity and Other Myths (Australian Circus company) and Force Majeure (Australian Physical Theatre company). These companies also challenge form and incorporate text and movement.

For the last few years I have been mainly working in film and TV where you never get any rehearsal and development time so I really loved being invited to help create the story from the beginning with Geordie, Scott and Andrew Bovell, the writer.

Research & Development

We had two separate weeks of research and development over 2 years before we started rehearsals for the production; during this time the ideas percolated, shifted and became more refined/defined.

In the first R&D we arrived in a room with Geordie, Andrew, Geoff, Scott, six actors and nothing else. I had never started a project like this. It was a really bold and exciting way to begin a process. We spent the days talking and playing out improvisations all inspired by the photographer Gregory Crewdson. Andrew was able to watch how we all operated together and by the end of the week he decided it was a play about a family and that it would take place over a year.

One thing I really enjoyed about the process was that **everyone's personal stories and experiences bled into the final production**. Often as an actor you don't get the chance to be part of the story but rather play out someone else's story. The process for *Things I Know To Be True* made everyone feel very connected to the story and the relationships within the play.

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Often as an actor you don't get the chance to be part of the story but rather play out someone else's story. The process for Things I Know To Be True made everyone feel very connected to the story and the relationships within the play.



Luke Mullins, Nathan O'Keefe, Scott Graham, Tilly Cobham-Hervey, Alison Bell. Photo Shane Reid

From Nothing to Something: An actors perspective

For example; during the first week we were all sharing personal stories and I told a story about a past relationship where after a lovely six-week holiday I was left heartbroken at a train station in the UK. I was 19 and although so tragically upset I also realised that it was quite funny and ridiculous. I decided I didn't want to be heartbroken and hopeless so I bought a book about the history of the universe, got on a train and proceeded to **write a list of all the things I knew to be true....and it turned out to be a very short list.**

This story then became the basis of Rosie's first monologue and whilst it is a slightly different set of events to my own it really helped me to emotionally enter the story and the character. I guess you could say it was a strange art imitating life moment.

I am also fascinated by writers' processes so being able to watch the show's content change and develop through Andrew's eyes as he observed our responses in rehearsal was inspiring.

Second Research & Development

In the second R&D week Andrew had written small chunks of text and had a vague outline for the story. Scott and Geordie pushed us all to experiment with putting movement and text together and create visual images to play off the words or ideas we were discussing. We all had to give a lot of trust and be happy to experiment.



Scott and Geordie worked so well together to help us individually crack the elements we were struggling with and it was a very magical thing to realise that you don't have to be the worlds' best dancer to create beautiful movement.

In this process we would often play out abstract tasks like; you have 10 minutes to come up with a sequence of continuous hugs or; without talking create a moment where one person can never touch the ground. No one really knew where it was going to end up so it was a bit like walking in the dark. We usually split the day up by making movement pieces and exploring more abstract ideas in the morning and in the afternoons we would play with text and story. Then by bringing both text and physicality together we would find the ideas took on a whole new meaning.

Another interesting moment to watch unfold was that all of the actors were from a different generation and had very different experiences and physical abilities. I had come from a physical background but had never been in a play whereas others had come from a theatre background and weren't so comfortable with the movement. Scott and Geordie worked so well together to help us individually crack the elements we were

struggling with and it was a very magical thing to realise that you don't have to be the worlds' best dancer to create beautiful movement.

Rehearsals

Heading into the final rehearsal process was really exciting. Everyone was so committed to the project, it felt very safe and energising. We now had script and characters. It was like the process flipped itself around again and we entered the story from a whole other angle.

I often feel like words fail me, and that is why I love Frantic Assembly's work so much. They are able to articulate more than just the words coming out of the characters mouth. They can throw them into the air and visually show the feelings and emotions of characters.

This was such a different and challenging project for me, I had never been in a play before. In film and TV you turn up knowing your lines and have to deliver a performance instinctively. It was really challenging to get the technicalities of language and movement flowing coherently in the first few weeks of the process. We rehearsed every tiny detail and after 5 weeks of intense rehearsals it was strange to stop tweaking and let the show sit and play out each night. As I had never been involved in a text based play I was shocked at how draining it was to live out the emotions of Rosie's character night after night. I found it terrifying, but in the way that making art should be.



THEMES

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*Matthew Barker (Mark), Imogen Stubbs (Fran),
Richard Mylan (Ben), Ewan Stewart (Bob), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie).
Photo Manuel Harlan*

Running & Running (away from perfection)

ROSIE. You're home. You're here. You don't have to run any more.

BEN. You don't understand. This is what I've been running from. I've been running. And running. And look where I end up. I'm so angry.

Ben is not the only one who is running. **Each of the siblings are running away from something.** Rosie tries to find herself and grow up in Europe, Mark needs to start again in Sydney and Pip needs to escape the person she will become if she stays in a marriage that becomes bitter. Ben is the one who, above, articulates the magnetic pull of the family home and the pressure its warmth exerts on them all.

Crewdson's images are full of people in some kind of paralysis. Broken down cars, upturned school buses, people caught in mysterious light from above. There is a feeling that no one escapes each image.

FRAN. We'll have dinner tonight. All together. Bob, pick up a few chickens from the butcher when you get the kids.

BEN. Mum, I've got plans.

FRAN. What do you mean? Rosie's home. Change them.

The pull of the family home is enormous.

PIP. This garden is the world. Everything that matters happened here.

It is the expectation and ethics that none of the children can live up to. Bob and Fran have no understanding of this tyranny and cannot understand the need to escape its gravity. To them, this is perfectly natural and this dynamic will surely be played out in future generations.

Rosie also romanticises her family home. She longs for it when things go wrong in Europe. She needs its security and familiarity and feels none of its suffocating effect. She naively presumes that it is a place where nothing will ever change. When she returns home Mark initially jokes about her need to escape and then explicitly states her need to leave.

MARK. You need to grow up. You need to decide who you are and get on with it. You're smart, you know. You're smarter than any of us.

ROSIE. I don't know how to do that.

MARK. You have to stop loving us so much... Mum and Dad, Pip, Ben and me. You can't love us as much as you do.

ROSIE. How do I do that?

MARK. Stop thinking that we're the best thing since sliced bread.

ROSIE. We are.

MARK. We're not. We're f***ed up. Like most families.

ROSIE. I hate you.

MARK. You have to say goodbye, Rosie. You have to turn around and walk away.



*Ewan Stewart (Bob) and Natalie Casey (Pip).
Photo Manuel Harlan*

ROSIE. I can't do that.

MARK. Then stay. And be the one they want.

Eventually she will need to run too. She does this, not through crisis but by going to do a course in Brisbane. She is the last bird to fly the nest and this is the one that breaks Bob's heart. He has created a home and a garden to contain his family and cannot see the negative connotation to that word 'contain.'

It would be easy to criticise Bob but as a father myself (like Andrew, Geordie and Geoff) I have a lot of sympathy with Bob. His mistakes are the mistakes I will make. They might be the mistakes you make too! **Andrew has always been adamant that this play is about love. It is not about a family breaking up because they hate each other. It is about an incredibly powerful love that can nurture and protect but can also crush and devour. Each sibling identifies a moment when they have to run away from that power.**

Bob & his garden

Bob has poured so much effort into his garden. As Fran says the tree 'is the only thing that isn't pruned to within an inch of its life.' The garden is a place for family barbeques, weddings and games. In fact, 'this garden is the world.'

It is a world Bob has created for his family and he is immensely proud of it, especially the roses. (Even his youngest daughter is called Rosie!) So much of his focus has gone on controlling it against the natural environment. The only thing he wants rid of in the garden is the native gum tree.

The significance of this garden is huge. Bob only realises this when the nature of the late night phone call becomes clear. He goes to the garden and destroys the roses.

He does this because he has been focussing on the wrong thing. He has tried to control and shape the growth of his plants and recoiled at Fran's suggestion of native plants growing freely. **You could say that the roses are his children that he has tried to cultivate when what he needed to do was give them the space to grow wild.** When Fran suggests getting rid of them once Rosie has announced that she is moving out it is the potential for a new phase, a new connection between the two of them. It is possibly the deferred promise to 'remind ourselves who we are.'

When he receives the phone call and worries which child is in danger or dead, he never contemplates the possibility of his wife's mortality.

None of them do. She is the rock that they orbit. All of them are guilty of taking her for granted. It is no surprise that he then pulls up the roses. He has focussed on them and not on Fran. The roses grow, bloom and then are pruned to come back again next year. The structure of the play suggests this seductive cycle but **when Bob is faced with the harsh reality of Fran's mortality the manicured perfection of his garden and the roses within it are too much to handle.** It is a poetic and heartbreakingly real gesture. All the more tragic as it is just too late.

In this moment the roses are seen to be unreal. The actor easily pulls them from the ground and throws the whole bush across the stage. This is deliberate. We were not interested in him faking the pulling of real roses out of the ground and all the effort and blood that would take. This naturalistic approach may have been what Andrew envisaged but we argued that there was merit in Bob finding that everything around him was a lie. The lighting state opens up showing the whole stage and the fake roses. The only real thing is the breaking of Bob's heart. This felt like an important realisation us and for Bob.



The significance of this garden is huge. Bob only realises this when the nature of the late night phone call becomes clear. He goes to the garden and destroys the roses.



Ewan Stewart (Bob). Photo Manuel Harlan

The creation of the image

The poster image for a new Frantic show is always very important. I wanted to find something that captured both the essence of the play and the promise of a Frantic Assembly production.

The poster image for a new Frantic show is always very important. State Theatre Company of South Australia had already created an image for the Adelaide version and this was very much an image that suited their needs. It highlighted a prominent actor in a style that was consistent across their whole season. We don't have these demands upon the UK image and **I wanted to find something that captured both the essence of the play and the promise of a Frantic Assembly production.** In every Frantic poster image there is the suggestion of movement. Not in a dance sense but the image has to be alive, to be dynamic. Even on the Lovesong poster, which might seem still, the image is inverted so that it looks slightly odd, suggesting the grass they are lying on is actually the ceiling.

The UK photo shoot happened before we started rehearsals in Australia. I realised that it would be impossible to capture the grandeur and quality of a Crewdson image so wanted to try something much simpler.

For me the most striking image of the play was Bob tearing up the roses but to capture this literally would be to give something away about the play. I wanted him to hold roses but for him to have his body covered in

cuts and scratches. I also wanted to capture the emotional impact of the phone call telling him that Fran was dead. This was when his world turns upside down, when the adrenalin and shock must have caused his head to spin. I wanted to get him in a pose that suggested falling, possibly mid fall, yet retained dignity.

The photo shoot took place in the marketing company's office, using the photographer's dad as Bob! We placed a load of cushions on the floor and I convinced him to simply fall forward onto them! This was problematic for the photographer as there was not enough light to capture the moving image crisply. I got an extension cable, wrapped it around Bob's chest and asked someone from the office to stand behind the door and hold his weight. This meant that 'Bob' could hold the position for longer. At least until the guy behind the door could take no more or 'Bob' was cut in half by the wire. Whichever came first. The wire was then edited out of the image, along with the door and the sweating man behind it.



*Ewan Stewart (Bob).
Photo Manuel Harlan*

[Click here to see the video](#)

[Creation of the image](#)

I remained convinced that Bob being knocked off kilter by the late night phone call was important. When we were rehearsing in Adelaide I decided to return to the image of the poster and developed a crude mechanism to allow Bob to fall slowly forward and then return to upright. We initially researched how Michael Jackson did it in the Smooth Criminal video but found that the mechanism was patented under his name and would be expensive and clumsy for us. The simple option of harness hidden in a pyjama top, a carabiner and some black rope worked best.

Pip's letter

This is an extraordinary moment of honesty from Pip. Not only does it admit her infidelity and the fact that it is with a married man, both of which Fran had guessed, but it also suggests that she thinks there was a time in Fran's life when she might have made the same decision. It even suggests she should have because she became bitter and took that out on her daughter.



Click here to read about this moment in the rehearsal room

Pip admits this to Fran and in doing so risks so much. But somehow she knows Fran will not tell Bob. She risks breaking her father's heart while hinting at knowledge of or even a desire for her mother to have had the affair. There is so much blistering information in this letter but Pip must know that it is safe. Just as Fran knows Pip inside and out, she has come to know her mother the same way. They are one and the same. That breaks Pip's heart in a complex way. She does not want to become like her mother but also laments that her mother never made the choice she has made, resulting in her becoming bitter, angry and emotionally abusive.



Natalie Casey (Pip) and Imogen Stubbs (Fran). Photo Manuel Harlan

Dreams we are sold

The more we looked at the Crewdson images the more we found ourselves talking about a faded dream. The suburban landscape seemed to promise much but deliver little to those trapped within the images.

While chatting about this we were at pains not to judge anyone for falling for such a promise. Each generation chases a dream. Bob and Fran fought for a better life for themselves and their children. Their desire to be debt free would liberate their offspring and give them a life that they never had. Once those children were secure they could then look forward to reaping the rewards of retirement.

BOB. It wasn't meant to be like this... I thought they'd be like us. But better than us. Better versions of us. Better educated. With better jobs. And better prospects. That's what we worked so hard for. Wasn't it? But I thought they'd all live close by. In the same city, at least. In a house they built. Just like us. And that they'd get married to good people. And have kids. Like us. And that we'd put on a barbecue here most Sundays. And there would be all the kids. All the cousins. And that there'd be cricket. And totem tennis. And sleepovers at Nan and Pop's. You know. And engagements. And weddings. Here in this garden. I thought that's what life would be. That's all I ever wanted it to be, Fran.



Richard Mylan (Ben), Ewan Stewart (Bob), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie). Photo Manuel Harlan

Dreams we are sold

The children's generation has the opportunity to travel, either through leisure or work, and to find themselves in jobs that make their parents proud.

This generational tension and the dreams we are all sold became central to *Things I Know To Be True*.

Bob and Fran have entered a kind of deferred living where a life lived well will benefit from a time of relaxation at the end. Certainly Bob has. To be fair, Fran seems much more suspicious of this as she talks of how Bob took the package offered by his employers when made redundant only to find it did not offer much at all. She clings onto work because it keeps her alive and it affords her to be the person she wants to be.

The children have been afforded a different life. They consume now and chase immediate happiness. This tension explodes several times in the play.

FRAN. We spoilt you... You and your sister. We brought you up to think that you can have what you want, you can be what you want. No matter what the cost. Or who it hurts. People like us. Your father and me. The mugs we are. We're just the people we were told to be. And who was I told to be? A mother. Well, I wish I'd never had children.

* * *

BOB. No f*** you! F*** you! F*** you! For bringing this into our home. The opportunities you've been given. To finish school. To go to university. What I could have done with an opportunity like that. But you! You get a degree in accountancy so that you can steal from people. So no! F*** you!

Ultimately, the simple truth of life, that everything dies, puts all the dreams into perspective. When they lose Fran each person's world gets jolted. Pip captures this moment when she dismisses her time in Vancouver as 'whatever this is.'

PIP. I hang up. I pull back the curtains. It's snowing. Everything is white. And suddenly I feel so cold and so far away. Please, God. Not her. I think about phoning him and asking him to come, instead I reach for my laptop and start searching for a flight. And I know that this, whatever this is, is over and that I have to go home.

None of the reactions are as extreme and as poetic as Bob's. In destroying the roses, he recognises that he has been focussing on the wrong thing. He attacks them because they were not only what Fran wanted to get rid of but also what he cherished and valued. To him they meant something – beauty, comfort, stability, safety, respectability? A life well lived? The sign of being good people? Whatever it is, their destruction feels like a tragic epiphany.

All of the siblings could be said to be chasing dreams that their parent's generations cannot comprehend. Pip rejects her family and escapes to Canada with a lover she knows will ultimately reject her. Mark embarks on gender reassignment and seeks a more understanding world outside the family. Ben steals to keep up with what others have. He also idolises his parent's relationship and knows he will always fall short of this perfection. Of course he has no idea of the complexities at the heart of this relationship. The image is just another dream that corrodes and betrays.

Gender Identity

ANDREW BOVELL

It's important that the play is not understood to be about gender and the issues around transition. This is not that play, as such a play would be best written by a person who can speak more directly from the experience.

But the play is about identity as each of the kids are trying to work out who they need to be, rather than who their parents expect them to be. So the emphasis of the drama is on each of the children's struggle to reach for that and the impact it has on the parents. It examines the patterns within the family dynamic in response to crisis. And in Mia's case her particular struggle is around gender identity.

As a society we are in the throws of this really interesting discussion around gender. I have read a lot around the issue and spoken to many people who are directly engaged with it. But I know less about how it affects the families. When a child goes through transition from one gender to another, is it experienced as a loss by the parents or a gain? Is their grief involved? Of course, most people seem to come to terms with the change in the family structure pretty quickly as do Bob and Fran. But for them, this doesn't happen without a degree of pain and questioning.

SCOTT GRAHAM

Gender identity is a very hot and highly political subject in society at the moment as awareness grows. We have tried to be sensitive to this very personal subject and have all undergone awareness training as we wanted to understand the subject from a wide perspective and did not want to be crass or upset anyone. The actress [Rebecca Root](#) led a very interesting and informative session with us where we could ask questions and learn from her experience.

Of course one person's experience is always never more than that but what we were looking for ultimately was not just the correct way to use terminology (as this is fluid and subjective) but to make sure that we were always addressing the issues in a sensitive way.

The production has the privilege of opening up awareness of trans experience to a wider audience.

It was suggested that a trans actor must play the part of Mark Price.

However, it seemed obvious to me that trans actors should be auditioning for ALL the parts and not just for the role of Mark Price.

With the support of casting director Sarah Hughes we worked hard at getting the casting call out far and wide, specifically targeting trans actors. We also opened the casting up to a blind ethnicity approach and saw people from all kinds of backgrounds for every part. My commitment was always to finding the best company for the roles.



Matthew Barker (Mark); Photo Manuel Harlan

What we have is the best cast for the show based on who auditioned. While we may not have a trans actor in any of our roles I have had the privilege of meeting some really talented trans actors and will continue this casting process in the future.

Gender Identity

Mia Price

In the play, we first meet Mia as Mark Price.

Before the end of Act One she reveals to her family that she does not align herself with the biological sex and gender assigned to her at birth. She tells her family that she will be leaving home and is ready to undergo hormone treatment and live as a woman. We see her return home at the end of the play as Mia Price.



Matthew Barker (Mark), Imogen Stubbs (Fran), Ewan Stewart (Bob), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie).
Photo Manuel Harlan

Preparing for the role

Actor, Matthew Barker, shares his creative process.

"It's not the loss or changing of someone to be utterly different, it's their true self coming through"

Matthew Barker (Actor playing Mark Price)

"I did independent research around transgender"

Matthew Barker (Actor playing Mark Price)

There is a wealth of information and resource on the internet about gender identity.

Here are some useful sites:

[NHS Gender dysphoria](#)

[Sparkle](#)

[Gender Spectrum](#)

[Gires](#)

Gender Identity

"From the script there's what facts are presented about the character, things they say about themselves, what people say about them..."

Matthew Barker (Actor playing Mark Price)

INFORMATION MARK GIVES ABOUT HIS GID/TRANSITION

- HE WASN'T GAY / DOESN'T CONSIDER HIMSELF GAY
- HE'S KNOWN FOR 20 YEARS OR SO WHAT FEELS WRONG (FROM ABOUT 12)
- HE'S FOUGHT IT, HIDDEN IT
- IT'S MADE HIM VERY UNHAPPY
- FINISHED FEELING ASHAMED, BUT CLEARLY HAS DONE
- NEVER WANTED TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION (HOPING TO AVOID / DISAPPEAR?)
- BEEN SEEING PSYCHOLOGIST FOR A YEAR
- READY TO START HRT (PRESUMABLY IN A MONTH)
- HASN'T DECIDED ON SURGERY YET. (PRESUMABLY THIS REFERENCE IS VAGINOPLASTY / BREAST IMPLANTS)
- HE'S MADE FRIENDS IN THE LGBT COMMUNITY - IN ADELAIDE MOST LIKELY.
- HE EXPECTS TO SEE SOME CHANGES FROM HRT IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS.

"I'm a big fan of creating a timeline for a character: within the play and the events that have happened prior to the time we meet the character."

Matthew Barker (Actor playing Mark Price)

- PIP - VANCOUVER
- NOV (LAST YEAR) BEN BEGINS STAMMING
 - FEB MARK BEGINS SEEING PSYCHOLOGIST
 - ROSE LEFT FOR EUROPE
 - APR MARK & TAYLOR SPLIT
- EVENTS OF THE PLAY.
- MAY ROSIE RETURNS
 - JUNE
 - JULY
 - AUG
 - SEP PIP SPLITS WITH STEVE (LEAVES VERY SOON)
 - OCT
 - NOV PIP'S LETTER ARRIVES.
 - NOV
 - DEC MARK COMES OUT ("MIDDLE OF WINTER")
 - JAN LEAVES FOR STONEY
 - FEB
 - FEB BEN . FRAN REVEALS SAVINGS TO BOB.
 - MAR
 - APR
 - MAY
 - MAY ROSIE SIGNS UP TO COURSE IN BRISBANE
 - JUNE ROSIE LEAVES FOR BRISBANE. FRAN DIES. WE MEET MIA.
 - JULY
 - AUG



BIBLIOGRAPHY OF INSPIRATION

Inspirations

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*Richard Mylan (Ben), Matthew Barker (Mia),
Natalie Casey (Pip), Kirsty Oswald (Rosie).
Photo Manuel Harlan*

Inspirations

As ever I like to write a bibliography of inspiration. It is not a traditional bibliography as it notes any reference that helped develop our understanding of the play.

Sometimes that reference passed between the creative team and sometimes it was a throwaway remark in the rehearsal room between directors and performers. The reason why this section is important is that it should remind the reader that inspiration can come from anywhere and it all has equal value. Before entering a rehearsal room you should never shut yourself off from the potential for The Simpson's to provide that crucial creative breakthrough. Similarly, it could be that really annoying advert or it could be that third movement of the symphony. It does not matter. You should be open to all and ashamed of none of them.

I have gone into more detail about some of them in Moments in the Rehearsal Room but below is a list of many of the things referenced in the rehearsal room. Each one added to the production and pushed us forward.

Araby, The Dubliners	James Joyce	Short Story
Twilight	Gregory Crewdson	Visual Art
Beneath the Roses	Gregory Grewdson	Visual Art
Mohammed Ali v Sonny Liston	Neil Liefer	Image
Just, Radiohead	Jamie Thrives	Music Video
Ozymandias	Percy Bysshe Shelley	Poem
The Birthday	Chagall	Painting
<u>Witness</u>	Peter Wier	Film
<u>Stop Making Sense</u>	Talking Heads	Film
Krapp's Last Tape	Samuel Beckett	Play
<u>Erased Tapes</u>		Record Label