

# *THE QUESTIONS*

*BY VAN BADHAM  
AND RICHARD WISE*



26 JUL - 17 AUG

SPACE THEATRE

**STATE THEATRE**  
**COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

State Theatre Company South Australia presents

## THE QUESTIONS

Book by Van Badham

Music by Richard Wise

Lyrics by Badham & Wise

## SYNOPSIS

When a young woman arrives at her online dating match's apartment, already late, things start badly. She has a master's degree in Gender Studies. He thinks Jordan Peterson would make an ideal dinner guest. They both realise this blind date is doomed, but an outside catastrophe and "shelter in place" lockdown order forces these opposites into the longest first date ever. They are now in a position where they have no alternative but to try to get along in this pressure-cooker situation. He is used to living alone in a peaceful serene environment, she is used to sharing with a flatmate and can be loud and messy. The rock band rehearsing in the apartment next door witness their constant discomfort and hardly help them to stay calm. Desperate to end the constant bickering, they turn to "The Questions", a real-life psychological questionnaire that researchers promise can build intimacy between anyone. But are either of them ready for the answers?

SPACE THEATRE: 26 JULY — 17 AUG 2024

SCHOOL PERFORMANCES: 1 AUG AND 7 AUG

RUNNING TIME

Approximately 110 minutes

Ages 16 +, year 11 and 12

Contains adult themes, mild coarse language, mild sexual references. Both characters remove their shirts, but no nudity is shown.

Please see the 'What to Expect' notes for more detail on content. Note that this is a new work and changes may be made to the script and staging of the work.

Resource created by Fiona Lukac and Jelena Nicdao for State Educate. ©

Support for State Educate comes from the State Theatre Company South Australia State Educate Circle.

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCING THE PLAY

Cast & creative team	4
Meet the Writer and Composer	5
Writers Note from Van Badham and Richard Wise	6
Script Excerpt	7
Interview with Van Badham and Richard Wise	8
Director's note from Mitchell Butel	9
An interview with Mitchell Butel	10
Dramatic notes	11
What next?	12

## CHARACTERS & CHARACTERISATION

Cast Q&A: interview	13
Excerpt - song	14-15
Characters/Roles	16-17
Excerpt - text	18
What next?	18
The 36 Questions	19
Excerpt -text	20

## DESIGN

Set Design - Jeremy Allen: interview	21-22
Costume design	23
Lighting Design - Gavin Norris: interview	24
Costume drawings	25
What next?	26

## DIGGING DEEPER

Themes & Concepts	27-28
Excerpt - song	29
What next?	30
Excerpts - text	31
Interesting Information	32-33
Excerpt - song	34
Further activities	35

# CREATIVE TEAM & CAST

BOOK & LYRICS .....	Van Badham
MUSIC & LYRICS .....	Richard Wise
DIRECTOR .....	Mitchell Butel
VISITOR .....	Chaya Ocampo
RESIDENT .....	Charles Wu
MUSICAL DIRECTOR/KEYS .....	James Bannah Jr
GUITAR/KEYS/SINGER .....	Sam Lau
DRUMMER .....	Jackson Mack
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER .....	Jeremy Allen
LIGHTING DESIGNER .....	Gavin Norris
SOUND DESIGNER .....	Andrew Howard
ASSOCIATE SOUND DESIGNER .....	Patrick Pages-Oliver
DRAMATURG .....	Kenneth Moraleda
INTIMACY COORDINATOR .....	Eliza Lovell
MUSICAL SUPERVISOR .....	Kym Purling
PRODUCTION MANAGER .....	Gabrielle Hornhardt
STAGE MANAGER .....	Bridget Samuel
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER .....	Carmen Evans

Set made by State Theatre Company South Australia Workshop.





# MEET THE WRITER AND COMPOSER VAN BADHAM AND RICHARD WISE

Van Badham is an international award-winning writer, theatremaker and broadcaster. She is a featured columnist for The Guardian and has also written for The New York Times, Bloomberg, The Telegraph (UK) and The Age. She was a Walkley finalist for her non-fiction book debut, 2021's best-selling QAnon And On: A Short and Shocking History of Internet Conspiracy Cults and Van was the first Australian to win Britain's Harold Hobson prize for theatre criticism.

Van Badham describes herself as living a double life, as a journalist and a commentator. She met her collaborator Richard Wise on a dating app but they quickly realised that their relationship was a different relationship and they have worked together collaboratively on a number of projects since then.

Richard Wise is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, producer, and clinical psychologist based in Melbourne. Originally from New Zealand, he has performed extensively as a percussionist, guitarist, and pianist across New Zealand, Australia, and China. Richard received his Bachelor of Music in Jazz Performance from the New Zealand School of Music and his Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology from Monash University in Melbourne.



RICHARD WISE AND VAN BADHAM PHOTO MATT BYRNE

# WRITERS NOTE FROM VAN BADHAM AND RICHARD WISE

In 2016, an American political scientist teamed up with a data analyst to determine the statistical likelihood of “mixed-partisan” marriages in America. The analysis concluded 30 percent of couples did not share a political affiliation. The majority of these were between partisans and independents; nine percent of the total were between Democrats and Republicans. Only four years later, researchers from the conservative Institute for Family Studies crunched their own numbers and discovered the polarisation gap had widened further, rapidly; now only 21 percent of marriages were politically mixed, and just under four percent were between Democrats and Republicans. By last year, when yet another study found two thirds of singles were claiming to “swipe left” on potential online dates who did not share their politics, writers from The Atlantic raised an alarming new statistical context. The number of young men identifying with conservative politics had risen slightly in the past decade, while the number of young women espousing progressive values has risen markedly. Heterosexual partnering in America is hence faced with a profound logistical challenge; there aren’t enough partners available in the dating pool who fall within every young person’s “red lines”.

None of this was known when we first had the idea for The Questions back in 2015. When the two of us met as a Tinder match a year earlier, a brief spell of dating brought us to the fast conclusion that overwhelming similarity can, in fact, overwhelm a relationship; we didn’t work as a couple because we were dating a reflection of ourselves. Our luck was to realise that in the same mirror lay a shared artistic connection that was rare and powerful. Only a couple of months later we’d made our first music theatre show together, Late Night Story, for the Adelaide Fringe. In the car ride home to Melbourne, we were outside Hahndorf we discussed Arthur Aron’s fascinating intimacy-building questionnaire, The 36 Questions That Lead to Love, and decided it would be our next collaboration. We just needed to find the premise. As we were searching, we were distracted by the sometimes shared, sometimes separate rhythms of adult life... and then the whole world was swallowed by the crisis of Covid-19.

The period of pandemic lockdowns fostered intimate drama for everyone who lived through it, but a news report on The Today Show about a couple in China posed a uniquely confronting scenario; a young man and woman on a blind date were trapped into sudden domestic cohabitation when governmental crisis management locked them in his apartment together. We’d discovered The Questions’ premise at last, but developing the musical over the past couple of years, the true story it’s based on is a cultural moment in which dissimilarity can seem insurmountable.

Arthur Aron’s 36 Questions promise to foster intimacy between any two people. The question we are asking with a show about them is just what might have to transpire amongst polarised people for them to have the space, and the inclination, to attempt the answers.

Van Badham and Richard Wise, July 15, 2024.

# INTERVIEW WITH THE WRITER AND COMPOSER VAN BADHAM AND RICHARD WISE

We interviewed Van and Richard on Day one of rehearsals.

Interviews can be found here:

Van Badham Part 1: <https://youtu.be/stNbowlCwLQ>  
Van Badham Part 2: <https://youtu.be/VDcd1xmttww>  
Richard Wise: <https://youtu.be/JBYLEzyHYMs>

It was during a drive from Adelaide to Melbourne when Van and Richard were discussing the '36 Questions' and debating the effectiveness and validity when Richard stated 'this will be our next musical'. The endeavour for humans to find ways of connection is not new, and there have been many questionnaires that have attempted to smooth the true course of love but Aron's questions have generated much public response, with each question more probing than the previous one, leading to a mutual vulnerability that fosters closeness. The final exercise is to stare into each other's eyes for 4 minutes.



Excerpt 1: (first meeting)

The Resident answers the door. There is a slightly longer-than-one-would-expect as they regard one another for the first time.

BOTH: (simultaneously) Hiii.

Awkwardness.

RES: (guiding her inside) So pleased you finally made it.

VIS: This is a really nice place. You sure you live here by yourself?

RES: Who else would live here?

VIS: And the food smells amazing.

RES: I had to juggle some of the timing – did you have some trouble getting here? Was there a bottleneck at a checkpoint?

VIS: No, but there are lots of police out. Not just at the stations. Are there usually so many on the street?

RES: Oh, they're not police - they're "neighbourhood security" now.

VIS: We can't have a neighbourhood loose in this city.

RES: Not with everything that's going on.

VIS: I'm sorry, I was late.

I hope it didn't cause problems with what you're -

RES: It did, but you're here now, so – make yourself comfortable -

VIS: This is a really nice place.

RES: You've already said that.

VIS: Awkward –

RES: Awkward –



RICHARD WISE



VAN BADHAM



# DIRECTOR'S NOTE FROM MITCHELL BUTEL

I met the wondrous whirlwind that is playwright-journalist-commentator-author Van Badham when I was performing at Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre in the early 2010s when she was the theatre's dramaturg (and coincidentally where our esteemed Executive Director, Julian Hobba was then the Malthouse's Company Manager – 'twas fun times). I very soon realised that Van was one of the sharpest, wittiest, most imaginative and iconoclastic makers working in Australian theatre.

She has a rich knowledge of and love for both classic and new theatrical forms, has a deep sense of social justice and a belief in people's power to do good but is also a pop culture junkie whose connection to what's hot and what's not is unparalleled. Accordingly, she knows how to whip up wonderful theatrical feasts that hit the heart, tickle the funny bone and plug squarely into the zeitgeist.

When she presented the idea of a world premiere chamber rom-com musical about a blind date that goes wrong and then (maybe) right against a backdrop of modern metropolitan crises that could also platform five amazing young and diverse musical and acting talents and in so doing, explode tropes about intimacy and love, I was once again in her thrall.

And the minute I heard the soulful, soaring and sweet sounds of her writing partner, Richard Wise's songs, I knew that State Theatre Company South Australia was destined to become the birthplace of what I know will be a musical that travels the nation and the world.

If you ever felt the need for love, found it, lost it, found it somewhere else, this is the show for you.

Van and Richard have worked with such invention, generosity, kindness, mischief and joy on this piece through various developments, all funded by our beloved Commissioning Collective and we're thrilled to be able to share the product of all that dream-weaving with you in this production, brought to life by a cast, crew and creative team of similarly gorgeous and talented folk.

To live is to have many questions about ourselves and our world. To ask them is how we grow. To answer them honestly is how we connect. To connect is how we ultimately love.

I love this piece. I hope you will too. And I hope it raises a few questions for you that might get answered in your own daily rom-com musical.

Sit back, take shelter and enjoy.



MITCHELL BUTEL AND BRIDGET SAMUEL PHOTO MATT BYRNE

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MITCHELL BUTEL

Mitchell Butel was interviewed during Week 2 of rehearsal

Mitchell Butel: <https://youtu.be/VHhlw16YjSk>

Questions asked included the following.

What is the difference between a musical and a play with music?

Do you have a particular rehearsal technique you use?

What do you see as the themes of the play?

What do you think the play tells us about the need for human connection?

Aside from performing, does the band serve another role, a voyeuristic perspective?

What do you want the audience to get out of the play?

# DRAMATIC NOTES

## Why are stories told through song?

Music guides the emotional journey and adds meaning/emphasis to the text. The feelings are so powerful that the character can only express themselves through song. They are unable to find the words on their own and the layer of musical expression allows us the emotional access to the character.

Songs are a powerful mode of storytelling and music is a part of so many cultures that it is a medium that we can all recognise.

Music is one of the things that connects us, especially as an isolated society. Whether that isolation comes because of external circumstances, like a worldwide health pandemic, or as a result of our increasing dependancy on devices that remove our traditional means of communication.

‘We create songs, poems, stories and plays in order to communicate the things that we learn in our experience to the people around us and to the people who come after us as well to remind people that this is an ongoing experience’ Van Badham.

In *The Questions* the music conveys people figuring out their way towards intimacy and how they make that connection. It is a window into the internal thoughts of our characters as they discover each other.

The songs also function as a safety mechanism for *The Resident* and *The Visitor* to face some of the more difficult and challenging emotions they’re experiencing. It feels ‘safer’ for them to share their inner most secrets with one another through song. For example, *The Resident* singing about losing his mother and *The Visitor* singing about the breakdown of her marriage.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9E5DrBLg\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9E5DrBLg_w)



CHARLES WU AND CHAYA OCAMPO SINGING ALL THESE MAYBES: PHOTO MATT BYRNE





JACKSON MACK, SAM LAU, CHARLES WU, CHAYA OCAMPO AND JAMES BANNAH: PHOTO MATT BYRNE

## What next?

*Our “What next?” sections include questions and activities based on previous pages. These can be used for individual reflection or as class exercises.*

Van discusses Arthur Aron’s 36 Questions that can lead to Love (Closeness Generating Procedure).

Create a series of questions, or a song, or a poem to find something in common with your fellow classmates, with a view to friendship rather than dating. Avoid using online quizzes.

Think about ways in which you feel safe sharing some of the harder parts of yourself with another person. Make a list of what these could be and how and why these forms of communication give us a sense of safety. For example, writing a letter, use of visual language such as memes/gifs/emojis instead of words, creative writing including poems or short stories.





CHARLES WU AND CHAYA OCAMPO : PHOTO MATT BYRNE

## THE CAST Q&A

These responses have been taken from video interviews with the cast of The Questions, Charles Wu and Chaya Ocampo.

Charles Wu: <https://youtu.be/qhMNBk1SBzw>

Chaya Ocampo: <https://youtu.be/Llh0QuQjy1w>

We asked the following questions of Charles and Chaya:

What kind of person is the Resident/Visitor?

What were some of the challenges playing the Resident/Visitor?

How do you embody the character of the Resident/Visitor?

How do you prepare yourself for a musical? Physically and vocally.



CHAYA OCAMPO AND CHARLES WU IN REHEARSAL: PHOTO MATT BYRNE

## EXCERPT 2 (approaching the first date)

### All These Maybes

VIS: It's this city we live in  
Disconnected, and so lonely, and we're tired, sad and too driven,  
So perhaps it's a given, given everything,  
That dating's a digital shit-show, just gamified nights of regret.

But I want to connect,  
And I want to be close -  
And whomever I love, well, I want to love them the most.

... But between here and there is a wall  
made of atomisation, and grey urban sprawl -  
It's tall.

So yes - I said yes - to a blind date -  
With some guy my friend told me is fine... if not great,  
And now I'm late – perhaps that's telling?  
I'm fighting a doubt that's compelling.  
Propelling me forward is the sheer force of “maybe”  
I'm secretly hoping that hope is not crazy -

... I guess we'll see.

RES: Here I am, on time, as planned -  
Fielding lol I'm late DMs on Instagram.  
I set my house in perfect order, so she'll see  
A scene of masculinity  
An archetype of modern man, that she can stand -  
At least that is the plan

VIS: In my dreams, just past the door  
I see a man with flawless jawline  
And I'm somersaulting in my head -

RES: Maybe tonight she'll note discretely  
Here's a stack of Men's Health Weekly  
Then she'll lick her lips and flick her hair -

VIS: Maybe...

Here I launch once more unto the breach  
Battle-scarred and with just more hope than reach  
It seems – and yet, the maybes drive me on...

RES: Maybe...

We could take off, like a rocket  
Flying perilously through space  
Til our fuel burns up and we crash into the moon

VIS: Sometimes life just astounds me

RES: Maybe yes, maybe no

VIS: In this city around me, I sense possibility.

RES AND VIS: I can sense a something maybe could become -



CHAYA OCAMPO IN REHEARSAL: PHOTO MATT BYRNE





THE RESIDENT, CHARLES WU AND THE VISITOR, CHAYA OCAMPO : PHOTO MATT BYRNE

## CHARACTERS/ROLES

### The Resident

The Resident is a single occupant of a highrise building in a densely -populated modern city. Nominally, a man in his 30s, who works - largely from home - as a graphic designer. He is fastidious and describes himself as 'serene neutral' which is reflected by his neat and orderly apartment. He is very programmed to his solitary life having lived by himself since college and this is challenged when the Visitor is entrapped with him during an emergency lockdown. The Resident loves to cook and utilises this passion as a gateway to willingly share and connect with the Visitor.

As he delves deeper into the questions, he reveals a deep regret from his youth in which he missed the passing of his mother, suggesting how this grief has played a part to his shut-in and isolated nature. He expresses how the day of her passing is connected to the last time he was carefree with his time.

Like the Visitor, he wishes to connect with others but is unsure how to do so.

### The Visitor

The Visitor is a guest to the Resident's home. In contrast to the Resident, she has a very open nature that is vibrant, outgoing and free. She has a masters degree in Gender Studies, and is passionate about sharing her world view with others.

The Visitor has a complex relationship with her family, recognising herself as the black sheep. She feels overshadowed by her successful younger sister who has



been studying in the medical field to be a respiratory specialist. Meanwhile the Visitor herself has been struggling as a recent divorcee, forced to start from scratch. In spite of this, she continues to wear her heart on her sleeve and is determined to find a love connection. She has had an extensively complex journey with love and has taken a leap of faith with her blind date with the Resident.

She appears to be willing to take risks and make connections, particularly through the device of The Questions, the 36 Questions quiz by Arthur Aron.

## The Band

In a nearby high rise building, there are three members of a rock-and-roll band trying to rehearse. The band is situated in perfect view of the couple and act as spectators to the couple's story, also experiencing the lockdown from a distance. Throughout the play, and as the relationship changes between the Res and the Vis, we see the band respond and contribute to the tensions and the connection.



THE BAND JACKSON MACK, SAM LAU, JAMES BANNAH, RICHARD WISE AND CHAYA OCAMPO : PHOTO MATT BYRNE

## Arthur Aron's 36 Questions that can lead to Love (Closeness Generating Procedure).

### Mentioned in the play

Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why? P. 10

Who would your ideal dinner guest be? P. 8

What does friendship mean to you? P.27

What roles do love and affection play in your life? P.27

If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future or anything else, what would you want to know? P. 29

Is there something that you've dreamed of doing, and for a long time? Why haven't you done it? P. 29

When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else? P. 44

What would constitute the perfect day for you? P. 31

If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30 year old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want? P. 54

If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be? P. 57

Share something of a positive characteristic of your question partner P. 64

If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet? P. 68

Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life. P. 71

<https://amorebeautifulquestion.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Arthur-Arons-36-questions-2.pdf>

### What next?

Pick one of the characters and underline their objectives and journey throughout the play.

The Visitor uses the 'questions' to try to get to know the Resident, using the list of The 36 Questions in the Study Guide choose 5 of your own. Why have you chosen these and how would they help bring the characters together?

In a world where we are increasingly online and separated from each other do these shortcut questions help bypass months of awkward social interaction?  
Discuss

Thinking about the voyeuristic nature of today's society through social media, what role does the 'band' play?

## Arthur Aron 36 Questions that can lead to Love (Closeness Generating Procedure)

How the Questions came about:


Psychologist Arthur Aron and his partner Elaine Spaulding curated the '36 Questions' as a study originally called the 'closeness generating procedure' published in the 1990s. The study involved collating multiple coupled strangers in a laboratory setting who were given a series of questions designed to gradually bring two people closer. As the couple progresses through the questionnaire so does the level of intimacy of each question.

The finalised list of questions became popularised in 2015 when a New York Times writer shared it as a story 'To Fall in Love with anyone, Do This'. It's now commonly recognised as the '36 Questions that can lead to love' with its design to build intimacy between two people through the gradual progression of sharing self-disclosed information with one another.

Is there a secret to a long, loving relationship?

Ultimately we need to communicate as humans, to support one another, to listen and to connect. Dr Aron highlights four key areas, looking after your own, and each others, mental health, keeping strong friendships and balance.

<https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/the-36-questions-that-lead-to-love/8387736>



There's an experiment, written about in this magazine. I think we should try it. It's supposed to accelerate the building of intimacy between two strangers, by asking one another a series of 36 specific personal questions.



Res typing



### EXCERPT 3 (Visitors backstory)

VIS: Both parents are still alive.

RES: You're not close?

VIS: They haven't kicked me out of the group chat... but overperforming younger sister at medical school absorbs most of their attention. She's going to become a respiratory specialist. And deliver world peace and conquer the Martians, ask anyone. Ha, no, you don't need to ask – my parents will tell you. For hours. Not quite so vocal about loser daughter who had a job in a restaurant -

RES: You're not a loser.

VIS: These old friends of my parents once turned up in the place I was working and didn't recognise me and then were so weird when I came up to them I had this really solid feeling Mum and Dad might have told them I was dead.

RES: So who was the last person or anthropomorphised creature you sang to?

VIS: Probably my husband.

RES: YOUR WHAT?

VIS: Oh yeah – 300 person wedding, abalone at the banquet, changed outfits three times. The whole deal. We really don't know each other at all. By the way, (of the food) good call - I was hungrier than I thought.

RES: How long have you been married?!

VIS: A lot less time than I've been divorced.



CHAYA OCAMPO AND CHARLES WU: PHOTO MATT BYRNE





SET DESIGN - PHOTO: FIONA LUKAC

# DESIGN ELEMENTS

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JEREMY ALLEN SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

The set design is created by Jeremy Allen, in conversation and collaboration with the Director, Mitchell Butel. Jeremy also designed the costume for the production. The general design has three main elements, the skyline (the curved cyclorama at the back of the stage), the bands apartment and the Residents apartment.

The residents apartment sits front and centre of the stage. It sits on a deck and will sit on a high gloss floor, which will reflect the skyline at night. There is one main wall to maximise as much of the open space as possible. On the wall is the front entrance door which has some use as the Visitor arrives and as the Resident obtains supplies. There is also a kitchenette, which will need to have functionality as the Residents' skill as a cook is an integral part of the play. There will be a sink that will also need to be functional.

In terms of the furniture, it is neat and minimal and fits in with the style of the Resident. The sofa will need to serve as a bed and will also need to be visible from all sightlines within the theatre.

There are a couple of floor textures to represent the style of the Resident, the carpeted living area and the kitchen surface.

The band space contains our three piece band. The interior is similarly dressed to the Resident's apartment, similar palette of whites and greys. They will be contained to this space throughout the show. The exterior of this is dressed as a three dimensional version of the skyline that we can see. To give the idea that the skyline is real.

The skyline is a painted surface that sits on a curved structure. The skyline will hopefully cut through into some of the windows, with the hope to shine lighting through the windows in the night scene as discussed under the lighting section below.

The interview can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/hb5vi0HKW1Y>

Questions we asked Jeremy:

What inspirations jumped out at you in terms of set design when you first read the play?

Did these change much after conversations with the director or in the rehearsal room?

How does your design support the themes in the production?

Can you tell us about the costume design?

How do you create a set with two scenes happening, with the band in the background at all times, and still representing the confines of the apartment?









SET DESIGN THEME BOARD, NIGHT AND LIGHTING INSPIRATION- PHOTO: FIONA LUKAC

# LIGHTING DESIGN

## AN INTERVIEW WITH GAVIN NORRIS

The perimeter of the Residents apartment is lit with LED lights and sits about 600mm high. The skyline is also lit and will change from daylight to reflect the city at night. There is a gloss floor which will help create a sense of the city skyline from the apartment living. There is also strip exclusion lighting fixtures above the apartment space to light the main performance space, which will fulfill a functional role as well. Looking at a warm RGB. We are hoping to have lighting throughout the windows to help show the life of those who are also trapped/confined in their apartments, with lighting able to come on and off across the skyline to reflect people coming home after the notifications come through. Looking at putting natural white in behind the windows, and will custom make some pixel streams for this, with the idea to colour the scape as well and provide a candy palette.

This interview can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/sE4kiyUAhQ4>

Questions we asked Gavin:

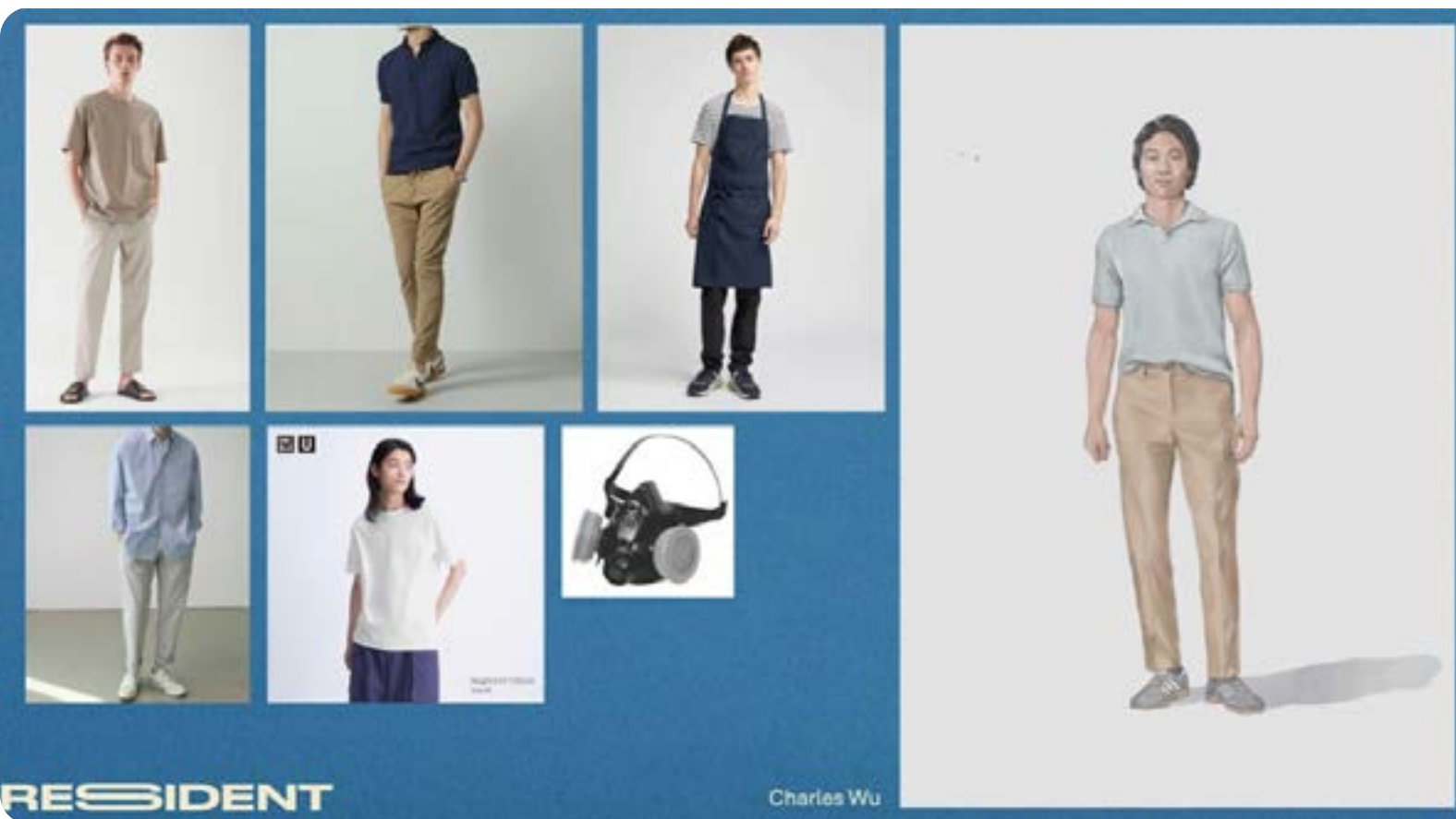
What is the world you are trying to create with your lighting design?

How do you create the lighting for an apartment whilst still signifying the exterior world?

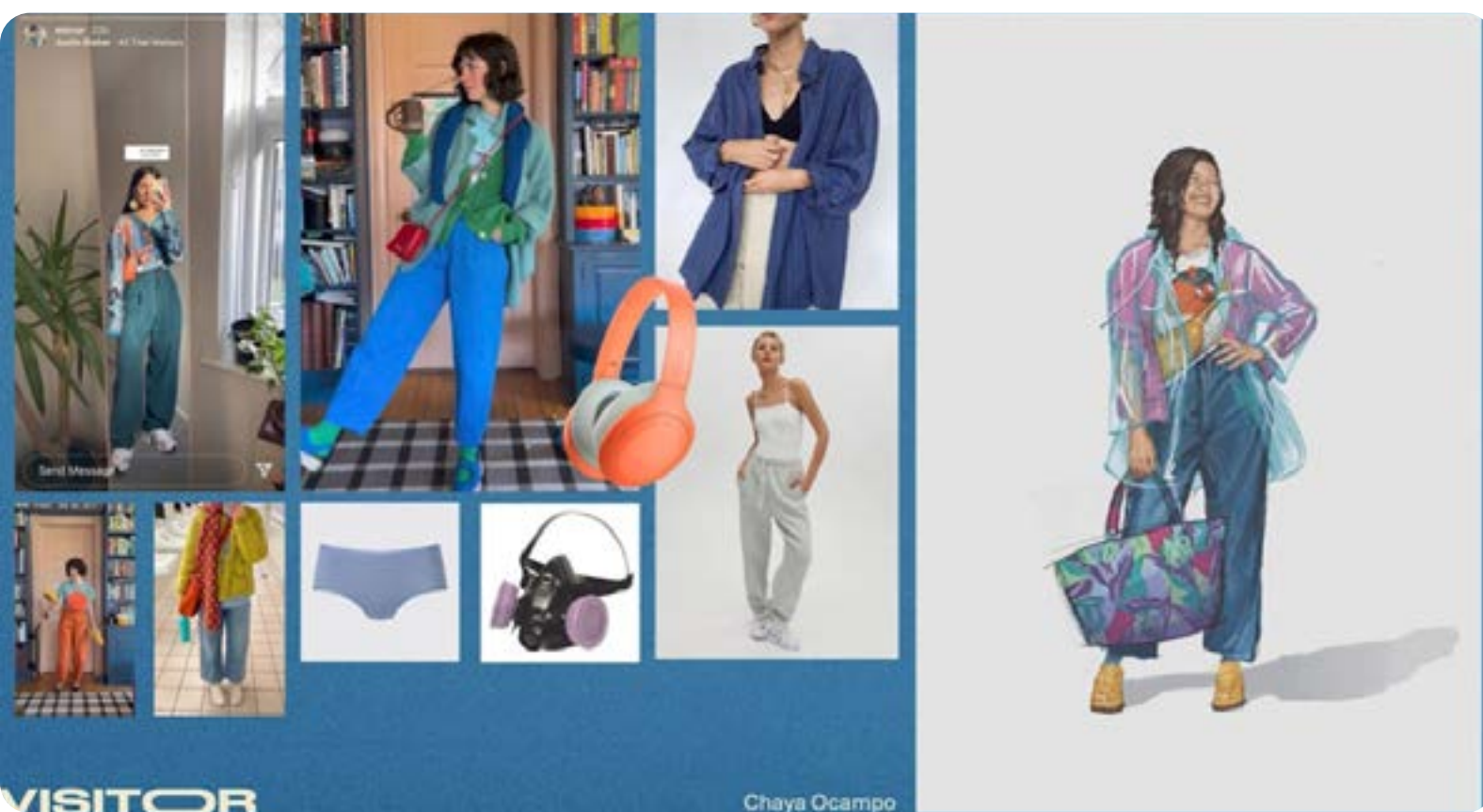
What challenges, if any, does the above present in terms of lighting?

What kinds of lights are you using? How do they help realise the design?





COSTUME DESIGN IMAGES COURTESY JEREMY ALLEN - PHOTO: FIONA LUKACL



## What next?

Think of the design process and the set, costume and lighting for this play. Taking into consideration the information above, create a palette for your own design.

What other options could you design to represent the band on stage? Present your own concept of the set incorporating the themes of isolation, connection and relationships.

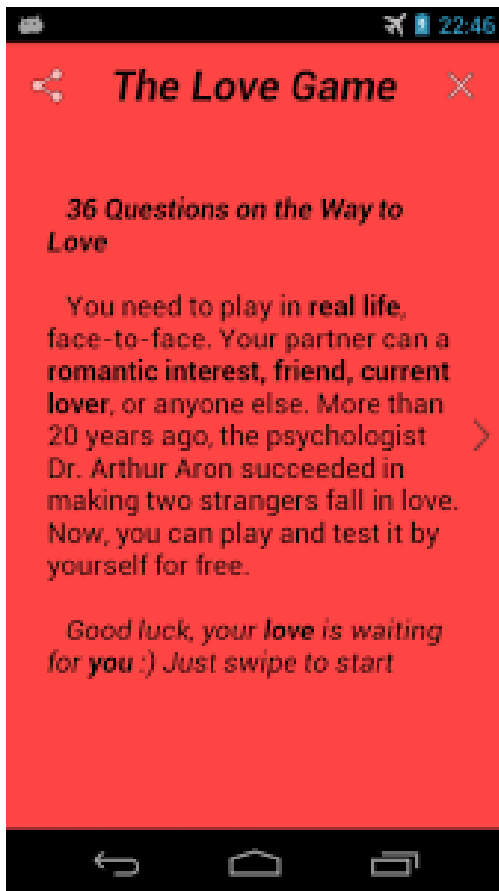
Think of the challenge of lighting a city skyline whilst still maintaining functioning lighting for the main actors in the apartment, can you present ideas of how to do this?



APARTMENT LIVING DESIGN CONCEPT - PHOTO: FIONA LUKACL

# THEMES & CONCEPTS

IN *THE QUESTIONS* BY VAN BADHAM AND RICHARD WISE



## Vulnerability and the Power of Connection

The play has a focus on the transformative power of intimacy and that to connect through conversation is not only a desire but a human need. To understand each other through our fragilities and admit that we don't always have the answers is what brings people together.

Different levels of vulnerability are exemplified throughout this production. Through living in extremely close proximity, the characters are forced to know each other in their pure habitual nature. They are forced to be vulnerable and intimate in this physical state. They are also physically vulnerable to the dangers of the outside world, fearful of the unknown reasons for their immediate lockdown. However, through the continuous dialogue of the 36 questions, the characters choose to understand each other at a deeper emotional level. They consciously make the choice to be vulnerable as opposed to being forced into it.

From this vulnerability grows compassion for one another. The play inspires how we need to be compassionate to those in vulnerable situations in order to work together, and vice versa how when we open ourselves up to one another we find true understanding.

## Cultural Disconnect (Social Media and COVID-19)

Set in a post COVID-19 world, the Questions recognises the recent disconnect between people of the modern world who have been influenced by long periods of isolation. The play expresses the cultural loss of certain social skills and the compassion we have for those who are different to us and how this practice must change. Especially living in a modern age of social media as a main means for communication between different communities, we have created an online culture that is quick to judge and shut down opposing views without considering how these differences can make us stronger. This distance and tension we have created is unhealthy and toxic because it stops us from true human experience and development as a community. 'Finding common ground between people who are not like you is the point of human connection' says Badham.

On social media, we don't share all of the aspects of our personalities, such as our deepest hopes and fears and other emotions. They don't see us when we first wake up in the morning, they don't see us crying. They only see the "good or curated" parts of us. And vice versa, we do not see the full range of emotions and ups and downs for them, either. When we are friends with someone on social media, we do not have that



closeness of contact with them, so we are less connected than with friends in real life. Online 'friendships' do not offer genuine connection that we get when we are face to face, in person. Our brains respond differently in these situations. For example, a hug or verbal positive reaction in real life releases different neurological responses, more intense, as a result of actual human contact.

We know that people who have strong social circles in their lives and connect with others regularly and consistently are happier and live longer than those who have fewer connections. This is not true of social media, in fact we are discovering that there is an increasing level of anxiety and depression as a result of the increasing reliance on social media.

<https://digitalwellbeing.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Research-Brief-Impacts-of-Social-Media-in-Australia.pdf>

Communication via social media may also replace in-person interactions, contributing to increased loneliness and worsening of existing mental health conditions.

## Social Isolation

The play is set within the confines of a 'lockdown/isolation' period, where the characters are forced together but we know that the Resident has felt difficulty connecting to others and felt lonely, particularly after his mother dies.

In today's society we can often find it difficult to connect with others, and particularly to avoid the toxic difficulties that come with the combative nature of social media. We find that tensions around difference have really been enhanced by social media. Our isolation from lockdown have magnified the differences we have, rather than finding common ground with others.

We need to recognise that difference is what allows us to continue engaging with each other, to learn, to build, to create and enable humanity to build communities together. Not just collaborating, but recognising our different skills, experiences and tastes and aesthetics are what enables us to grow and thrive.

The musical that Van and Richard have written reminds us of the power of showing vulnerability to one another, allowing ourselves to learn from each other.





EXCERPT 4 (Residents Backstory through song )

11. Nightingale

RES: In corridors of the old cancer ward  
I make my decision to leave  
My dad's in there with Mum  
The nurse calls to me on the way out  
Asking if I'm wanting to stay  
It won't be too long now

I say it's fine, I need a walk  
I need some time to be alone  
And just talk to myself for a little while – ah

I go outside  
The sky is clear  
The traffic's soft  
The moon  
The moon above me, crying too.  
I start to walk  
The houses sleep,  
The streets are dark, and warm  
It's bedtime in the heartlands now

Then

BAND: : (he's walking without thinking)

RES: I

BAND: (a journey through the shadows)

RES: - stopped and took a look around

BAND: (He didn't know where he was going)

RES: and I found, myself on an adventure  
Now, lost,  
Wandering along the verge, and saw  
A movement there

Right there on the street  
An old fox was standing  
Licking his paw, as if demanding  
why I'd come to visit, then  
I heard a nightingale

Up in the trees, the leaves started shifting  
Blown in a breeze,  
Singing to me, right  
There I heard a nightingale  
And the bird heard me

I sang...  
I sang into the night  
and the nightingale sang...  
She sang to me.

VIS: What happened then?

RES: Walked home, got in really late, checked my phone. Twenty missed calls from my Dad. Mum died within an hour of me leaving the hospital.

She reaches for him, he pretends he has not seen it, and moves.

## What next?

What other themes do you believe the play addresses?

Prepare a table and list the themes addressed, and where you encounter these issues in your daily life. Do you think social media has played a role in these issues.

Choose two areas and prepare a short scene with characters to highlight our search for connection.



## EXCERPT 5 (The Questions introduced)

VIS: Don't write it off, World's Most Unimaginative Design Professional.

RES: Why is this bookmarked and tabbed?

VIS: Arron's idea is emotional closeness is formed from mutual vulnerability, so as you go through asking all the questions -

RES: (Flips through) "Before you make a phone call, do you rehearse out how you think it should go...?", "Who would you invite to dinner..." ... "if you were famous..." HEY. You asked me these the first time we had dinner - !

VIS: Forgive me for rolling some dice on what was supposed to be a date.

RES (waving the magazine) Not the first time you've rolled them, given all the margin notes.

VIS: Why do you think I'm going on dates?

RES: So you don't have to wash your own plates after dinner?!

VIS: Ok, then so why are you going on dates?!

RES: "The 36 Questions That Lead to Love" ... except they don't, haven't and clearly never will.

VIS: We need to learn to live here together. (snatching back the magazine) Maybe – maybe – we might build a little intimacy, safe from any romantic risk.

RES: There is no possibility of romantic risk.

VIS: FANTASTIC news.

## EXCERPT 6 (Arguing)

Res: I appreciate it's frustrating to only have one pair of underpants.

Vis: Thank you. I'll be more mindful of the toothpaste lid.

Res: And if you can, please close the cupboards

Vis: ok

Res: And pick out one cup, rinse it out after you've used it, and reuse it so there aren't dirty cups everywhere.

Vis: Also, your hair smells

Res: It does not!

Vis: Your scalp's reacting to whatever the chemicals are in that awful shampoo.

Res: My shampoo is not awful.

Vis: One cup for coffee and one cup for tea is not 'cups everywhere'!

Res: Fine. Fine. But I will never forgive you for chipping one of my plates!

Vis: Oh my god, not the fucking plate again!!

# INTERESTING INFORMATION

Van has discussed that her original idea came after hearing the story of a chinese woman who had been on a date when she was caught by a lockdown order.

## **Covid-19: Chinese woman stuck in lockdown with blind date:**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-59969509>

China has a zero Covid-19 policy, meaning that swift lockdowns are routinely imposed in communities when cases of the virus are detected. Early 2020 saw many lockdowns as the virus took hold and the government worked swiftly to ensure that it was contained. This meant public transport was cancelled and travel outside of the region was also restricted. Citizens were required to remain indoors with shopping for supplies limited due to closures of businesses and non essential services. Residents reported being met with locked exits as they tried to leave their apartment buildings.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/mar/11/experience-locked-down-with-blind-date-now-engaged-china-covid>

The pair were trapped together during a coronavirus lockdown in Shaanxi province for a month. The woman said the man did not interest her at first but has since won her heart. She discusses how her date cooked for her and cared for her, how they discussed normal daily activities at first but then as time went on began to really make a connection and recognise their compatibility.

## **Who is Jordan Peterson?**

The Canadian psychology professor emerged from obscurity, railing against identity politics and dispensing tough but ill informed and misogynistic advice to (mostly) young alienated men.

He claims that concepts fundamental to social-justice movements, such as the existence of patriarchy and other forms of structural oppression, are treacherous illusions, and that he can prove this with science. Hence: "The idea that women were oppressed throughout history is an appalling theory." He has been widely recognised and condemned for his misogynistic and harmful views.

Exerpt 7: (Gender studies)

RES: But I guess Jordan Peterson would be interesting. To have at dinner.

VIS: Jordan Peterson. The misogynist.

RES: He's a very famous philosopher.

VIS: Who believes in forced monogamy.

And witches. You know he has this whole paranoid analogy where he equates vaginas to an underground dragon's lair and (realising what she's doing) ... great plates. These are great plates. IKEA? I love IKEA -

RES: They're Wedgwood.

VIS: I mean, you have to admit the dragon-vagina thing is hilarious -

RES: My cousin said you have a Master's degree. What's it in?

VIS: Gender Studies.

Beat.



## Real Social Connection - Why it is important for humans

Humans are social creatures by nature. We have an innate need for connection which is supported by how our genes, hormones and brains have evolved. Social connection is crucial for our mental and physical health - we strive to feel love and happiness to ensure we continue to reproduce and care for our children.

Strong social connection has therapeutic powers. It has been linked to lower rates of anxiety and depression, improved immune function, and even a longer life. Social connection is also important for our sense of purpose and belonging, which helps drive us and make us feel happy. Plus, we're 30x more likely to laugh with someone 'IRL' than we are on our own - and laughing is so good for us.

"Connections with others at the individual and collective levels improve our chances of survival...These behaviours co-evolved with supporting genetic, neural, and hormonal mechanisms to ensure that humans survived, reproduced, and cared for offspring sufficiently long that they, too, could reproduce." [Hawkley & Cacioppo](#)

Social media can create a false sense of connection that doesn't actually meet our need for real human interaction. We feel less empathy when we're behind a screen (hence why it's easier for people to be mean) which doesn't allow us to connect as deeply. The most common feeling from social media is FOMO and comparison.

The absence of social connection for a prolonged period of time can be pretty harmful to our health. Loneliness isn't just being alone, it can be feeling the lack of emotional and real human connection. Loneliness impacts mental health and cognitive function.



Excerpt 8

RES: I've got a problem,  
It's everything you do  
And everything you say, the way  
You talk to me, the way that you go about your day being / you.

VIS: / I've got a problem,  
It's everything you think,  
And everything you like, these gross  
Ideas you have, like your odd belief that you're superior to me –

RES AND VIS: And I don't know how to solve this problem.

RES: You are dishonest, a mess, unpunctual,  
and quite unable to self-reflect  
Because you make too much bathroom steam for the mirror.

RES AND VIS: And I don't know how to deal with this problem

VIS: You're a control freak, uptight, antisocial,  
And while you're proud to be stubborn, you  
Don't address that it's made you into a fool, so ugly and cruel.

VIS AND RES: : So ugly and cruel.

RES: I've got a problem,  
It's everything that you feel  
And everything that you touch, so much!  
And I waste time just trying to avoid the stench of your / chaos

VIS: / I've got a problem,  
It's everything that you own  
And everything that you choose, you ooze  
'Conformist', you excrete the sad banality of just being safe.

RES AND VIS: And I don't know how to solve this problem

VIS: You're a mean troll,

RES: And you are a goblin.

RES AND VIS: (at each other)  
And could it be you're a bit in love  
with all these component traits (you) claim to despise?

VIS: I don't know how to deal with this problem

RES: I think I might just get off on the loathing

VIS: And all the hate, and the cruel things we say  
To shape all the vengeful insults that fly

RES: They keep us alive.

VIS AND RES: It keeps me alive.

VIS: What if this is all we get?  
This one shot at life, and then death.  
And all I'm gonna do / with my time on earth

RES: /I'll spend all my time on earth fighting you -

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

### WRITTEN RESPONSE

Think about the pressure of social media and finding true relationships at the moment. Has our increasing reliance on social media isolated us and prevented making social connections?

Prepare a written review of the production, noting the writing, directing and design elements. What do you think the audience took away from the performance?

For guidelines on how to write a review, see our review writing resource linked in the dropdown menu for *The Questions* at

<https://statetheatrecompany.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/How-To-Write-a-Theatre-Review.pdf>

### DISCUSSION & WRITTEN ACTIVITY

Analyse the role you believe the band has in the production. Do you feel that our lives are constantly being played out with everyone watching? How do you think this impacts our behaviour and interactions with others?

Create the next scene once the two main characters are out of lockdown, how different does this look and why?

### ACTIVITY

What other ways do people make connections? Make a list of the different options to online dating, with friendships in mind rather than romance. How do we feel part of society and connected without an online presence? How can we foster connection without our social devices? How can we find the humour in this?



# STATE THEATRE

COMPANY SOUTH AUSTRALIA