

state ed

Little Bird

by Nikki Bloom



**STATESA
THEATRE
COMPANY**

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE'S
ADELAIDE
CABARET
= FESTIVAL =
6 - 21 JUNE 2014

duration approx: *70mins (no interval)*
suitable for *Years 9 - 12*
DWS performance followed by a 20 - 30 min Q&A session

**STATE SA
THEATRE
COMPANY**

INDEX

INDEX.....	3
CAST & CREATIVE TEAM	4
PLAYWRIGHT.....	5
NICKI BLOOM	5
DIRECTOR.....	7
GEORDIE BROOKMAN	7
DIRECTOR'S NOTE	8
ACTOR PROFILE.....	10
PAUL CAPSIS.....	10
SYNOPSIS.....	11
PLOT	12
SONG ANALYSIS	14
CHARACTERS	16
THE JUNIPER TREE.....	18
SYNOPSIS	18
THEMES/MORALS	19
FAIRYTALE STYLE	21
DESIGN.....	24
DESIGNERS	26
GEOFF COBHAM	26
COSTUME DESIGN.....	28
AILSA PATERSON	28
DESIGN REFERENCES.....	30
MUSIC DESIGN.....	31
INTERESTING READING.....	32
ESSAY QUESTIONS.....	35
ENGLISH QUESTIONS.....	35
DRAMA QUESTIONS	36
IMMEDIATE REACTIONS.....	37
DESIGN ROLES.....	38
REFERENCES.....	39

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

Writer	Nicki Bloom
Songs and Music by	Quentin Grant & Cameron Goodall
Performer	Paul Capsis
Director	Geordie Brookman
Musical Director	Quentin Grant
Set & Lighting Designer	Geoff Cobham
Costume Designer	Ailsa Paterson
Sound Designer	Jane Rossetto
Associate Lighting Designer	Chris Petridis
Choreographer	Larissa McGowan
Dramaturg	Julian Meyrick
Violin	Belinda Gehlert
Guitars	Dylan Woolcock
Double bass	Harley Gray
Percussion	Jonathan Sickerdick
Stage Manager	Melanie Selwood
Touring Stage Manager	Gabby Hornhardt
Assistant Stage Manager	Alex Hayley
Head Mechanist	Ashley Knight
Head Lighting	Fred Schultz
Head Sound	Mick Jackson
Floor Sound	Jacob Heinze

PLAYWRIGHT

NICKI BLOOM

Nicki Bloom writes plays, poetry and prose.

Nicki Bloom's plays include *Tender*, *Land & Sea*, *Bloodwood* and *The Sun and the Other Stars*. Her adaptations include Ibsen's *Ghosts* and Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, both for STCSA.

Her plays have been produced in Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Albury and New York City. Her plays have been published by Currency Press (*Tender*) and Phoenix Press (*Ghosts*).

Bloom's playwriting awards include the 2006 Adrian Consett Stephen Memorial Prize (*Tender*); the 2007 Inscription Chairman's Award for Best Play (*Tender*); the 2008 Patrick White Playwrights' Award (*Bloodwood*); the 2009 Inscription Playwriting Award (*Bloodwood*); the 2012 Jill Blewett Playwrights' Award (*A Cathedral*); and the 2012 Barbara Hanrahan Fellowship (*The Sun and the Other Stars*). Other awards include the Henry Lawson Prize for Prose.



QUESTIONS FOR THE PLAYWRIGHT

1. What was the starting point for writing this script?

There were a few starting points to this piece. Before anything had been written, Paul Capsis and I spoke about the themes we were interested in exploring and the kind of theatre we wanted to make. We spoke about ideas of gender, transformation, and of something being ancient and new at the one time.

From this conversation, I began re-reading myths and fairytales, and it was a Grimm Brothers fairytale called *'The Juniper Tree'* that sparked for me the idea of a character called Wren, and provided the foundations for the structure of the story.

2. Was the fairytale genre something you've wanted to explore in your writing?

I wanted to access a very direct form of storytelling for this piece, and I wanted the audience to feel an immediate sense of familiarity and connection with the mode of storytelling. With these considerations, and also keeping in mind the themes I was intending to explore, the fairytale genre was the right fit for this piece.

3. Did you look at fairy tale writing conventions such as: formulaic sentences, imagery, journey, strong rhyme, repetitive language when writing this piece?

I looked at how fairy tales function and utilised all the conventions that were useful to my purpose.

4. Some descriptive scenes are made of just words instead of sentences. Does this style have a name or why do you like writing this way?

I don't tend to write in big, bulky sentences that traverse the width of the page. I use the breath patterns inherent in the text to dictate where a new line will fall. This often results in text that appears as a thin column. I find that writing in this fashion assists actors in their breathing and in their intention, which is why I prefer writing in this way.

5. What do you think is the underlying theme to the story and how can students relate to this?

I think the underlying theme is transformation, and how one individual can transform multiple times over the course of a lifetime. Students can relate to this as they will have already experienced one major transformation in their own lives, from that of a child to a teenager, and may have experienced their own personal upheavals as a result of this transformation.

6. You've written some of the lyrics for the songs, but left the rest to the musicians. How difficult is it to allow a lyricist to further the storyline through the song lyrics?

It's rather easy – telling someone what to do is easier than doing it yourself! The script for *Little Bird* came before the lyrics in this instance, but I had a clear idea of where the songs would go, the 'feel' of them, and what they needed to accomplish in narrative terms, so I was able to describe this for the composers.

DIRECTOR

GEORDIE BROOKMAN

Geordie is the Artistic Director of State Theatre Company. Since graduating from Flinders University Drama Centre in 2001 Geordie has directed work around Australia, the UK and Asia. His State Theatre Company directing credits include *The Seagull*, *Maggie Stone*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Speaking In Tongues*, *romeo&juliet*, *Ghosts*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *Ruby Moon* and *Hot Fudge*, *Toy Symphony* (Queensland Theatre Company & State Theatre Company), *Knives In Hens* (Malthouse & State Theatre Company). Other directing credits include *Spring Awakening: The Musical* (Sydney Theatre Company), *Baghdad Wedding* (Belvoir), *Metro Street* (Arts Asia Pacific, Power Arts, Daegu International Musicals Festival and State Theatre Company), *The City and Tender* (nowyesnow), *Marathon*, *Morph*, *Disco Pigs* and *The Return* (Fresh Track), *Tiny Dynamite* (Griffin), *Macbeth* and *The Laramie Project* (AC Arts).



His productions have won or been nominated for Helpmann, Greenroom, Sydney Critics Circle, Adelaide Critics Circle and Curtain Call awards.

He has also worked as a producer, dramaturg, teacher, event director and curator for organisations including the Adelaide Festival, The National Play Festival, University of Wollongong, Australian Theatre for Young People, Australian Fashion Week and Queensland Theatre Company.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As I sit here writing this in the midst of a band rehearsal, and as Paul Capsis adds his extraordinary voice to the swirling music created by Cam and Quincy, I'm struck once again by what a unique and energising experience the creation of new work is. It's been a winding and wonderful road to the stage for *Little Bird* and the production represents exactly the kind of ambitious artistic risk taking that I want the Company to be synonymous with.

The piece feels both old and new, distinctly Australian, yet tapping the global. At its simplest *Little Bird* is a 'finding yourself' story, it looks at how we are often defined by the views of others instead of by our own sense of self worth. It gently touches on the pressure that comes with parental expectations and the largely inflexible definitions our heavily gendered society has created.

It's been a pleasure dipping into the fairy tale form with all its quirks and structures, rules and freedoms. It's allowed the creation of a world of dark wonder. A place where anything can, and hopefully will happen. Amidst the darkness there is light, levity and good old fashioned sparkle arkle. Theatre as it should be, made to be received. Through it all the sense that if there's a concrete conclusion within the piece it's that, in the words of The Beatles, "*All you need is love.*"

It's been a rare treat to work with such a gifted and generous group to create this new piece for the Adelaide Cabaret Festival, enjoy.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DIRECTOR

1. What was your reasoning behind programming a one-man cabaret show?

The main driver behind programming the piece was the idea of Paul Capsis and Nicki Bloom as a creative combination. They were two artists I thought would collaborate in a really unique way. We were also keen to work with the cabaret festival, as the Company hasn't done that before.

2. Why was Paul Capsis your choice for this role?

Paul wasn't so much a choice for the role, as the role was written for Paul. He's been there since the beginning with this piece. We were keen to work with him because he brings a completely unique set of skills to the table.

3. For a new work, the development week is essential in refining the script. As a director, what do you take away from this process?

This piece has been through two different development periods and they have both been very important in terms of refining the ideas in the piece, but in particular in finding the best way to connect the words and the music.

4. Rehearsing a cabaret piece that is, theatre crossed with music, creates many challenges, what are the main challenges and how do you resolve them?

I guess I'm not really thinking about it as a cabaret piece. I don't really separate my work into genres. In my eyes it's a piece of theatre that happens to have a number of songs in it. The challenge when working with music is always about balancing the two elements and making the transitions from text to music as smooth as possible.

5. The set design is like a character in itself. Where was the starting point for you when talking to Geoff?

The set is kind of like a character. Or a suggestion of a world I suppose. Geoff and I always start by talking about the world and atmosphere that needs to be created and then progress by talking about the different phases of the show. In terms of this piece we've identified 4 central landscapes that we've realised through relatively abstract suggestion.

6. The music is such an important element of the overall production. Where was the starting point for you when talking to Quentin and Cameron?

Cam, Quincy, Nicki, Paul and I talked about different feels and types of music and concentrated on what would best showcase Paul's voice. Nicki wrote a brief for each song which gave Cam and Quincy a starting point.

7. What do you think the underlying theme to the story is and how can students relate to this?

I think at its most simple the piece is about finding yourself, coming to peace with who you are and how you're parents have influenced your lives. Something that everyone can relate to!

ACTOR PROFILE

PAUL CAPSIS

Spanning an extensive career, Paul Capsis has probably been best known as a performer of theatre, concert and cabaret. A well seasoned Adelaide Cabaret Festival performer, *Little Bird* is Paul's second production for State Theatre Company. Theatre highlights include: *Angela's Kitchen* (his co-written solo piece), *Pinocchio*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Boulevard Delirium*, *Three Furies*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, *All About My Mother*, *Thyestes* and *Volpone* with various state and independent theatre companies throughout Australia. Paul has worked extensively internationally, his favourites being New York, London, Vienna, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Paul Capsis appeared in a leading role in the recently released Australian feature film, *The Boy Castaways*. His debut feature film acting role in 1998 was the groundbreaking Australian film *Head On*. Paul has also appeared in several short films, including *Let Me Die Again* (1997) and *Oscars First Kiss* (2009) as well as the telemovie *Carlotta* (2013) and the online series *I Luv U But* (2014). Capsis' vocals featured on the soundtrack of the hit television series *Underbelly: Badness* (2012) and the award winning short film *Franswa Charl* (2009).

Paul has recorded four albums and is a popular guest for various television programs. Award highlights include: Five Helpmann awards, including in 2012 Best Actor in a Play (for *Angela's Kitchen*), Greenroom award, Film Critics Circle Award and the 2010 Sidney Myer Individual Performing Arts Award

PAUL CAPSIS TALKS ABOUT *LITTLE BIRD*

Little Bird is a piece about transformation. It's a theatre music piece, not a traditional cabaret show, it's a fairy tale and I'm embodying a number of songs with a band onstage.

What is it like to have a piece of music written especially for you?

It's an incredible honour. They've got me singing in a particular way and using my range. I really like Cameron & Quentin's music; they've got a great energy and a broad range of music. Rock n roll, punk, 'Joy Division' - a bit of classic, very original, very unique.

SYNOPSIS

The lives of a young couple, heartsick at not being able to have children, are changed in an instant when they magically fall pregnant. Nine months later their very own little bird, a boy named Wren, is born. As Wren grows, their idyllic existence starts to fray at the edges, and one day Wren returns home from school to find his mother gone and his father grief stricken and silent. Frustrated by his father's inertia, Wren leaves his home, determined to make a new life for himself, and possibly even find his mother.

On the verge of exhaustion, Wren collapses on a stranger's doorstep. The girl who lives in the house takes care of him, loves him, and marries him. Wren lives as the girl's dutiful husband. Years pass. Wren gradually realises that this existence is as false to him as the previous life he lived with his father was, and once again he leaves his home, hoping to start again, and to one day find his mother.

He arrives destitute in the big city, and is taken in by Rocky, a bearded, dress-wearing ex-woodcutter. Under Rocky's influence, Wren becomes a woman. Years pass. Again Wren begins to realise that this existence is as false as the others have been, and despite his journeying and the progression of so many years, he is no closer to finding his mother.

Rejected by Rocky and utterly alone, Wren seizes one last opportunity to find out who he is and where his mother might be...

PLOT

The Narrator begins;

*"I want to tell you a story. Once upon a time, not so long ago.
I knew a boy. There was a boy. There once was a boy.
Stop. Wait. Before that. His mother. His father."*

A couple is desperate to have a child, *"Just one child and I'd be happy, I would leach the tears from my eyes. Hack the hair from my head. Spill the blood from my veins. Anything for a child."* They magically fall pregnant and nine months later their very own little bird, a boy named Wren, is born. *"Little Bird, we love you whoever you are."*

Time passes and the family is happy. The mother loves Wren, of course she does, but, there's *"something she can't quite put her finger on."* They follow a daily routine. The father works, leaving early and coming home late, Wren at school, the mother at home baking.

One day Wren returns home from school to find his mother gone and his father grief stricken and silent. *"Where is his dinner? There's nothing on the table. The fire's not lit. It's so cold in here. Swamped by the darkness. The birds have stopped singing. The snow falls steady. It is the quietest place in the world."* Wren doesn't know whether his mother has died or left them. Years pass before his father tells him, *"She died of happiness."*

Dejected by his father and distraught at the loss of his mother, Wren runs away. He runs through the forest and eventually falls exhausted at the door of a girl. She takes Wren in and looks after him, falling in love with him and marrying him. He falls into a melancholy routine of working during the day and dancing at night. The years pass. One day he realizes that he can't be this person anymore, and once again runs away.

He arrives destitute in the big city, and falls dejected into the gutter, tired from his journey. A bearded, dress-wearing ex-woodcutter, Rocky, finds Wren and takes him in;

*"He washed my hair and curled it
Cleaned my up
Styled me
Gave me shoes.
Red, high and glittery."*

We find out that the woodcutter was the seventh son in his family and his mother was delighted when he started wearing dresses, *"A doll! A princess! Handbags! Tiaras! Feather boas!"* His Dad unimpressed by his cross-dressing, and tells him to take off her dress and cut trees. Rocky replies, *"I ain't taking off this dress boys, I am not gonna take off this dress."*

Years pass and again Wren begins to realise that he has been changed into a woman, but this existence is as false as the others have been. He becomes weak and frail and tells Rocky to give up on him and return him to the gutter. Rocky slams the door in his face.

Rejected and utterly alone, Wren finds a card with the name *Susannah's*. On the back is a picture of his mother, *"Hair black as coal, skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood."* Entering *Susannah's* he walks down the long mystical corridor seeing various images; firstly of Rocky, in a full beard, dress, boots and

an axe dangling from one hand; then the girl sitting on an empty bed; before it switches to his father on the rocking chair; before finally seeing his mother and an impression of what might have happened to her. Wren comes out of *Susannah's* finally understanding himself and his place in the world and as he sings, "*Mother dear. I've been finding myself for to find you.*" He becomes a bird.

Wren returns to Rocky and asks him to keep him company on his journey home. They find the girl, older than before. Rocky and the girl fall in love and the chain that she placed around Wren's neck falls off. Wren returns to his home, "*The house is the same as it ever was.*" His father is still there in the rocking chair. Wren has come full circle, discovered who he was and in the process, forgiven his mother and father. Years pass.

SONG ANALYSIS

1. Lullaby

Is the song that Wren's father and mother sing to him as a baby and as he grows. The lullaby acts as a continual motif throughout the play as a reminder of his past; in memory of his mother and again when he finds his way home. *"Little bird, we love you whoever you are."*

2. For So Long

Wren's mother sings this song to Wren as he grows. It's about her love for him. It's almost prophetic though, as although she loves her son, she feels something missing. *"But only for so long."*

3. Where's Mama?

Wren comes home from school to find that his mother has gone. This song questions his father about where she is, but his father stays silent.

*Where's mama?
Through the door, down the path out the gate
She just left?
Was it me? What did I do?
Or you, did you do something wrong?*

4. There's a Ghost in This Place

Finally Wren's father tells him that his mother died of happiness. This song envelopes the emotion Wren feels over losing his mother and the isolation and dejection from his father;

*"Now there's a lump in my throat the size of a fist
Cos crying is something I'm trying to resist.
And I'm dying inside and I'm hiding a list
Of all the opportunities missed."*

It ends with Wren's decision to leave home and look for his mother;

*"I may not find her but I will find a place
Where there isn't this stifling nothing embrace
And your rocking chair rocking and that look on your face
And you staring at me like you are hating the trace
Of her smile in my aspect just haunting this place
And your rocking chair rocking and replacing the space
Of her chasing the sadness away from this place and I'm done. I'm done. I run."*

5. The Girl Said to the Wind

The song is about Wren's wedding day. The girl is extremely happy to be getting married, but Wren is unsure and just wants to fly away.

*"The boy said to the sky
I really want to go
But she's so full of joy
How can I say no?"*

6. Cats and Rats

Rocky sings this song to Wren when he finds him in the gutter. He warns Wren of the dangers, *"There are cats and rats and snakes all looking for flesh."* This is where Rocky takes him under his wing and looks after him.

7. The Woodcutter Song

Rocky and Wren talk about their parents and this song reflects Rocky's childhood and being the seventh son, but wanting to wear a dress. This song really reflects Rocky's desire to be who he is, insisting on wearing a dress, even in this heavily male dominated family with traditional values.

8. Susannah's

Wren visits *Susannah's* where he discovers who he is and that he needs to be true to himself. *"Who is that boy who ran so hard, and ran so far, alone?"* As Wren sings his song of discovery he becomes a bird.

*"Yes I was that boy who became that man,
Who lived as a woman and ran and ran.
I will run no more, be what I was before,
Become my mother's little bird.
Become what I always was.
And always will be.
My mother's little bird."*

9. The Sun Has Shone

Wren has finished his journey and returned home to find his father in the rocking chair in which he left him. He takes care of his father, but soon his father dies. Wren sings this song to his father.

*"You've been crying so long,
A long sad song for so long,
Let go now, let the gentle wind
Take you to where she is resting
Just hold her hand and sleep with her
For so long, for so long."*

CHARACTERS

Little Bird is a one-man show with Paul Capsis assuming the role all of the following characters.

NARRATOR

The narrator begins the tale of *Little Bird*. This character is crucial for furthering the story, even though it is clear as he tells the story that he is the character, Wren. As a narrator, he is able to use imagery when he tells the story of Wren, become Wren, but also be an outside observer, helping the audience connect to the story.

WREN

Is the 'little bird' in the story. He starts as a young boy surrounded by loving parents. The family falls into a familiar routine and Wren goes to school, coming home one day to find his mother has gone. Years pass without Wren knowing what happened to her and his sorrow and her haunting presence push him to leave home.

Through his journey he meets a girl and then Rocky. Both of these characters try to change him into something he's not; a husband, a family man, a woman. Losing himself in each of these environments he eventually breaks free and runs away.

It is not until he visits Susannah's that he begins to truly understand his quest and himself. The song *Susannah's* sums up his journey and his awakening.

*"How many false faiths and how many fake-cures?
How many denials, how many new shapes?
How many promises, how many mistakes,
How many new versions of me?
How many versions, none of them free."*

Wren completes his journey returning home, finding his home and his father how he left them and forgiving him and his mother in the process.

DAD

Wren's father works, leaving home early and returning late every day. He chops wood in the forest and pushes paper in an office. He is overwhelmed with grief from the loss of his wife and sits in the rocking chair in silence, distancing himself from the world and from Wren.

When Wren returns his father is still in the rocking chair, but Wren reminds him of the past by singing the *Little Bird* lullaby. He dies an old man. Wren says, *"You died of happiness."*

MUM

Wren's mother was desperate to have a child and offered, *"The tears from my eyes, hack the hair from my head, spill the blood from my veins. Anything for a child."* When her little bird is born she draws him close and loves him. Keeps him warm, rocks and feeds him.

"She loves him. Of course she loves him. But something else. Something she can't quite put her finger on."

She stays at home, believing it to be best for the child, but her routine is mundane and she, *"watches her hair fade to silver."* The day she leaves she pares Wren an apple, but *"the knife slips and blood pools on her fingertip."* When Wren returns home from school his mother is gone. He doesn't know whether

she's left him, or has died and it is years before his dad says, *"She didn't leave. She died, Wren. Happiness. She died of happiness."*

She leaves behind many unanswered questions, a shattered husband and a confused child, who tries to find her in everything he does. It isn't until Wren's finds himself at Susannah's that we get a glimpse into what might have happened to her;

"The snow begins to fall on the field by the tree and underneath the tree on her knees is my mother, her golden hair around her neck, a knife in her hand and screaming at the sky she slits her skin, red blood spurts over the white snow, the tree stands sentinel. Her scream softens. She smiles. She stands. She is so young. She looks upwards. Stretches out her arms, waiting to welcome something to them – a V of birds traces the sky. And a feather falls."

GIRL

Wren meets the girl when he first runs away from home. She takes him in and looks after him. At first, she is similar to his mother, baking, singing and dancing, he wants to find his mother in her. But she is not familiar. Wren describes her, *"She carries her loneliness like a blanket. She talks too much. She is too kind. She is too eager for company. She is not my mother. She's warm."*

The girl looks after the house, baking and keeping the home warm while Wren goes out to work as a wood-cutter. The girl marries Wren, putting a gold chain around his neck. The years pass together before Wren gets the courage to leave.

Wren meets the girl again on his way home. She is older, but she is still alone. She falls in love with Rocky and the two of them marry and have children. *"As if they'd both always lived there."*

ROCKY

Rocky is a rough wood cutter, *"with boots, legs like tree trunks, hair so long and thick you could braid it. Voice like a woodcutter... Beard like a woodcutter. Eyes of a girl."*

He finds Wren in the gutter and takes him in, protects him against the world. He introduces Wren to the city and the world of drag queens, dressing him in a skirt, red high shoes and curling his hair. Rocky is the seventh son in his family, so his mother was delighted when he started wearing dresses and wanted to pluck his hair and dress him like a princess. Although he likes wearing dresses, Rocky knows that he is a man and defies his mother by becoming a wood cutter and his father by wearing a dress.

He truly knows who his is and isn't afraid of what the world thinks of him.

*"For a man can be multiple things boys
Yes a man can be multiple things
A man can be mulish and dogged
Be both grounded and gifted with wings*

*Yes a man can be brutal and bloody
Cut a figure of red-bloodedness
Yes a man can be stout-hearted, bearded and blue
And still do it while wearing a dress!"*

THE JUNIPER TREE

The Juniper Tree by the Brothers Grimm was the inspiration behind the story of *Little Bird*.

SYNOPSIS

A woman wishes for a child as red as blood and as white as snow. Towards the end of her pregnancy, she knows she is about to die, so she requests that she be buried under a juniper tree that her family has outside, as that is where she wished for the miracle child. After a few months she gives birth to a son and dies a few days later. She is buried beneath underneath the Juniper tree.

Her husband grieves for a long time, but years pass and he marries again. His second wife gives birth to a daughter, Marlinchen, but hates the son because he would be the one to inherit all the family's money, and she wishes it to be her daughter. One day, she offers Marlinchen an apple and she graciously accepts it. Then she has an evil thought and cruelly offers the boy one. As he reaches in a box to get it, she slams the box's heavy lid on him, beheading him. She then takes a bandage and ties his head back to his body, and tells Marlinchen to ask him for the apple, and if he doesn't give it, to give him a good box on the ear. Marlinchen kindly asks for the apple, and then boxes him on the ear, resulting in the boy's head falling off.

Marlinchen goes to her mother and tells her in sobs that she killed her brother. Her mother reassures Marlinchen and they both agree not to tell the father. Marlinchen cannot stop weeping. When the father returns the step mother says the boy has 'gone to stay with his uncle'. The father is upset that the boy did not say goodbye. The stepmother then turns the boy's body into a stew, and in some other versions, black sausages, without anyone knowing apart from her and Marlinchen. The father eats the stew, suspecting nothing, and declares it delicious. Marlinchen, however, keeps the bones left over from the meal and buries them beneath the Juniper tree.

A beautiful bird flies out of the tree. It sings a song to a goldsmith about its cruel death at the hands of its mother and how caring his sister is. The goldsmith gives the bird a golden chain because the song is so beautiful.

The bird sings the same song to a shoemaker, who gives it a pair of red shoes, and to a miller, who gives the bird a millstone. It then flies back home and sings its song. The father goes out to see what is singing such a beautiful song and the golden chain falls about his neck. The father tells everyone that a beautiful bird gave him a chain.

It sings again and Marlinchen goes out to see if this is true, and the red shoes fall to her. She comes in giggling happily and tells everyone how happy she is with what the bird has given her. All this time the stepmother is complaining of heat, claiming she has a horrid fire burning in her veins.

It sings a third time, the stepmother goes out, hoping for relief, and the bird drops the millstone on her, crushing and killing her. The father and Marlinchen go out to see what caused the loud crash, but find nothing but a swirl of smoke and a stone. The brother is standing there, looking happy, and they all go inside for dinner.



Read the full story here; <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm047.html>

THEMES/MORALS

BE TRUE TO YOURSELF/ HAPPINESS IS FOUND WITHIN

Wren leaves home thinking that he has disappointed his mother and father. Along the way he meets the girl, who chains him, marries him and makes him work. After running away, he meets Rocky, who dresses him up, does his hair and parades him around. Still unhappy, he leaves Rocky, *"At last, Release. I don't have to be anything anymore."*

It isn't until after his spiritual journey in *Susannah's* that he finds inner strength and happiness and feels he can return home to his father.

Throughout all his transitions in the story, the moral remains - be true to yourself, only then can you be truly happy and find peace.

*"How many false faiths and how many fake-cures?
How many denials, how many new shapes?
How many promises, how many mistakes,
How many versions, none of them free."*

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

A similar theme again to above. The journeys you take, the places you go and the experiences you have mean nothing without love. Finding how to love himself, forgiving his family and loving them brings Wren back home where he is finally at peace and feels complete.

TRANSFORMATION

The underlying theme is transformation, and how one individual can transform multiple times over the course of a lifetime. There's transformation from wanting a child to having a child, being a boy to becoming a man. Wren makes many transitions, sometimes led by other people. The girl transforms him into a husband and companion and chains him to her. It takes years before he has the will to leave, *"I can't do this. I can't do this anymore."*

Rocky finds Wren and once again is changed into something he's not, *"He's tried his hardest to turn me into something beautiful. Something for him. A woman. But. Something's not right."* Even though he realizes what's happening it is a while before he leaves, running away, ending up back in the gutter.

Inside *Susannah's* Wren doesn't see himself in the mirror because he's gone through so many changes. A vision appears before him first of Rocky, then the girl his father and finally, his mother. It isn't until this moment that Wren makes his final transformation and becomes a man, symbolized by the wings of the bird and he finds peace in himself.

EVIL

"You won't survive here, Little Bird. You're not tough enough."

Unlike traditional fairy tales where there is usually an evil character, evil in *Little Bird* is portrayed by the big city. *"There it is. Monumental. Spread before me. Tall buildings and Subways. Trains and roads and lights flickering. Shopfronts and lamp posts and stairwells. Beggars and schoolgirls and men in suits and somebody knocks me."*

When Wren first arrives he finds himself in the gutter being trampled and is scared, alone and unsure of what will happen. After he leaves Rocky, he goes back into this world and feels crushed by its oppression.

*"I sink into the gutter.
Nestle my brittle body in among the dry leave
Wait to be devoured."*

Wren finds a glimmer of hope when he sees the card for *Susannah's*. This helps him pick himself up and continue on his journey.

JOURNEY

The character of Wren feels he is missing something in his life and takes his journey of discovery. He leaves home feeling rejected and empty and falls into each new chapter, with the girl, and then with Rocky, and is easily led into this new life. It isn't until he releases himself from Rocky that he discovers *Susannah's* - a dream-like place where;

*'You may think you know
what you're looking for
We know better
We exist to assist.'*

In *Susannah's* he sees his mother, golden haired with a knife in her hand. She slits her skin and red blood spills over the white snow. She embraces him, and he finds who his is and transforms into a metaphoric bird. Completing his transformation he feels at peace and is able to go home and end his journey.

REACHING PARENTS' IDEALS

Wren leaves home thinking that he has disappointed both his mother and father. So much so, that his mother left him and his father is silent and inattentive. He searches for his mother, but also for something he feels is missing within himself. Eventually he sees an illusion of his mother and realises that he is their 'little bird' and was loved for who he was. When he returns home his father is overjoyed and dies of happiness that his son has returned to him.

Rocky is the seventh son in a traditional, conservative family. His mother is disappointed that she didn't have a girl, until Rocky starts wearing a dress. She finally feels like she has a daughter and loves dressing him up until at puberty he declares he likes the burgeoning hair on his face, arms and legs. Sending him away he finds his brothers and father cutting down trees in the forest. He picks up an axe and starts swinging. His father has always been disappointed in Rocky and is relieved when Rocky joins them in the forest, although he doesn't approve of Rocky wearing a dress. But Rocky is true to himself and defies his father. Rocky finally finds his true home when he meets the girl. He becomes a woodcutter again and has a family of his own, all the while remaining true to his gender expression and identity.

FAIRYTALE STYLE

FAIRYTALE CONVENTIONS

Fairy tales capture our imagination by creating worlds of supernatural, good versus evil and true love. Traditionally fairy tales focus on themes dealing with life's important issues and their narrative structures are based on a quest or a journey. Characters are represented as good, evil, hero, villain, strong, weak, foolish or wise.

Fairy tales are written creating a rich, dynamic story world with mystical and surreal elements.

PLOT & STRUCTURE

The setting and details about events in fairy tales are nearly always vague; 'Once upon a time', or 'A long time ago...' The story of *Little Bird* begins with, "Once upon a time. Not so long ago."

Stories tell the adventures of people and can include the use of magic and fanciful creatures. Enchantments are common and rule-breaking has consequences. Whilst there are no magic or mythical creatures in *Little Bird*, there is an enchantment of sorts when Wren goes to *Susannah's*. This place is dream-like where visions appear of your past and your future. Although there are no mythical creatures, the character of the Wood cutter, Rocky, is very stylised, and dressed as a drag queen, he is comparable to a fairy godmother.

Often the hero is searching for something, a home, love, acceptance, often with happy endings. But some fairytales are darker, with sad endings, particularly the Hans Christian Anderson and Brothers Grimm stories. *Little Bird* has the character of Wren going on a journey searching for something that is missing. Whilst the story comes full circle and Wren ends up where he starts, it is a dark journey of discovery.

FAIRYTALE THEMES

Traditional fairy tales use themes of:

- Good and evil
- Weak and strong
- Old and young
- Beautiful and ugly
- Mean and generous
- Family/home and stranger
- Rich and poor

Little Bird touches on most of these themes, including references to become older. His mother, "She sits in front of the mirror all day. Watching her hair fade to silver." And again when he returns to see the girl, "She was older. Much older. She recognised me. She said I hadn't aged a day."

CHARACTERS

Fairy tale characters usually include heroes, villains, mentors, tricksters, kings and queens, knights and ladies, poor farmers, youngest sons and wise old women. The main character is often humble and melancholy. *Little Bird's* main character Wren, is indeed humble and melancholy and on a journey, trying to find a better life.

The villain is represented in the city and at times Wren himself, as he allows people to change and shape him for their own needs. *Susannah's* is representative of the wise old woman who gives him

insight into who he is and what he needs. Rocky is like a *Cinderella's* fairy godmother who looks after him and provides him with a dress and shoes and shows him off to the world.

LANGUAGE

Fairytales use repetitive, rhythmic and patterned language throughout their stories. Rhyme, alliteration, assonance, simile, metaphors, symbolism, formulaic sentences and spells are also used throughout the fairytale style. *Little Bird* uses a number of these conventions throughout the script.

- **Formulaic sentences;** "*Once upon a time. Not so long ago,*" "*I want to tell you a story,*" "*Seasons pass.*" These are used to create a vague sense of time and setting.
- **Repeating phrases** can create an emphasis or give a theatrical or magical effect. The lullaby, *Little Bird* is like a chant representing a family's love.

*Little bird we love you whoever you are
Little bird we love you whoever you are
Little bird we love you whoever you are*

- **Imagery** to reflect the setting;

*"In a field of snow, underneath a tree.
By the front gate
At the end of the path
Leading up to the cottage"*

"Down the path, past the tree, through the gate and away down the road."

*"The path, the gate, the road.
The snow, the grit, the forest
The rive, the mud, the vines
The dark, the cold, the shadows"*

- **Patterned and Rhythmical language** is used to create atmosphere and a sense of urgency, in the following excerpt it is driving us forward as the character Wren runs away from home.

*I run
The snow driving at my heels
I run
The grit burning in my eyes
I run
The forest clawing at my chest
I run
The river roaring in my ears
I run
The mud pulling at my legs
I run
The vines tangling up my limbs
I run
The dark bearing down on me
I run
The cold cracking all my bones
I run
The shadows growing in my mind
I run*

- **Rhyme** is used throughout many of the songs eg. The Woodcutter's song

*Well I know that you struggle to grasp this
It's something you plainly detest
That I pick up this axe and I hack with the best
And I do it while wearing a dress*

*I am practiced in axing these trees down
And I'm practiced in mercilessness
I will not be a victim of nothing, my brothers
I will not be removing this dress*

DESIGN

The set design unfolds in a series of stages. There are 4 major locations or chapters. The narrator begins with the story of the young boy Wren in a cottage on top of a snowy hillside. The set is a white box like a blank canvas, onto which lighting patterns are projected. As the story progresses and the conflict begins, the box seems to crack open, symbolic of the cracks appearing in Wren's life. It finally breaks open and collapses when his father says, "*Your mother died of happiness.*"

Behind this, a forest of two dimensional faux green felt trees rises up. Through these trees we get the first true sense of a fairytale. Shadows and silhouettes are formed from lighting to reveal the girl's house, 2nd chapter, where Wren collapses.

The 3rd chapter is in the city and the trees drop to the floor as rectangular structures fly in to represent the brutal cityscape. In the city Wren meets Rocky, a bearded man in a dress who chops trees who shows him the city.

Wren leaves Rocky and finds *Susannah's* - a place to face your fears. An enormous net comes over the stage creating a cave, almost representative of a womb. The netting is deep red, but lighting can change the colour as needed. In *Susannah's* Wren faces his fears and discovers who he is and once this is complete, two nets like wings pull up from the floor connected to Wren, representing him becoming a man - soaring like a bird.

Wren returns home to make peace with his father. As he returns, objects start to disappear and the original white box representing his home returns. However, this time, in the background remain the wings.

COSTUMES

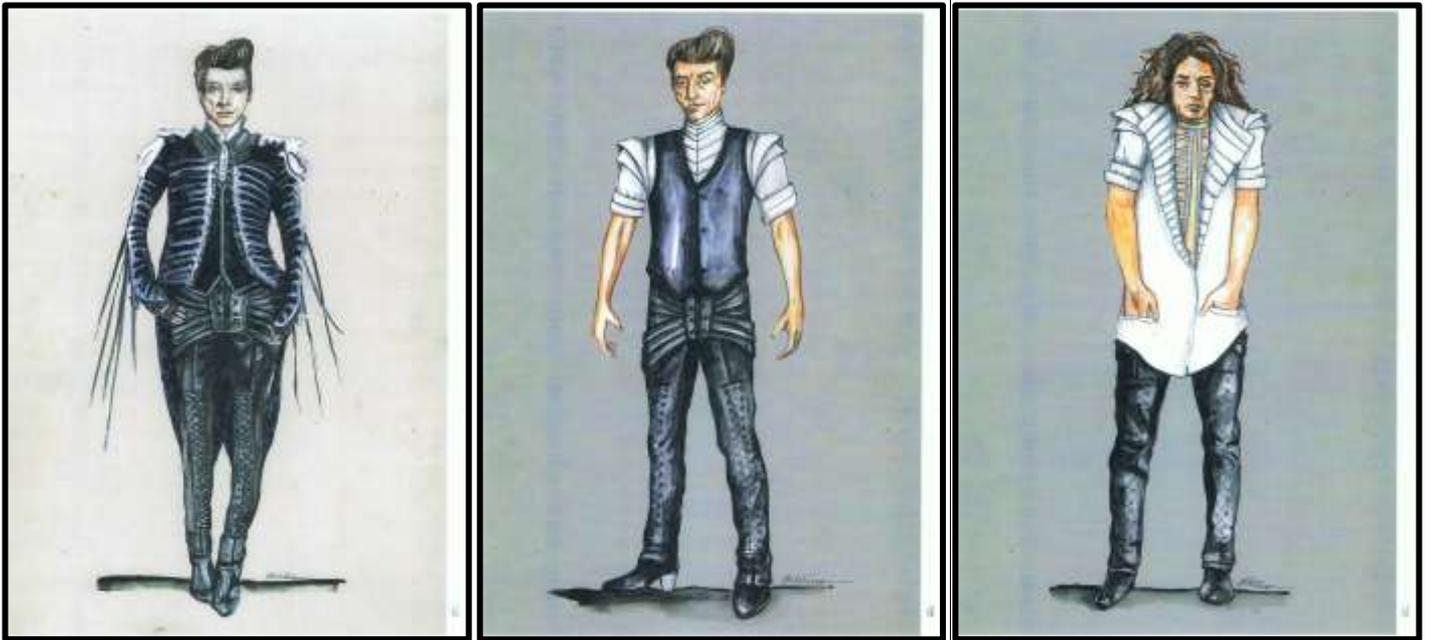
There were many difficulties in costuming for one person who is onstage the whole show, but who transitions through the four stages. To help with the changes a series of layered clothes has gone into the design. Initially using references to the designer Karl Lagerfeld and the aggressively masculine, but highly fashioned way in which he dresses, Costume Designer, Ailsa Paterson also looked at David Bowie's dress, particularly from the album, 'The Thin White Duke'.

FIRST FORM

The first costume takes on the form of a gothic storytelling world, with a skeleton jacket, showing rib structures, like the bones of a bird's wings.

SECOND FORM

The second form becomes more masculine where the jacket is taken off revealing a waistcoat.



© Ailsa Paterson 2014

THIRD FORM

In the big city Wren's waistcoat is gone and his costume softens and becomes more feminine with a tunic shirt.

FOURTH FORM

The final and most vulnerable stage shows Wren wearing silver leather style straps, whilst still remaining feminine.

The band in the pit is also dressed in a similar style to the *'Tiger Lillies'* - a three-piece London band who dress in a theatrical vaudeville style.

SET DESIGN

GEOFF COBHAM

Set Designer and Lighting Designer

Geoff is a State Theatre Company Artistic Associate (Design and Production) and has worked as a Production Manager, Lighting Designer, Set Designer, Event Producer and Venue Designer.

His recent Set & Lighting Design for State Theatre Company include *The Seagull*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Kruetzer Sonata*. Other Set & Lighting Design credits include *Never Did Me Any Harm*, *Not In A Million Years*, *The Age I'm In*, *Already Elsewhere*, *Same Same but Different* (Force Majeure), *Construct* (Tanja Leidtke), *Ode to Nonsense*, *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy*, *Wolf*, *Man Covets Bird* (Slingsby) *Fastest Boy*, *Emily Loves to Bounce*, *Me and My Shadow* (Patch Theatre), *The Flying Dutchman* (State Opera of South Australia)



His recent Lighting Design credits for State Theatre Company include, *Neighbourhood Watch*, *Babyteeth*, *Pinocchio* (Windmill Theatre and State Theatre Company), *Speaking in Tongues*, *romeo&juliet*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *Metro Street*, *The Goat*, *Night Letters*. Other Lighting Design Credits include *G*, *Vocabulary*, *Nothing* (Australian Dance Theatre), *Beetle Graduation*, *Skip Miller*, *The Hypochondriac*, *Drums in the Night*, *This Uncharted Hour*, *The Duckshooter* (Brink Productions), *Not according to plan*, *Impulse*, *Satyagraha*, *Einstein on the Beach Pt 1&2*, *Quick Brown Fox*, *Akhnaten* (Leigh Warren & Dancers), *Salt*, *Landmark*, *Rebel Rebel*, *Starry Eyed*, *In The Blood* (Restless Dance Theatre), *Plop*, *The Wizard of Oz* (Windmill Theatre).

He has produced many outdoor events and clubs for Festivals and received a Churchill fellowship in 2010 to study outdoor theatre in Europe.

QUESTIONS FOR SET DESIGNER & LIGHTING DESIGNER

1. What is the significance of the white box at the beginning of the show and why does it return to this state at the end?

The white box is a device to allow us to introduce the persona of the narrator/central character in a neutral setting; a sort of limbo. The very plain palette of this space and the very limited scale will be in direct opposition to the massive rich endless world of the net. We bring the story back to the personal singular at the end and the closing of the box supports this and again focusses the audience on the narrator.

2. The use of the netting to visually create wings is inspired. Why was this material chosen in the final design?

The net provides an abstract representation of wings, allowing me to ripple colour and movement through the net to animate the wings. Without something in the air like smoke you cannot see light, the net acts like smoke... it is basically a light catcher.

3. The design is very fairytale-esque. What were your influences in designing this space?

Yes, the design takes influence from the gothic works of Tim Burton, the bizarre heightened romance of *Pierre et Gilles* and the amazing sculptural work of Anish Kapoor.

4. What are some of the considerations you took into account before arriving at your final design with the four states?

The four “installations” or phases of the set are markers for the audience to key them into the emotional changes in the narrative. Geordie and I try to let our instincts guide us to find the correct emotional landscape to create the feeling that each section of the play has. Each atmospherical world we create should trigger a feeling or emotion a bit like the way smell often triggers a deep memory of place and time.

5. You have a lighting background, does this influence that way you design your sets and therefore does it become a part of the set design?

It influences everything I design... perhaps my sets are just things to catch light!

6. What should students draw on and take away from the set design to help them in their designing endeavours?

Keep it simple and be brave. Concentrate on the emotion not the literal.

COSTUME DESIGN

AILS A PATERSON

Costume Designer

Ailsa completed the Bachelor of Dramatic Art in Design (NIDA) in 2003.

Set and Costume Design credits for State Theatre Company include *Hedda Gabler* (Associate Set Design), *In the Next Room or The Vibrator Play*, *War Mother*, *The Ham Funeral*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, *The Price* and *The Cripple of Inishmaan*. Costume Design credits include *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters*.

Other theatre design credits include *Seminar* and *Skylight* (Ensemble), *You, Me and the Bloody Sea* (Adelaide Cabaret Festival 2013), *Ode to Nonsense* (Costume Design, Slingsby/State Opera of SA, *Shining City* (Griffin Theatre Company), *Hansel and Gretel* and *La Sonnambula* (Pacific Opera), *Faustus* and *Madame Melville* (BSharp), *Vampirella*, *The Internationalist* and *Bone* (Darlinghurst Theatre), *A Couple of Blaguards* (Seymour Centre/Comedy Theatre), *Shifted* (Sydney Dance Company) and *Debris* (Old Fitz /Melbourne Fringe). Ailsa worked in costume on *The Straits* (ABC), *LAID* (ABC), *Underbelly — A Tale of Two Cities*, *Underbelly — The Golden Mile*, *Blue Water High*, *The Last Confession of Alexander Pearce*, *Ten Empty*, *The Boy from Oz Arena Spectacular*, *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert The Musical* and *High School Musical*.



Ailsa received the 2011 Mike Walsh Fellowship.

QUESTIONS FOR THE COSTUME DESIGNER

1. What are the challenges of a one-man production in terms of costuming?

A one-man production creates both challenges and wonderful opportunities for costume design. We have the ability to create an incredibly detailed costume, constructed in the manner of an operatic garment in terms of complexity and labour. The challenge for *Little Bird* is to design a costume that can represent a range of identities, ranging from a gothic storyteller figure, to a woman, a man, a child, a bird, a woodcutter, a nightclub singer and others. The costume needs to suggest all of these things, and yet Paul never leaves the stage, so any transitions or changes must occur in full view of the audience and very quickly.

The piece is quite physical, and requires freedom of movement and no vocal constraints. Furthermore, the audience is looking at the same outfit for the entire show and so there needs to be a maintained interest through unexpected changes or complexity of fabric, texture and embellishment. On a technical level, Paul is also required to wear three microphone packs and so I needed to design a way to conceal these within the costume also.

2. You use layering in your design, is there a symbolic meaning behind this choice?

The use of layering in the costume design is highly symbolic. *Little Bird* is a complicated fairytale. There are themes of shedding and renewal. The piece is a series of episodes, each with a very different feel and texture. There is a suggestion that Paul is a bird who is molting, who is transitioning from something fluffy to something sleek. The use of layering is a way to symbolize the shedding process, as each layer is discarded we are presented with a different identity or version of the character.

As the layers are discarded we are gradually revealing the core of the man beneath, he is exposed and vulnerable and it is only in that form that he is able to ascend into a magical plane.

3. Black is the predominant palette used in your design, what is the reasoning behind this choice?

The initial version of the costume is predominately black. As the play progresses, this strong color is desaturated by the revelation of white and silver layers beneath. The black is a choice we have made to reflect the strong gothic storyteller who is first presented to us. There is a simplicity and strength to the lines of his costume and the color choice needed to be equally bold and striking. It will become apparent that the garments are not purely black – I have selected very particular fabrics with amazing texture and layering, and we are applying very detailed trim in white and silver and black. The initial tail coat is in fact a grey under-layer with a graphic lace overlay. This design choice is intended to respond beautifully to lighting so that we can change the appearance of the garment and present a costume with great depth and interest.

4. You've also costumed the band. Can you explain the reason why you've chosen to costume them and the style of costuming you've used?

My design brief included creating a look for the band members so that they are cohesively part of the world of the show. They will be partially visible in the pit throughout the show, and will appear on stage for a final bow. We wanted to stylize them and really draw them into the amazing world of *Little Bird*. The style of costuming for the band references vaudeville performers. There is a Becket-like feel to some of the clothing, inspired by groups like The Tiger Lillies, David Bowie, the world of Tim Burton and Rufus Wainwright. They are a kind of demented gypsy band and we have labeled their style 'vaudeville/dandy/hobo!'

DESIGN REFERENCES

Pierre et Gilles, Pierre Commo and Gilles Blanchard.

Are French artists who produce highly stylised hand-painted photographs and build their own sets and costumes. Their work has attracted some controversy with their 2012 work *Vive la France* depicting three naked French footballers with their genitals revealed on very large street posters. The public response led the artist to self-censorship, using coloured ribbons to hide the players' genitals when in large poster displays.



Sir Anish Kapoor

An Indian sculptor. In 1991 he received the Turner Prize and in 2002 received the Unilever Commission for the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern.

Notable public sculptures include;

Cloud Gate in Chicago's Millennium Park;

Sky Mirror exhibited at the Rockefeller Center in New York City in 2006 and Kensington Gardens in London in 2010;

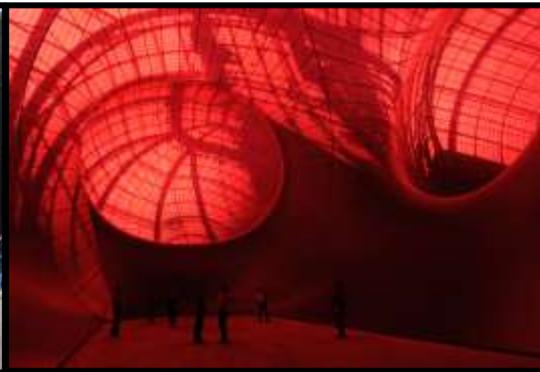
Temenos at Middlehaven, Middlesbrough;

Leviathan at the Grand Palais in Paris in 2011;

And *Arcelor Mittal Orbit* at London's Olympic Park and completed in 2012.



Cloud Gate



Leviathan



Temenos

The Tiger Lillies

Because of the music element in *Little Bird*, and the fact that the band will be partially visible in the pit, the costume designer wanted to bring them into the world on stage. The style of costuming references vaudeville performers, with the main inspiration from the band, The Tiger Lillies.

The Tiger Lillies are a three-piece London band whose style has been described as, "*darkly humorous, strangely humourous, Brechtian and gypsy cabaret.*" Their styling also reflects an old-style vaudevillian feel crossed with some glam and hobo.



MUSIC DESIGN

Music is very important in the overall design of the piece. Essentially the play is a piece of storytelling supported by music. There is an ethereal sound world, using a vibraphone, guitar and a bow, creating a warm, hazy background feel throughout the whole play. Through the story come songs building from eccentric to rock, fairy tale to cinematic style.

QUESTIONS FOR THE COMPOSER – QUENTIN GRANT

1. *Little Bird* is a new one-man show written for the Cabaret festival. Music plays a huge part in the storytelling. How do you approach a concept such as this?

We start with the story, and the many elements that will combine to create the show: the performer, the design, and the costumes. Then it is a matter of finding what the style of the work will be, and how best to build it musically.

There are several songs in the show, so we started by doing sketches for these. Some worked, others didn't, but gradually we found the songs that supported the story and the characters best.

2. Music underscores the play, what elements do you consider when creating the atmosphere of the play?

This is a piece of cabaret, so we approach it in a different way than a text-based play. *Little Bird* has several songs and spoken pieces set to music, as well as a lot of colourful atmospheric moments that are heavily scored. We also have a five-piece band playing live, so there are a lot more colours available to create the changing moods and atmospheres. The piece has to have elements of magical story-telling, and then colourful characters who call for particular style of song: folk, rock, etc. The settings for the story change very quickly, so the incidental music has to support this.

3. Do you have any musical training at a tertiary level and if so, how important was this to your development as a musician/composer?

I've been largely self-taught as a composer, but did stints at tertiary level. I had instrumental lessons and did, literally, 1000s of hours of practice and time composing and listening.

4. Can you tell us a little bit about the music you usually create? (Styles/bands/recordings etc)

I compose in many different styles - orchestral music, avant garde chamber music, different styles of world music, electronic music, popular styles such as rock and folk, and nearly everything else. I've also played in a number of bands in many different styles over the years.

5. What has been the process between you and your co-composer, co-lyricist Cameron Goodall? Is this similar to how you usually work?

This is the second project Cam and I have written together after many shows performing together over the years. Parts of the show have been written with the two of us sitting at a piano thrashing out different ideas, while for other parts we have gone off separately to work on lyrics or music. There is no fixed way of working. We've used different processes to get different results depending on what was required.

6. What do you want young audiences to take away from the music design to help them in their designing endeavours?

If the story and the music excites young musicians and inspires them to go into music, then that's brilliant.

INTERESTING READING

BIRD METAPHOR

V FORMATION

Birds flying in a V formation greatly boosts the efficiency and range of flying birds, particularly over long migratory routes. The upward airflow created by the bird in front, assists the bird following it.

The V of the bird's flights is mentioned several times throughout the play.

Wren's parents are desperate for a child and the reference to the V of birds, is symbolic of the mother becoming pregnant;

*"He holds her, she cries. And her tears ice over as they hit the snow.
He clears his throat. A V of birds traces the sky
They walk inside and a feather falls."*

When Wren sees his mother at *Susannah's* exactly the same imagery is used, "*A V of birds traces the sky. And a feather falls.*"

BIRD

Wren is referenced as the couple's little bird. They tell him that he will fly high and they sing the *Little Bird Lullaby* and he rests in, "*The nest of his parents' arms.*"

As Wren grows he, "*Studies the birds. Learns their songs.*" And he wonders, "*Can a boy bird sing a girl bird's song? Can a girl bird sing a boy bird's song?*"

The day his mother disappears, the birds stop singing and there is silence. He leaves home, flying like a bird, but when Rocky finds him destitute in the gutter he says, "*You won't survive here, little bird.*"

The bird reference then reappears when Wren sees a vision of his mother at *Susannah's*. Wren becomes a bird before returning home telling his father, "*I was born a bird, wasn't I? Can you see what I am?*"

JUNIPER TREE vs. LITTLE BIRD

There lived a rich man with a good and beautiful wife. They loved each other dearly, but sorrowed much that they had no children. So greatly did they desire to have one, that the wife prayed for it day and night, but still they remained childless.

She had a little child, and when she saw that it was as white as snow and as red as blood, her joy was so great that she died.

The mother says, "*Just one child and I'd be happy. I would leech the tears from my eyes, hack the hair from my head, spill the blood from my veins. Anything for a child.*"

Wren is born and they love him and are happy. One day Wren returns home from school to find that his mother has gone. When he asks his father what has happened he says, "*She died, Wren. She died of happiness.*"

After this a mist came round the tree, and in the midst of it there was a burning as of fire, and out of the fire there flew a beautiful bird, that rose high into the air, singing magnificently, and when it could no more be seen, the juniper-tree stood there as before, and the silk handkerchief and the bones were gone.

The goldsmith was in his workshop making a gold chain, when he heard the song of the bird on his roof.

The bird flew down and took the red shoes from the shoemaker.

There are many reference to a birds, including Wren's name, they call him Little Bird, the V formation imagery, bird-like songs and finally over the course of a song Wren becomes a bird, *"Be what I always was, and always will be. My mother's little bird."* The set design also references this transformation with wings developing behind Wren on stage.

The girl fastens a gold necklace around his neck, chaining him, choking him. When he returns to her the chain falls from his neck and breaks into two identical rings.

The woodcutter gives Wren a pair of sparkly shoes.

GENDER DIVERSITY

The question about gender is posed near the beginning of the play. *"Can a boy bird sing a girl bird's song? Can a girl bird sing a boy bird's song?"*

Gender Diversity is a term that recognizes that many peoples' preferences and self-expression fall outside commonly understood gender norms. Gender diversity is a normal part of human expression, documented across cultures and recorded history.

Gender Identity is how individuals perceive themselves as male or female, or both or neither. One's gender identity can be the same or different than the sex assigned at birth. Some of these individuals choose to socially, hormonally and/or surgically change their sex to more fully match their gender identity.

Gender Expression refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, and other forms of presentation.

Transgender refers to an individual whose gender identity does not match their assigned birth gender. Some can trace their transgender identities and feelings back to their earliest memories. They may have vague feelings of "not fitting in" with people of their assigned sex or specific wishes to be something other than their assigned sex. Others become aware of their transgender identities or begin to explore and experience gender-nonconforming attitudes and behaviors during adolescence or much later in life. Some embrace their transgender feelings, while others struggle with feelings of shame or confusion.

Cross-Dressers are people who wear clothing that is traditionally or stereotypically worn by another gender in their culture. Those who cross-dress are usually comfortable with their assigned sex and do not wish to change it.

The character of Rocky is a cross-dresser, *"Beard like a woodcutter. Eyes like a girl."* He finds Wren lonely and dejected in the gutter and takes care of him.

*"He washed my hair and curled it.
Cleaned me up. Styled me.
Gave me shoes.
Red, high and glittery.
He's changing me.*

*I dress differently.
I stand differently."*

CABARET

Is a form of entertainment featuring music, song, dance, recitation or drama. Traditional Cabaret is usually in a restaurant, pub or nightclub where the audience sits at tables eating and drinking.

Cabaret culture began in 1881 in the Montmartre district of Paris. Artists, poets, composers and performers could share ideas and test new material with audiences enjoying a few drinks. Cabarets grew to include floor shows, with artists working in the midst of the audience, who inevitably become part of the show. After World War I, cabaret enjoyed even greater popularity all across Europe, particularly in Germany, where the Weimar government essentially ended all forms of censorship.

Bob Fosse's acclaimed film version of *Cabaret* (1972) gives a stylized but essentially accurate view of what cabaret entertainment was like in 1932 Berlin, with satiric sketches, torch songs, transvestism and more. When Hitler rose to power in 1933, the Nazi's effectively suppressed all hints of cabaret subculture in Germany.

American cabaret diverged into several different styles of performance mostly due to the influence of jazz music. There were large band ensembles and smaller venues called 'speakeasies' and 'supper clubs' where several singers made a name for themselves, accompanied only by piano.

Many contemporary cabaret groups feature a combination of original music, burlesque and political satire.

Beginning in 2001, the Adelaide Cabaret Festival is an annual cabaret festival, the largest festival of its type in the world. In 2014 there are 60 shows on during the festival.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

ENGLISH QUESTIONS

1. *Little Bird* has been described as 'a fairytale for adults'. How does this piece conform to traditional aspects of a fairytale and how does it differ?
2. 'Can a boy bird sing a girl bird's song? Can a girl bird sing a boy bird's song?' How does *Little Bird* explore issues of sexuality and gender roles? Include specific character analyses in your response.
3. 'Little Bird we love you whoever you are'. Describe how the use of music and song adds to this piece. How do the songs add to, underscore or heighten the drama onstage?
4. Explore the use of symbolism in *Little Bird*.
5. *Little Bird* has foundations in myth. Research the significance of birds in mythology and discuss how this relates to the piece.
6. Compile a character study on Wren outlining how he transforms over time. Discuss changes in his appearance, behaviour, mood, attitude, motivation, aspirations and mental health.
7. Complete a recount of your trip to the theatre to see *Little Bird*. Include important details about the show and refer to at least one key scene in your recount. Use rich, descriptive language in your response being sure to connect with your senses.
8. Complete a song analysis on the song Rocky sings about his dress. Create a report outlining the meaning of the song and poetic techniques used. Include an annotated copy of the lyrics in your response.

WRITING

Write your own fairy tale. Think about plot, setting, characterisation, structure and theme. Decide what lesson your fairy tale is going to teach before you write it.

OR

Create a piece of poetry exploring a symbolic aspect of the piece (birds, feathers, colour, light...)

DRAMA QUESTIONS

1. *Little Bird* has been described as a 'theatre music piece'. Explain how this piece differs from a traditional play or a piece of musical theatre.
2. Explore the use of symbolism in *Little Bird*. Draw focus upon the emphasis on birds, feathers, song & singing, colour and light. Discuss how these elements effect or position the audience.
3. How does this piece explore Wren's life and transformation over time? Include reference to at least one important scene in your response.
4. Analyse the staging of the piece at Her Majesty's Theatre. Discuss design elements and lighting in your response. Include sketches where needed to illustrate your ideas.
5. Discuss the ending of the piece. What is Wren's transformation symbolic of? What effect does this ending have on the audience?
6. 'The birds have stopped singing.' Explore this quote from Wren at the beginning of the play when he cannot find his mother.
7. 'The house is cold, The fire's out.' Wren finds his mother gone. 'She's warm... Her house is light.' Wren meets the girl. Explore the reference to and symbolism of light and warmth in the text and in the production. Discuss design elements and how these portrayed the symbolism associated with light and warmth from the text.
8. Discuss how you think this piece relates to contemporary audiences. Exploring the key themes from the piece how or why do you think this piece is a relevant piece of theatre? What qualities from this piece will people relate to?

DESIGN

Design a costume portfolio for Wren exploring the various transitions and transformations throughout the piece. Be sure to include important changes in his life such as when we was young, his marriage, when he meets Rocky and so on.

PERFORMANCE

Create a monologue from Wren's point of view exploring what he would say if he ever saw his mother again. Perform this to your class.

OR

Create a soliloquy from the perspective of Wren's father when he loses his wife.

IMMEDIATE REACTIONS

	production elements	performance elements
strengths		
impact on audiences		
weaknesses		

DESIGN ROLES

design role	technique	What did this contribute to the performance?
lighting	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	
music	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	

REFERENCES

FAIRYTALES

www.mybooktherapy.com/how-to-write-a-great-story-using-fairytale-structure

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grimms'_Fairy_Tales

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Juniper_Tree_\(fairy_tale\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Juniper_Tree_(fairy_tale))

DESIGN

www.thefoxisblack.com/2011/05/13/anish-kapoons-leviathan/

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_et_Gilles

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anish_Kapoor

lagroveliving.com/2011/08/currywurst-debuts-tim-burton-summer-session/

asenor.blogspot.com.au/2010/12/music-style-david-bowie-as-thin-white.html

intervaldrinks.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/the-tiger-lillies-perform-hamlet-queen.html

www.thereainsoftheweb.com/2012/10/15/the-tiger-lillies-brechtian-punk-cabaret/

INTERESTING READING

www.slideshare.net/thomasmg/the-power-of-alignment-metaphors

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transgender

www.genderspectrum.org/understanding-gender

www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender.pdf

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabaret

www.musicals101.com/cabaret3.htm