

# A Doll's House



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES HARTLEY

## STUDY GUIDE

State Theatre Company South Australia

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Youth & Education Manager

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## OVERVIEW

The clouds in Nora Helmer's sky have parted. Her husband Torvald has recovered from a grave illness and accepted a role that secures their futures. A beautiful home and a carefree life with their daughter is at their fingertips. However Christmas brings with it an old acquaintance, a desperate stranger and a dear friend's terminal illness, exposing devastating secrets and cold truths. As Nora's world spins out of control she begins to realise that to move forward she must either crash, or crash through...

## THE PLAY

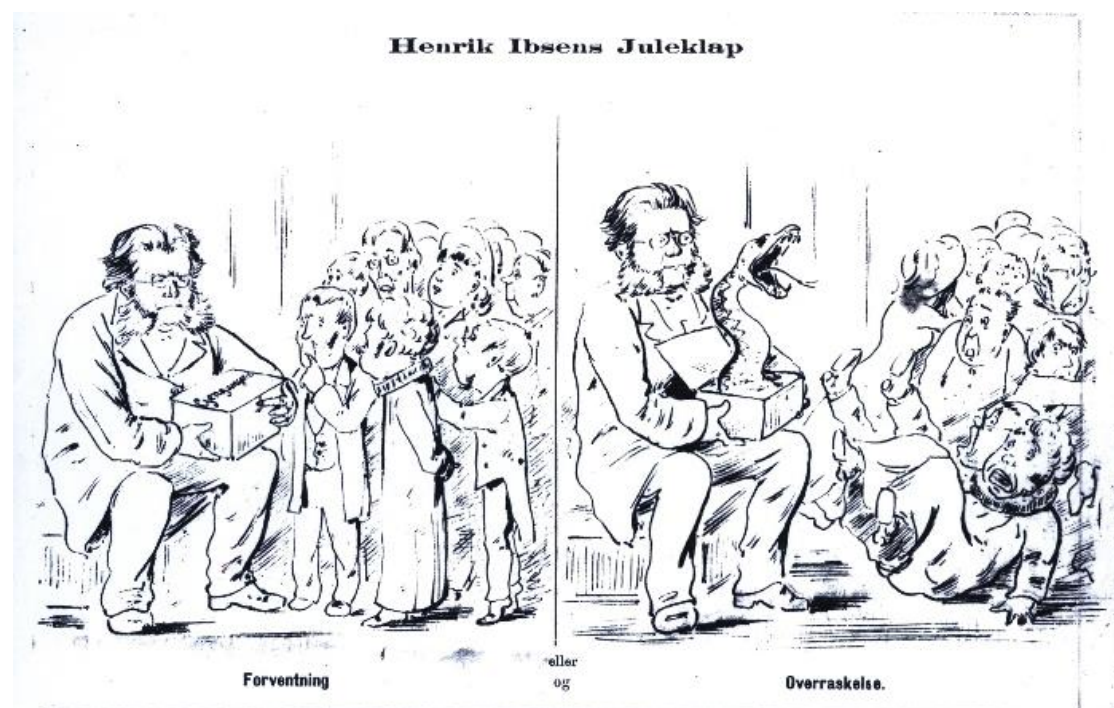
*A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen is regarded as a masterpiece in the canon of Western theatre. Written whilst living in Italy, *A Doll's House* was published in 1879 and first performed in Copenhagen, Denmark at Christmas time of the same year. Ibsen employs a classical three-act structure to explore confronting themes including identity, marriage and the role of women in society.



Ibsen used colloquial Norwegian language to write *A Doll's House*; which was distinctive from other many plays at the time as Norway was still striving to reinstate its national identity after being under Danish rule (and language) for 400 years. This decision shows Ibsen's progression from his earlier, more epic and allegorical works and is a pronounced step away from the romantic, melodramatic theatre popular in Victorian times. Ibsen was determined to write realistic characters with true-to-life troubles so that audiences could identify with what they saw on-stage. Audiences of this time were accustomed to being entertained by heightened spectacles involving heroes, villains, elaborate staging mechanisms, exaggerated gestures and musical accompaniment. Recognised as the father of Realism, Ibsen clears away these melodramatic distractions and focuses on characters navigating tough moral questions and situations. By identifying with the on-stage action, Ibsen believed, audiences could truly

consider the themes explored in his work in relation to themselves, their lives and their society. If we further examine the timing, we see the show was written to appeal to audiences as 'a Christmas play', it starts off as a light-hearted comedy but soon transforms into drama. This too shocked original audiences who were not prepared for the shift. Ibsen is often regarded as being ahead of his audience's time. Ibsen's cleverly framed his difficult content in a classic three-act form of a tragedy, giving audiences a familiar way to take in what was confronting material.

The ending of *A Doll's House* became known as, "the door slam that was heard around the world" and while Ibsen was interested in exploring contentious themes and contemporary issues he was not supported in this by his society, and spent much of his life living and writing in Italy and Germany. He was forced to write an alternative ending when others threatened to do so on his behalf and he is quoted as describing this new ending as, "a barbaric act of violence." This reluctantly-written 'happy' ending had Torvald force Nora to stay through guilt of leaving her children. Fortunately the original ending is the one that endured and is performed, especially as *A Doll's House* is one of the most performed plays in the world and has been adapted into work across many different cultures. According to *A Global Doll's House* it has had over 2500 productions over 135 years and 5 continents.



A caricature of Ibsen published in Norwegian satirical magazine *Vikingen*, 31 December 1881

Credit: National Library of Norway (online)

## THE PRODUCTION



Directed by Geordie Brookman and adapted by Elena Carapetis, the State Theatre Company South Australia's 2017 production of *A Doll's House* is a contemporary adaptation of Ibsen's most famous play. Programmed as the debut performance for the Company's ensemble, Brookman explores Ibsen's original ideas using a contemporary setting. Just as Ibsen used realism to focus attention on characters and themes, Brookman and his creative team have transported the characters from Norway in Victorian times to Adelaide in 2017 to reinforce the realism of the genre of writing and prompt audiences to consider how these themes are still relevant to their own lives and society today.

## CHARACTERS

Nora Helmer	a housewife with a secret
Torvald Helmer	a husband with a new well-paying job at the bank
Dr Lars Rank	the Helmer's best friend
Kristine Linde	Nora's best friend from childhood
Nils Krogstad	an employee at the bank
Anna	the Helmer's nanny
Emmy	Nora and Torvald's daughter



## SYNOPSIS

### *Act I: Christmas Eve*

Nora is preparing Christmas presents she has just purchased but is told off by her husband, Torvald, for spending too much money. She has also been eating Haigh's chocolates which she hides from Torvald when he enters the room as he does not approve. They talk about the new role Torvald has won at a bank, and the beautiful life they will share with their daughter once he starts receiving his new salary.

An old school-friend of Nora's, Kristine Linde, visits hoping that Nora can ask Torvald to help her find work at his bank. Nora reveals to Kristine that she has secretly borrowed an enormous sum of money to finance her husband's recovery from illness and has been paying it back slowly in secret.

Meanwhile, a bank-employee, Krogstad, visits Torvald. After their meeting Torvald reveals that he does not trust Krogstad and intends to fire him, and offers his position to Kristine.

Krogstad returns and reveals to Nora that he knows she forged her dying father's signature to receive the loan and threatens to expose her if she does not convince Torvald to keep him on staff. Despite her best attempts, she is unsuccessful at convincing Torvald to retain Krogstad.

### *Act II: Christmas Day*

Nora is preparing for a costume party where she will perform a musical number but she has not found a costume; Kristine comes over to help. Nora reveals that Krogstad is blackmailing her about the loan. Torvald emails Krogstad to dismiss him from his job. In her desperation, Nora talks to Dr Rank, a close family friend, to seek his help. Dr Rank admits to Nora that he is in love with her and Nora decides not to ask for his help.

Krogstad visits Nora having been fired by Torvald and sends an email to Torvald exposing her secret regarding the loan. Nora diverts Torvald's attention from his inbox by breaking his phone and making him help her practice for her performance.

### *Act III: Boxing Day*

We learn that Krogstad and Kristine know each other and had previously been in love. They decide to resume their relationship and Krogstad considers trying to recall the email as he wants to be a better man. Kristine convinces him that it would be better if Torvald did receive the email so that he and Nora had to address the lies in their relationship.

After the party, they return home and Torvald reads the email. He confronts Nora and is only concerned about how his reputation is damaged rather than seeing that Nora has lied in order to save his life. Nora is unnerved because she thought that Torvald loved her so much that would protect her but Torvald is only scathing of her actions

and criticises her about many aspects of her personality. This causes Nora to finally see their relationship as it truly is. Krogstad sends another email that reveals he is not going to take legal action and Torvald is immediately soothed, but Nora has seen the truth about his priorities. She questions whether she has truly ever been anything more than a daughter and wife and whether she can be a good role model for her daughter if she doesn't know who she is. The play concludes when she leaves both Torvald and Emmy.

## THEMES

Identity

Truth

Societal/family roles and gender

Appearances and Reality

Deception and corruption

Growth and Development

Materialism

Sexuality

Performative gender

Visit the following study guides for in-depth information on the above themes:

Sparknotes: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/dollhouse/themes.html>

Gradesaver: <http://www.gradesaver.com/a-dolls-house/study-guide/themes>

Endnotes: <http://www.woodville.org/documentos/161031a-dolls-house-enotes.pdf>



## *A DOLL'S HOUSE* CREATIVE TEAM

Adaptation

ELENA CARAPETIS

Director

GEORDIE BROOKMAN

Set & lighting designer

GEOFF COBHAM

Costume designer

AILSAPATERSON

Composer

ALAN JOHN

Sound designer

ANDREW HOWARD

Stage manager

HOLLEE GUNTER

Assistant stage manager

MARK HEUER

Chaperone

ABBIE JOHNSTONE

With the State Theatre Company Ensemble

RACHEL BURKE MIRANDA DAUGHTRY RASHIDI EDWARD DALE MARCH  
NATHAN O'KEEFE ANNA STEEN

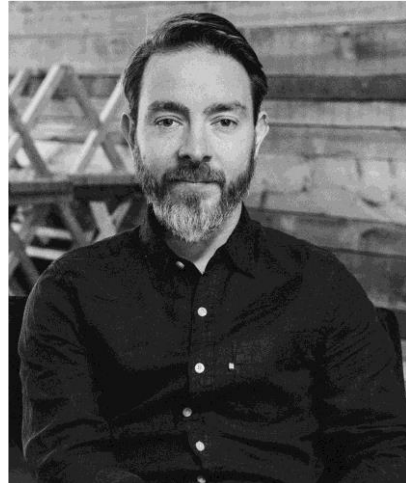
WITH HALEY GRAY & CLIO TINSLEY as EMMY





## FROM THE DIRECTOR: GEORDIE BROOKMAN

### DIRECTOR'S PROGRAM NOTES



Can you achieve happiness without truth?

Can you find truth without suffering?

Henrik Ibsen asks us many questions in his startling 1879 masterpiece but these two sit at the centre of the work. He exposes, brutally at times, the way in which we distract ourselves from the true nature of things. Nora and Torvald Helmer have constructed lives of seamless social, professional, personal and romantic performance. They play their parts so well that they've mostly forgotten that they're performing at all.

The 'door slam heard around the world' still echoes today and close to 140 years on the play resonates as strongly as ever. Progress made in regards to the fight for equality is put in stark relief by how far we have yet to go. It's my third time helming an Ibsen following *Ghosts* in 2009 and *Hedda Gabler* in 2013 and my encouragement and challenge to Elena Carapetis when approaching the adaptation of the text was the same as it was to Nicki Bloom and Joanna Murray-Smith: bring it firmly and forcefully into our contemporary world, let it speak with our voice so that we are made painfully aware of Ibsen's brilliance in investigating human frailty.

The production has been a joy to work on and I couldn't be more proud for it to be the debut of the State Theatre Company Ensemble, a beautiful group of performers who hold storytelling at the heart of their craft just like this Company does.

### INTERVIEW WITH GEORDIE

**This is your third time directing an Ibsen; what draws you to his plays as a director in contemporary Australia? What do you most want our audiences to be faced with in this contemporary production of such a well-known work?**

I love Ibsen because he is able to articulate human frailties better than almost any other playwright. His mastery of plotting and naturalistic scene construction

mean that his plays will always endure. Ideally I hope the audience will question the way our society is structured and face down the central ways in which women are disadvantaged within our still deeply patriarchal system.

**You have selected *A Doll's House* to be the debut for our ensemble; why did you choose this play as the first chapter in the ensemble's repertoire?**

Well they say that 80% of the director's job is getting the casting right and once I'd assembled the group the play immediately popped into my head. You need a very particular combination of actors to play Nora and Torvald and Miranda and Dale bring all the required qualities and more. I also wanted the group to test themselves against one of the Western canons biggest classics straight away.



State Theatre Company Ensemble 2017

**What was a particularly interesting exercise/discussion or moment in the rehearsal room that helped drive your directorial concept from the work being done on the floor to what we witness on-stage?**

The progression of dancing through the piece is quite critical. The production begins with images of a woman dancing for a man, submitting and playing to his view, his gaze. Towards the end of Act 1 we have a moment where Nora and her daughter, Emmy dance together, sweetly, childishly and this energy spreads to the cast members at side of stage, reminding us of the freedom our bodies have before we get strictly 'gendered'. Finally there is the famous 'Tarantella' rehearsal at the end of Act 2. The Tarantella was originally a dance that was like an exorcism, based

on the way people moved if they were bitten by the spider that provides the dance's name. Over time it became a charged kind of courtship dance. In our version Nora's dance starts with a sense of coquettish, submissive female sexuality transforms into something much more sexually aggressive but still male orientated and then finally breaks through those boundaries into a kind of ecstatic freedom. All this happens to a music track that none of us can hear, that is just piped in through Nora's headphones. Instead we hear a mess of drones and beats that give us some insight into Nora's mental state. It's been a complex moment to find but I think the day when we found the right track for Miranda to listen to (I'm not telling what it is!) was a real breakthrough.



## FROM THE ADAPTOR: ELENA CARAPETIS

### WRITER'S PROGRAM NOTE

*A Doll's House* gets under your skin. Scanning the first few pages, it reads like a light comedy. Indeed Ibsen wrote it as a Christmas play in disguise, only to tear the rug out from under a destabilized Norwegian audience who were not expecting that ending. 'The door slam heard around the world'. Writing an adaptation of one of the most performed plays in the world is a responsibility I do not take lightly. When adapting a classic you are asking the audience to sever their current relationship with the play, plus be open enough to consider accepting a completely new rendering. But the nature of culture is that it changes and shifts, so therefore art should too.



I have adapted this play fully aware of my status as female in a patriarchal society, aware of how dangerous the word 'feminist' still is and aware of the things I've had to give up to pursue the life I want. So I get Nora. I feel for her immensely. But I also get Torvald, who too is imprisoned by the lies society tells us about who we are. Adapting this story about the marriage between two ordinary, privileged people, filtered through all the ways the world still hasn't changed since Ibsen wrote it, has been my mission. The struggle is still real, you see.

### INTERVIEW WITH ELENA

**Can you share with us the strategy you used when approaching the huge task of adapting *A Doll's House*? How did you go about upholding Ibsen's ideas while implementing contemporary perspectives within this text?**

The first thing I did was read lots of different translations of the play and then I read a few adaptations that kept the play in a period setting. Then I did research, lots and lots of research about all the aspects of the play. I researched what Ibsen set out to do when he wrote it originally. I got to know the play really well in terms of structure, character arcs, themes, gender politics. I studied the meaning and background of the Tarantella and what it means in the context of this play. I read about how this play has been performed across the world, in many different languages, and how it's been adapted by artists of many different cultures and what aspects of the play continue to resonate across time and geography. Then I read the translations again and again and recorded my response to the work as a woman living in Australia in 2017. I figured out what elements of Ibsen's story I wanted to highlight, strengthen, focus on and distil. And then there were elements that I shifted a little to make them more relevant to modern society. I also knew I

was writing for specific actors which helped me imagine the version of the character they could totally embody. I wanted to work to each actor's strengths but also challenge them to work outside of their comfort zone.

**Do you have a particular character for whom you enjoyed creating contemporary text within the script? What language features or styles did you employ to bring out elements of this character?**

I enjoyed writing for every character. The challenge was creating them based on Ibsen's rendering but with the imaginative freedom to allow them to evolve as 21st century humans. For example, in the original Nora's husband Torvald calls her 'his little songbird', 'little squirrel', 'Madam Willful'. This kind of language just doesn't sit with a modern audience - but we all know examples of pet names people call each other when they are in a relationship. Names like 'Baby' for example. But I wanted to keep a link to Ibsen's original text. So when Torvald calls Nora 'his little song bird', I have him calling her 'Chickadee', as a pet name.

An example of the original text compared to my adaptation:

MRS. LINDEN. [Embarrassed and hesitating.] How do you do, Nora?

NORA. [Doubtfully.] How do you do?

MRS. LINDEN. I see you don't recognise me!

NORA. No, I don't think- oh yes!- I believe- [Suddenly brightening.] What, Christina! Is it really you?

MRS. LINDEN. Yes; really !!

NORA. Christina! And to think I didn't know you! But how could I-[More softly.] How changed you are; Christina!

MRS. LINDEN. Yes, no doubt. In nine or ten years-

NORA. Is it really so long since we met? Yes, so it is. Oh, the last eight years have been a happy time, I can tell you. And now you have come to town? All that long journey in mid-winter! How brave of you!

MRS. LINDEN. I arrived by this morning's steamer.

NORA. To have a merry Christmas, of course. Oh, how delightful! Yes, we will have a merry Christmas. Do take your things off. Aren't you frozen? [Helping her.] There; now we'll sit cosily by the fire. No, you take the arm-chair; I shall sit in this rocking-chair. [Seizes her hands.] Yes, now I can see the dear old face again. It was only at the first glance- But you're a little paler, Christina- and perhaps a little thinner.

MRS. LINDEN. And much, much older, Nora.

NORA. Yes, perhaps a little older- not much- ever so little. [She suddenly checks herself; seriously.] Oh, what a thoughtless wretch I am! Here I sit chattering on, and- Dear, dear Christina, can you forgive me!

MRS. LINDEN. What do you mean, Nora?

NORA. [Softly.] Poor Christina! I forgot: you are a widow.

MRS. LINDEN. Yes; my husband died three years ago.



NORA. I know, I know; I saw it in the papers. Oh, believe me, Christina, I did mean to write to you; but I kept putting it off, and something always came in the way.

MRS. LINDEN. I can quite understand that, Nora dear.

NORA. No, Christina; it was horrid of me. Oh, you poor darling! how much you must have gone through!- And he left you nothing?

MRS. LINDEN. Nothing.

NORA. And no children?

MRS. LINDEN. None.

NORA. Nothing, nothing at all?

MRS. LINDEN. Not even a sorrow or a longing to dwell upon.

NORA. [Looking at her incredulously.] My dear Christina, how is that possible?

MRS. LINDEN. [Smiling sadly and stroking her hair.] Oh, it happens so sometimes, Nora.

NORA. So utterly alone! How dreadful that must be! I have three of the loveliest children. I can't show them to you just now; they're out with their nurse. But now you must tell me everything.

MRS. LINDEN. No, no; I want you to tell me-

NORA. No, you must begin; I won't be egotistical to-day. To-day I'll think only of you. Oh! but I must tell you one thing- perhaps you've heard of our great stroke of fortune?

MRS. LINDEN. No. What is it?

NORA. Only think! my husband has been made manager of the JointStock Bank.

### **Adaptation:**

Kristine: Nora?

*Nora turns and looks at her. She smiles politely.*

Nora: Hello there.

Kristine: It's so good to see you.

Nora: Yes. You too. I'm...

Kristine: You don't recognise me.

Nora: Well, I'm trying to think of ... when did we... I'm sorry.

Kristine: That's alright.

Nora: I'm terrible with names.

Kristine: Nora. It's Kristine.

Nora: Kristine...

KRISTINE! Oh my god, Kristine, how are you? I didn't recognise you!

Kristine: Well, it's been a long time.

Nora: It's been ages!

Kristine: Nearly ten years.

Nora: Ten years? It can't be. Oh wow. You look...

Kristine: Not fat.

Nora: No! Different. That's all. When did you get in?

Kristine: My bus arrived this morning.

Nora: You came by bus? In this heat, god, you must be exhausted.

Kristine: A little.

Nora: Sorry I didn't recognise you. I just wasn't expecting ... to see you. Wow, you look great.

Kristine: I've lost weight, it's ok, you can say it.

Nora: No, it's not just that, you've changed somehow. Makes sense it's been so long. Oh god, listen to me blabbering on. Are you hot?

Here, come stand under the air-conditioning. (*She positions Kristine in a cooler spot.*) That better?

Kristine: That's great, thanks.

Nora: It's so good to see you.

Kristine: You too.

Nora: But I feel absolutely terrible.

Kristine: Why?

Nora: I'm so sorry.

Kristine: What for?

Nora: I heard about your husband.

Kristine: Oh.

Nora: I was meaning to call you, honestly. I thought about it all the time but something always seemed to get in the way. And then it got to the stage where I thought it was too late, to call, so I was going to write you a card, I even bought one but I wasn't sure where to send it to.

Kristine: That's ok.

Nora: No, I should have called you, I feel awful.

Kristine: Things happen, I understand.

Nora: I can't imagine how hard that would have been.

Kristine: It was a while ago, I'm ok now.

Nora: But what you must have gone through. Losing him and being left with...

Kristine: Nothing.

Nora: Nothing? No home.

Kristine: No. No money either.

Nora: What about children?

Kristine: No.

Nora: He left you with absolutely nothing?

Kristine: Not even a broken heart. (*Nora looks at her*) It happens sometimes.

Nora: But that's so sad.

I've got a daughter, Emmy, she's the love of my life! She's having her nap, but she'll be up soon and you can meet her. She's the cutest little thing.

Anyway, blah blah blah, what about you, Kristine? Tell me everything. I want you to tell me all about what you've been doing since I saw you last. Everything!

Kristine: I want you to tell me everything too.

Nora: No, you go first, I'm dying to know. And then I can tell you our exciting news.

Kristine: What news?

Nora: It's so amazing.

Kristine: What?

Nora: Guess.

Kristine: Um...

Nora: Torv has scored this FANTASTIC new job at the bank. In head office. HUGE money.

**What do you hope audiences take away from having seen a performance of this text in a local and contemporary setting?**

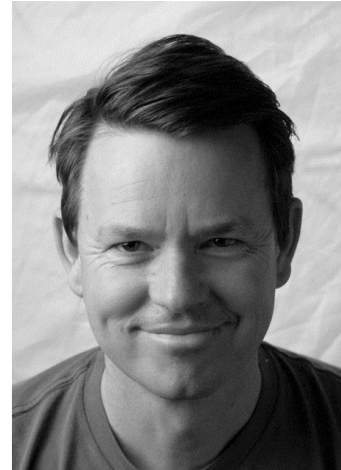
Unfortunately some audiences are turned off by the idea of 'old plays', I think because some of the language and behaviour of the characters seem dusty and old fashioned so it's hard to connect to them as real people. This is especially true of plays that have been written in other languages and then translated into English. They can feel stilted. I'd like this old play to seem completely new and relatable. I'd love for audiences to see the characters as real people and to care about them, despite their faults. I hope audiences get sucked into the world of the show and think about the play long after they've left the theatre.



## FROM THE SET & LIGHTING DESIGNER: GEOFF COBHAM

### INTERVIEW WITH GEOFF

**Can you tell us about your discussions with director, Georgie Brookman, about the decision to move away from a traditional 'kitchen-sink' naturalistic set for this production of *A Doll's House* and how you reached your ideas for the set and lighting that has been realised?**



This design aims to put the focus on the characters and their interactions. Georgie and I felt that where the characters are and what they sit on is not important. We decided to strip all of the everyday away and leave the audience free to focus on the emotion. This minimalist aesthetic puts the actors at the forefront of the design.

We knew we had to contain/trap Nora in her world and initially experimented with a wall of Laser light to surround the space, but our budget soon removed this option! The resolve was to make walls of light using every light in the venue. We have literally put Nora in a giant cage of light containing her small world, which actually revolves around her.

**What are the perks of being the designer for both set and lighting and how does this change your design process from when you are only designing one of these elements?**

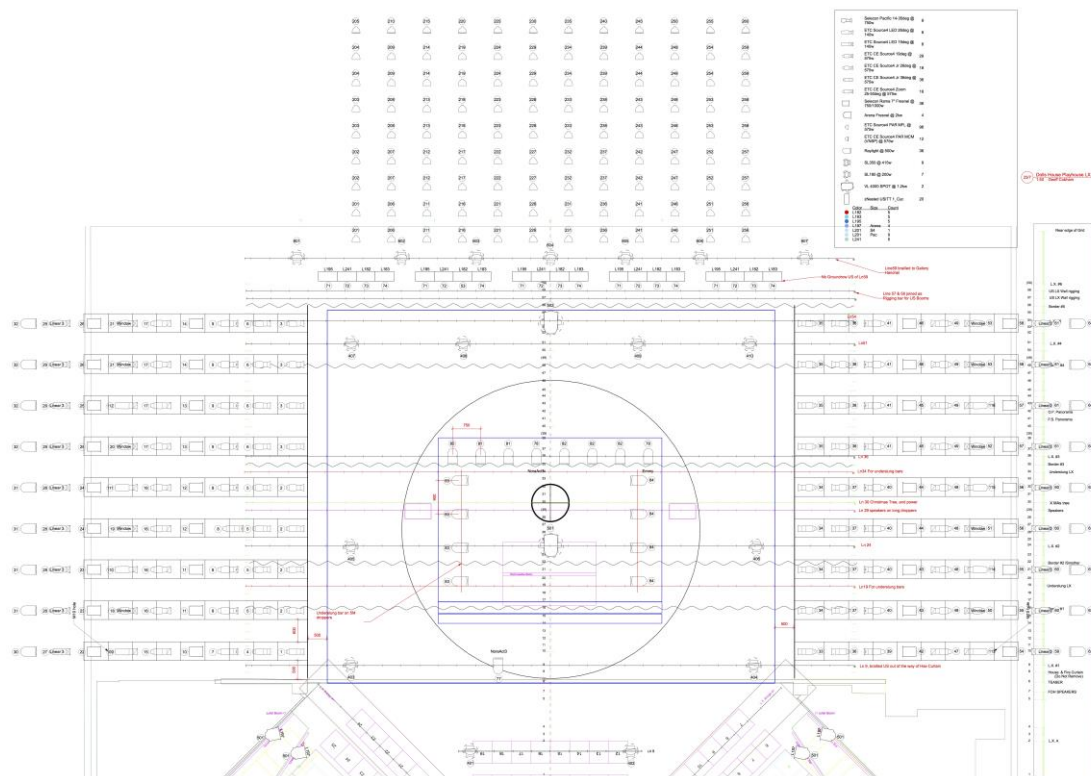
Designing the set and lighting together is a much more proactive job than just designing the lighting. When I focus only on lighting I am reacting to the set design. When I design both the design process is purely about the look and feel of the stage. In Europe this combined job is called Scenography. I enjoy both processes and it is often a relief to not be having an internal debate between the set and lighting designers within me!

**With the rotating rostra element being a central element to the design but having such a direct impact on the cast and their blocking, how much did your set and lighting design change over the course of the rehearsal process?**

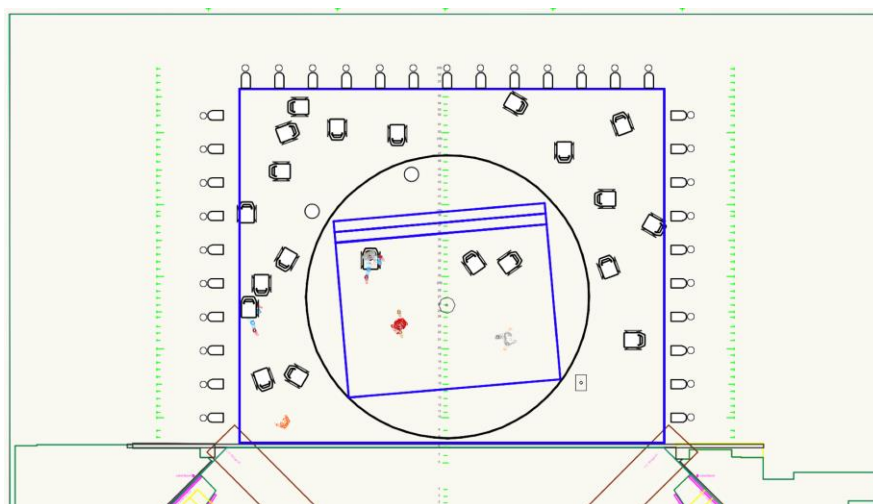
The rotating set is part about Nora being a “doll”; like in a music box and part about how the play and her world are centred on her. It was pretty nerve wracking the first two days we turned the revolve on in rehearsal, but the actors were amazing and managed to keep the scenes focused to the front. I spent a week asking everyone who ventured in to the rehearsal room if they thought it was distracting but I am now really enjoying the ever changing perspective this slow revolve

offers. Theatre design is full of change and compromise and Georgie and I would have abandoned the revolve idea if it had detracted from the actors ability to work, but we feel confident it only adds to the intensions of this version of *A Doll's House*.

Here are a few screenshots from the 3D rendering software called Vectorworks that I use for visualising the set and lighting when we are planning the design. And a set Plan, and a Lighting plan.

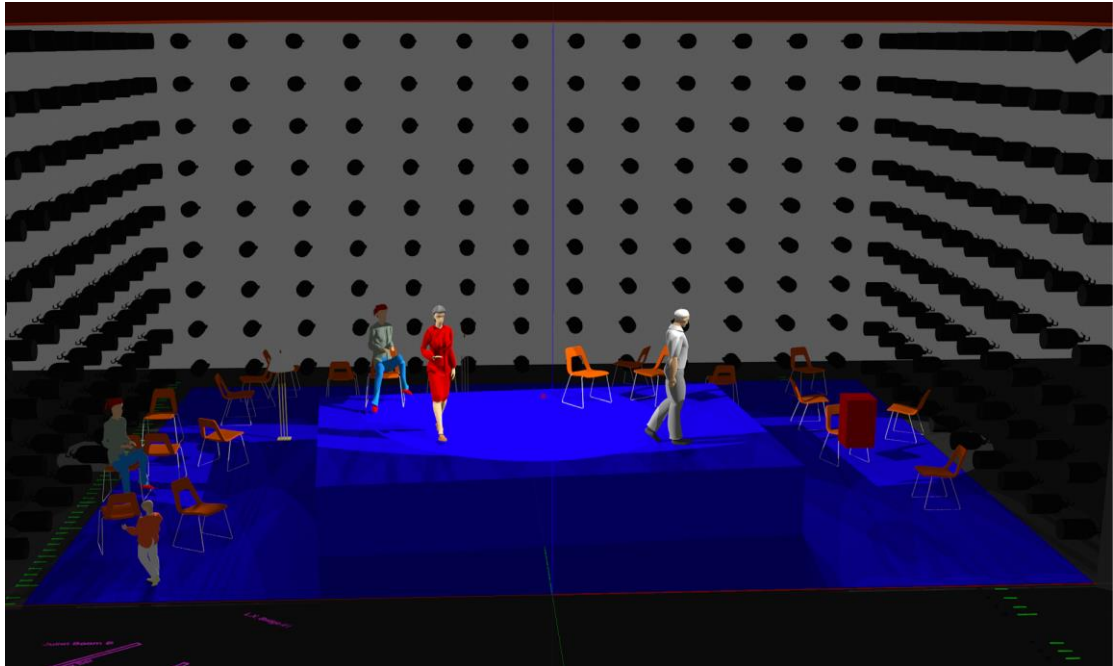


Lighting Plan, *A Doll ' s House*, Geoff Cobham

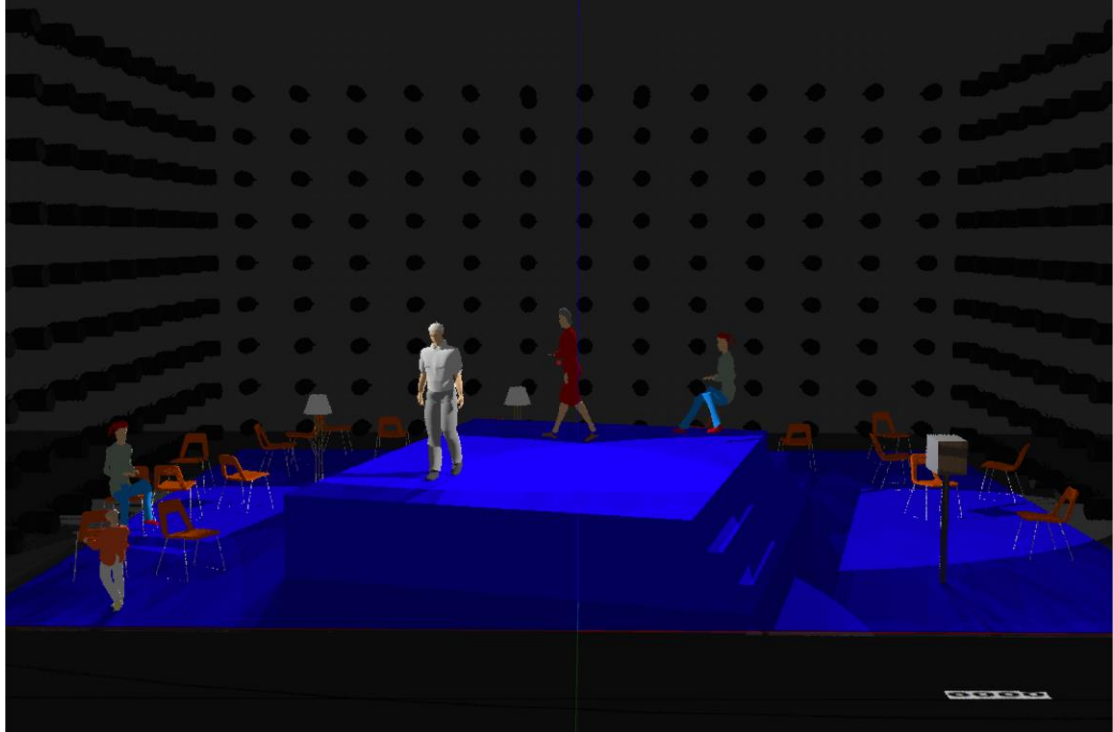


Set Plan, *A Doll ' s House*, Geoff Cobham





Screen shot from Vectorworks, Set Design, *A Doll 's House*, Geoff Cobham



Screen shot from Vectorworks, Set Design, *A Doll 's House*, Geoff Cobham

## FROM THE WORKSHOP

### INTERVIEW WITH GUY BOTROFF (WORKSHOP METALWORKER)

**What is the rotating piece of the set constructed from and what enables it to function as a moving piece?**

The set piece is what we refer to as a ‘revolve’, it is constructed of 16 pies (fig 1) of welded steel clad with a plywood floor. At its centre is a pivot called a slew bearing (fig 2), the outer most edge is curved to form a surface so that multiple wheels arranged on the ground can support its outer weight. This curved surface is also used to drive the revolve around.



**What were some of the challenges the team faced in creating the rotating rostra? Has the final product gone through many technical changes from when you first looked at how it would be constructed?**

This revolve predates my employment having been constructed in 2009 so I can't really speak to this. Although I know this is the third revolve STC has constructed.

As for the drive system itself, this has gone through some changes over the years. We have recently converted the drive from a rather heavy and noisy hydraulic system to an electric system controlled by some sophisticated electronic inverters.

For this particular application the brief was for the revolve to spin at two vastly different speeds, one was 1 revolution in 30 minutes and the second was 1 revolution in 30 seconds, that's a 60 to 1 difference. We achieved this by incorporating two motors and gearboxes on to the one drive and pivoting them from one to the other with a linear actuator. (fig 3)

**What kinds of people, skills and trades did you use to overcome these challenges?**

For the drive system we have a consultant electrical engineer who supplies us with all the components needed, we put them together and refine them to get the best results that the budget will allow.

**Is there any further work required on the set once the show is being performed? Does it require special technical operation or maintenance once it's been bumped in?**

One of the most important things here apart from the system being reliable is that it is simple to use and hopefully maintenance free, this will make the SM job less stressful.



Fig. 1



Fig 2



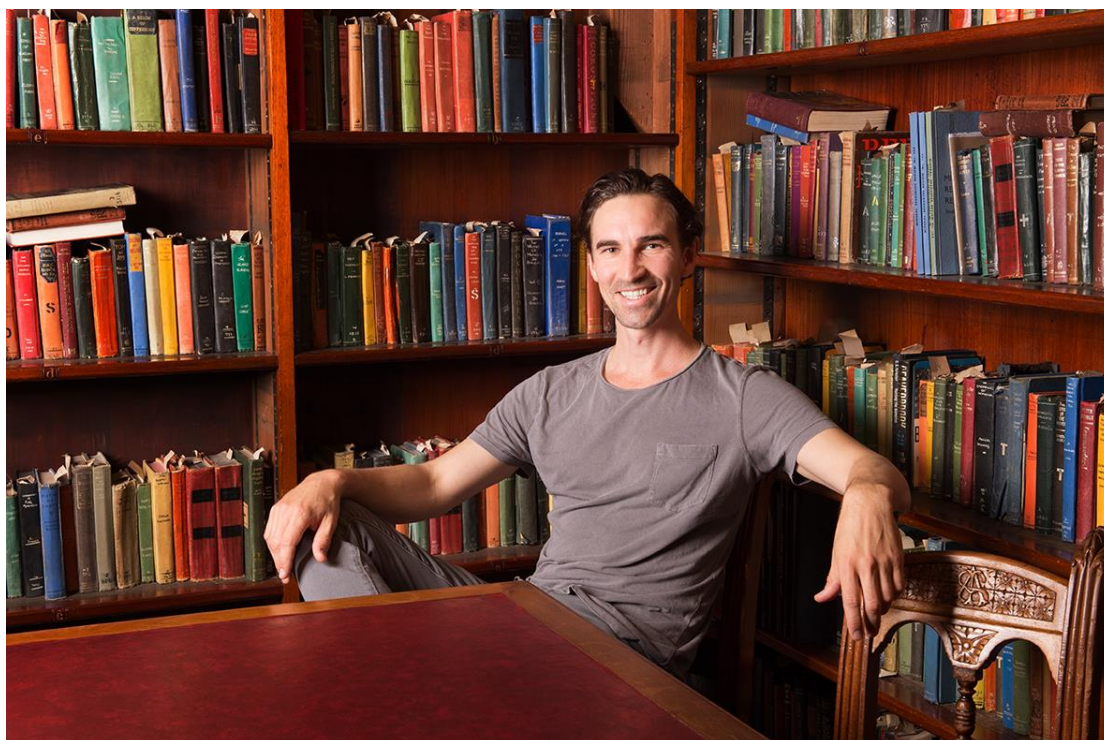


Fig 3



## FROM THE CAST

### DALE MARCH (TORVALD)



**What were your initial opinions of the character of Torvald and what new/interesting/alarming information have you uncovered about him during the rehearsal process?**

Ever since my first introduction to *A Doll's House* 10 years ago, I was troubled by the character of Torvald. It seemed so clear to me that Nora should leave this man immediately.

It seemed that in translations and performance he always came across as a bully and unforgivable male chauvinist. This aspect of his character cannot be avoided, but in approaching the role for this production, I was determined to give my greatest efforts to veiling his misogynistic behaviour.



Because I can only view this play as a parable of marriage, I wanted to give his side of the bargain as much complexity as possible. The most important thing for me was to attempt to give Torvald all the empathy I could find.

One of the most provocative realizations about Torvald that has come up through rehearsals is his emotional manipulation for power. He seems to garner deep satisfaction from uncovering Nora's shortcomings, raining down his disapproval, then immediately comforting her as a father would a child. This saviour/teacher complex reveals itself again and again as a deft psychological character drafting by Ibsen.

**Are you able to share an example of your thought process and align it with a piece of text? How do you go about recording this for your own practice (if at all)?**

One of the first layers of text analysis that I employ is to articulate what I am seeing in front of me that the character would believe needs to be changed.

For example, when Nora blatantly denies that Krogstad has been at the house, I can choose to see her as *an innocent child who is hiding a secret out of fear* or, I can see a *pathologically deceitful wife*.

The delivery of Torvald's next line will be significantly altered by choosing one of these two options. In the former instance I may see someone who needs *kind*



*assurance* that they will not get into trouble for telling the truth. In the latter example, I will likely see someone who needs to be *firmly reprimanded*.

These “active intentions” of *assuring* her or *reprimanding* her are the immediately actable substance of text analysis and something that I am always seeking to refine.

Here is some text which follows soon after Nora has refused to admit that Krogstad was in the house while Torvald was away. The italics illustrate some of the process mentioned above, as well as a couple of other thoughts I’ve jotted in my text to open up the relationship in this moment.

Nora finally relents and admits...

NORA: He was only here for a minute.

*I see a deceptive wife who needs delicate interrogation to expose the truth.*

TORVALD: And he asked you... what? For you to convince me not to fire him?

NORA: Yes.

*This switches me to see Krogstad in my mind’s eye just for the word “Jesus”. Now I see Krogstad, a manipulative, sneaky scammer who needs to be crushed out of my life.*

*God, I know Nora is naïve and susceptible to corrosive influence, but this is baffling behaviour even for her!*

TORVALD: Jesus! And you agreed to something like that? With a guy like him?

NORA: Torvald/-

*I see an intimate partner who has chosen to keep that filthy Krogstad’s request secret rather than honour our marriage bond of trust! She needs sharp castigation!*

TORVALD: And to top it off, you lie to me.

NORA: Lie?

*I see a disobedient child who needs to feel the pain her betrayal of trust has caused.*

TORVALD: You stood there and told me no one had been here.

Of course, this is all too much to be thinking about once the lights come up and you step into the performance. At that point you hope that the rehearsals have massaged all this cognitive history into the relationships and you can discover the moments freshly with your scene partner on stage.

Can you tell us about your interactions with an off-stage member of the *A Doll's House* team and how their work has helped you to further create your Torvald?

I had a wonderful conversation with our designer Geoff Cobham that helped me frame the unravelling of Nora and Torvald's relationship. He was speaking about the function of the almost imperceptible revolving stage and the cage of lights that create our "Doll's World." Like many of us, the Helmers are unaware of the system of aspiration, comfort and superficiality that they have been seduced by.

Geoff's design elegantly gives an architectural support to this idea in the play and has helped me to locate my own journey of Torvald's destabilization throughout the Third Act. He has felt so secure in the promising trajectory of their lives. Everything is smoothly revolving around his ideas of success a social status, until he discover that the gears have been eroding beneath him and everything is about to fall into a very static, dark pit.







## MIRANDA DAUGHTRY (NORA)



**Having recently graduated from NIDA, did you draw on any acting tools or strategies learned at drama school to create your version of Nora? Can you tell us about how you employed these strategies or provide an example?**

I don't subscribe to a specific acting theory. My approach tends to be influenced most heavily by the text itself and a very patchwork process. Different characters and texts call for different methods. One ideology that sticks out to me is that of Kristine Landon Smith, who introduced me to the idea of the "pleasure to play", she was influenced by her clowning work with Phillipe Gaulier, and looks for the spark that comes from actors who are present and alive with each other and finding pleasure in the embodiment of the character.

**What technical element of the production do you find most helpful or most challenging to work with in your role as Nora?**

There is one element that is both helpful and challenging at times! The slow revolve poses the constant challenge of adjusting the action to keep it visible and forward facing. This is especially difficult in long two-hander scenes where some of the action has drawn out static moments. But it has forced us to be more inventive in blocking and I have enjoyed the way it keeps us thinking about where to position ourselves with the rest of the scene in mind. Our designer Goeff Cobham talked about this set as a curveball, an element that should take us as performers a little out of our comfort zones and force us to break some habits in our problem solving! It's been fun! A little dizzying!



**Can you tell us about the physicality you have applied to Nora and how your reached decisions about the way she holds herself and moves on stage taking into account the style of production?**

The Alexander technique is a method of physical awareness I use that helps inform my movement and find ways to release tension and use a wider range of movement safely. Tension is the enemy when you're repeating a show night after night, and being physically aware with solutions to potential strain can save you from injury! With Nora I certainly found my way into the character through the way she is written, she is complex and fully formed in the writing and it was through her words that I found her movement. She has some elements of childishness due to the way she is treated and at times makes an effort to fit a very particular socially accepted picture of female sexuality. This is especially potent in the dance where she begins with a highly sexualised dance that is based entirely on the passive and coy femininity she knows Torvald idealises. The later stage of the dance we have tried to tap into a kind of movement that defies the male (or any) gaze, that is about a kind of ecstatic catharsis, completely personal and unperformative.



## NATHAN O'KEEFE (DR RANK)



### **What are the positives and negatives of your job?**

The negatives of this job are the lack of job security. A typical theatre contract in SA lasts around ten weeks.

The positives are the creative expression and intense relationships you can form. The community of artists here in SA are some of the most generous and wonderful people I have personally ever met.

### **What did you need to study to get your chosen career?**

You don't necessarily need to study at an acting school to pursue a performing arts career, but it surely does help a lot if you do. I studied acting 3 years full time at the Centre for the Performing Arts (now AC Arts), here in Adelaide.

### **Was this your first career choice? If no, why did your choice change?**

I wanted to be an actor before I even knew what it meant. Once I learnt what it required, I loved the idea even more.

I can honestly say it's all I have ever wanted to do.

### **Were there any influences in your career choice?**

I wouldn't say there were influences in my choice, but certainly influences in helping me shape my career. During my studying years I made a point to see as much live theatre as I could, learn about the professionals in the industry and most importantly making sure it is what I wanted to enter into. Deciding to do it

was one thing, but wanting to do it is what keeps me perusing it.

**Does this career allow you to travel?**

It does. I have been lucky enough to travel the USA, China, the U.K. and all across Australia with shows. A personal highlight has been performing on New York's Broadway.

**What education did you have before getting the job?**

The acting school I attended was the preliminary education, but so much of the learning is done through the work. Every new production delivers new opportunities to be challenged and keep pushing yourself out of your comfort zone.

**What are your tips and tricks being successful in this profession?**

There is no doubt that luck plays a role in this business, but you can't forge a career out of luck alone. Curiosity, commitment and hard work really do pay off in this industry. Most importantly, I think, a love for what you are doing is essential. It's too bloody hard if you don't love it.

**How long have you been in the profession?**

I have been a professional actor for fifteen years

**What advice would you give a young person pursuing a career similar to yours?**

For me, the arts are not a competition, they are collaboration. Don't compare yourself to others in the industry, either more successful or less so. The most unique thing you can offer is yourself.

## QUOTES

### NORA AND TORVALD'S RELATIONSHIP



Torvald      I should never have lent it to you in the first place. Not a good look

Nora          What?

Torvald      For a finance man to be shit at finance.

*She gives it to him, turns away from him.*

Torvald:      Ask me nicely.

Nora:          Please can I have it?

Torvald:      Tell me how much you love me.

Nora:          I love you, I love you, I love you!

*He gives her the money.*

Nora:          I'm not like him. Wish I was though. Wish I had his...

Torvald:      His what?

Nora:          Nothing.

Torvald: Good. Because I wouldn't change a single thing about you. Not a hair. Not a pore. You're perfection, my love.

*He goes to kiss her and she pulls away, awkwardly giggling*

Torvald: God, it'd be exhausting having to keep up that act. Having to remember what lie you've told to who, pretending to be this person that you're not. Even to your wife. Even to your kids. Imagine being his poor kids, having no idea what a lying sack of shit he is.

Nora: Maybe he's still a good parent.

Torvald: If you bring your kids up with lies, then that's what they learn. All the no hopers who used to come to me for legal advice, they weren't from good homes. The liars come from liars, the thieves come from thieves. And it's the mothers who do the most damage.

Nora: The mothers?

Torvald: Oh, fathers can be just as bad, don't you worry. Those kids are doomed.

*Nora is silent.*

Torvald: You can't just abandon your daughter.

Nora: Why not? She'll be much better off here.

Torvald: Because people will think you're a monster, that's why not.

Nora: I know what people say about women like me and I don't care what they think.

Torvald: You have responsibilities!

Nora: What responsibilities?

Torvald: To me. To her, to Emmy, your daughter, for god's sake.

Nora: But I have other responsibilities too. To myself.

Torvald: Don't be so selfish. You're a mother!

Nora: And you're a father.

Torvald: You're a mother and that means you put your child first.

Nora: Do you put your child first? Did my father put me first? No. Before I was a mother, I was a wife. Before I was a wife, I was a daughter. But before any of that I was a human being. I still am.

Torvald: You're out of your mind.



Nora: I'm not. I have never felt so clear or so certain. I am perfectly in my mind.

Torvald: Clear and certain about leaving us?

*She nods.*

Nora: I've been cheerful but that's not the same as happy.

You've always been kind to me, and I was always sure to show my gratitude. But this marriage, it wasn't real, we were just a couple of kids playing house. I'm your Baby doll, aren't I? You love to dress me up and twirl me round and show me off to your friends. I just had to make sure I kept a smile plastered to my face no matter how I was feeling. Even if I was feeling sad or lonely or... And I got really good at it, to the point where I was able to forget that girl, the real me became my secret, I pushed her away and I replaced her with your happy, pretty, Baby doll. Your Chickadee. But it was all lies. We've done nothing but lie to each other this whole time. And I can't do it anymore.

Nora: There. It's over. Here are my keys. Anna's promised to help look after Emmy, she'll be here and she'll do a brilliant job. She knows who she is.

## NORA & KRISTINE'S RELATIONSHIP





Nora: He left you with absolutely nothing?

Kristine: Not even a broken heart. (*Nora looks at her*) It happens sometimes.

Nora: But that's so sad.

I've got a daughter, Emmy, she's the love of my life! She's having her nap, but she'll be up soon and you can meet her. She's the cutest little thing.

Anyway, blah blah blah, what about you, Kristine? Tell me everything. I want you to tell me all about what you've been doing since I saw you last. Everything!

Kristine: I want you to tell me everything too.

Nora: No, you go first, I'm dying to know. And then I can tell you our exciting news.

Kristine: The joke was on me though because when he died he left me with a huge debt, even after the bank sold the business. So much for taking care of us.

Nora: What did you do?

Kristine: Whatever I could. Since he died, I've done nothing but work to make ends meet. And then a while ago my mum passed away. My brothers are grown up now, they've graduated and got good jobs. Thank goodness. They don't need me to look after them anymore. No one does.

Nora: But that's good, isn't it? That means you're finally free.

Kristine: Free? I'm lost. What do I do now that I have no one left to live for?

Nora: You're wrong about me.

Kristine: I'm sorry?

Nora: I have done something... big. And amazing. And you have no idea.

Kristine: Then why keep it a secret from him?

Nora: Not all secrets are bad.

Kristine: I'm being honest. I'm trying to do what's right.

Krogstad: You lied about how you felt about me. And you married someone else.

Kristine: I shouldn't have done that, but I've paid for it. From now on I'm a person who is only interested in the truth.

## NORA & KROGSTAD'S RELATIONSHIP



Nora: In fact they were talking about getting her a job at the bank.

Krogstad: A job?

Nora: And I set it up. I have quite a bit of influence over my husband, so I'd be very careful about the way you speak to me in future.

Krogstad: I wasn't trying to suggest your husband was having an affair. You have my word.

Nora: Your word?

Krogstad: I risked everything to save my family. But the law doesn't care if we have good intentions.

Nora: Well, the law is wrong! The law is unfair!

Nora: What are their names, your daughters?  
Krogstad: Gloria and Fatuma.  
Nora: And they don't have a mother?  
Krogstad: They have me. I'd do anything for them.  
Nora: I understand.  
Krogstad: I know you do.

## NORA & DR RANCK'S RELATIONSHIP



Nora: TA-DA! Aren't they glorious? Vintage.  
Rank: Are they silk?  
Nora: Nothing but the best. Want to touch them?  
*He does - starting at the foot and sliding his hand up the leg. Stops himself.*  
Nora: What is it? Don't you think they'll look good on me?  
Rank: I am unable to give my opinion on that just at the moment.

Rank: But where's my mark, where's the proof that I've been here, that you matter to me more than anything. Someone else will warm my seat at dinnertime and I'll be gone without a trace.

Nora: Not necessarily.

Rank: I'd die for you too. Happily.

I wanted you to know that before I'm gone. So. Now you know.

Let me be that man for you. And then you and Torv can live the rest of your lives happily every after. It would make me so happy. Please, Nora.

I love you. Always have.

Nora: You love me?

Rank: Yes.

Nora: Oh.

Rank: Surprise.

*He goes close to her, takes her hand and puts it to his heart.*

*She looks at him for a moment, then-*

Nora: Why did you say that?

Rank: I think I've... ah... misread the situation. I was under the impression that you enjoyed my company almost more than Torvald's. But that was stupid of me, I see that now.

Nora: No, you haven't misread anything. Torvald is wonderful, but no one makes me laugh like you. You're much more fun than him.

Rank: Right.

Nora: It's like when Daddy was alive. I loved him more than anyone but Anna and the ladies who cleaned our house were my pals, my mates.

Rank: I'm just the court jester. Understood.

## TO THINK ABOUT

- Nora and Kristine are both characters driven to discover truth, yet they end up in very different relationships by the end of the play. Explore and discuss the different marital roles these characters choose and why they may have done so. Would their decisions be different in 1879 to 2017 and if so, why? Has the role of women evolved since Ibsen's time or not?

- Is Torvald a truly unlovable character or is there a good reason for why he has such values and traits that see him often disliked? What do you think his next steps would be after the end of the play?
- The dance Ibsen has Nora perform is traditionally known as the ‘Tarantella rehearsal’ –where we watch a character rehearse a performance. The dance comes from Italy and is said to be the only way to rid someone of the poison of a spider bite. What is Nora ridding herself of in this moment? How do the men watch her performance? How does our awareness of her performance change as soon as we see her little girl Emmy watching her mummy?

### A Provocation from Elena Carapetis, adaptor:

*There are two kinds of moral laws, two kinds of conscience, one for men and one, quite different, for women. They don't understand each other; but in practical life, woman is judged by masculine law, as though she weren't a woman but a man. The wife in the play ends by having no idea what is right and wrong; natural feelings on the one hand and belief in authority on the other lead her to utter distraction. A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint. She has committed forgery, and is proud of it; for she has done it out of love for her husband, to save his life. But this husband of hers takes his standpoint, conventionally honourable, on the side of the law, and sees the situation with male eyes.*

Consider Elena's provocation and examine Nora's view of law: "I don't understand it because it's not my law. It's your law and it doesn't apply to me. To how I see things," Before seeing others' reactions to her forgery, did she believe she had done something wrong? Why, or why not?





## Provocations used in the Rehearsal Room

- What are some examples of the way we still live in a patriarchal system that makes it so difficult for a woman rather than men to go back to work after having a child? Consider the ways the workplace offers or doesn't offer parental leave to different sexes. Also consider the idea of a woman often having to justify her work with how much her salary (exclusive from her partner's) will be in comparison to Childcare.
- 
- Nora throws back Torvald's comment, "you're a mother" by saying, "you're a father" and something about the different attitudes we have about men and women leaving their children. Do you think that in 2017 we would judge a man as harshly as Nora is judged if he left his children?

## From The Guardian

Nora: A short film responding to Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CY8s2MqPyM>

*NB There are many more excellent essay questions and classroom tasks in the below study guides to explore themes, characters, context and more.*

- Signet Classics: <http://www.penguin.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/DollshouseTG.pdf>
- Sparknotes: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/dollhouse/themes.html>
- Gradesaver: <http://www.gradesaver.com/a-dolls-house/study-guide/themes>
- Endnotes: <http://www.woodville.org/documentos/161031a-dolls-house-enotes.pdf>



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The Guardian YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CY8s2MqPyM>

State Theatre Company *A Doll's House* Subscriber Briefing and Tangent Panel Discussion

Tangent: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKzIOqqbRRg&t=160s>

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Rehearsal and production photographs taken by Andy Rasheed 2017



