

THE
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A Doll's House

Education Pack

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Introduction to the play.

Synopsis

Set in 19th-century Norway, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* tells the story of Nora Helmer, a seemingly happy wife and mother who is beginning to question the life she has been living.

At the start of the play, Nora and her husband, Torvald, appear to be the perfect couple. Torvald is a successful banker, and Nora plays the role of the doting wife and mother. However, beneath this surface, Nora is hiding a secret. Years earlier, she secretly borrowed money to save Torvald's life, forging her father's signature to get the loan. She has been secretly working to pay it off, fearing what might happen if Torvald ever found out.

As the play unfolds, Nora's secret is threatened when Nils Krogstad, a disgraced bank clerk, discovers the forgery and tries to blackmail her. Krogstad's actions set off a chain of events that exposes the fragility of Nora and Torvald's relationship. Torvald is more concerned about his reputation than Nora's sacrifice, revealing a lack of genuine love and respect for her. Nora begins to realise that she has been living her life as a "doll," first for her father and now for her husband, never truly discovering her own identity or desires. In the play's powerful and controversial conclusion, Nora makes the bold decision to leave her husband and children to find her own path, declaring her independence from the societal roles that have confined her.

The Characters

Nora Helmer

The protagonist, Nora begins as a playful and naive wife but undergoes a transformation. By the end of the play, she realizes she's been living in a "doll's house" and chooses to leave her family to find independence.

Torvald Helmer

Nora's husband, Torvald is controlling and obsessed with societal status. He treats Nora like a child and is more concerned with appearances than with his wife's sacrifice or emotions.

Nils Krogstad

A lawyer who lent Nora money, Krogstad initially blackmails her but is revealed to be a desperate man seeking redemption.

Kristine Linde (Mrs. Linde)

Nora's old friend, Mrs. Linde is a pragmatic, independent woman who contrasts with Nora. She helps Nora see the reality of her situation and rekindles a relationship with Krogstad.

Dr. Rank

A close family friend, secretly in love with Nora.

The Helmer Children

Nora and Torvald's children Ivar, Bob (Bobby) and Emmy.

Anne-Marie

The Helmers' nanny who raised Nora and now cares for her children.

Helene

The Helmers' maid.

Henrik Ibsen

Original Author of A Doll's House

“There are two kinds of spiritual 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.

“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 female conduct from a male standpoint.

“A mother in modern society, like certain insects, goes away and dies once she has done her duty by propagating the race.”

-Henrik Ibsen in “Notes for a Modern Tragedy”
19 October 1878

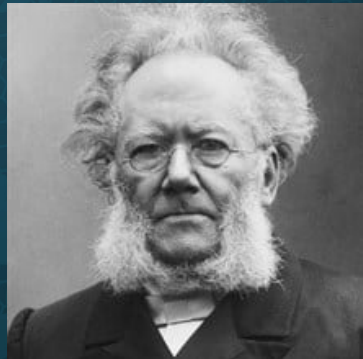
Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) was a Norwegian playwright and poet, often referred to as the father of modern realistic drama. He was born in the small town of Skien, Norway and grew up in a middle-class family but faced financial hardships when his father's business failed. This experience deeply influenced his writing, particularly his interest in social issues and the conflicts between personal freedom and societal expectations.

Ibsen began his career writing historical and romantic plays but eventually turned his focus to realistic drama, exploring everyday life and human struggles. His works often challenged the moral values and norms of his time, making him

a controversial figure. *A Doll's House* (1879), one of his most famous plays, is a powerful critique of the traditional roles of women in society and sparked debates about marriage, gender roles, and individual freedom.

Throughout his career, Ibsen wrote several influential plays, including *Ghosts* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), and *Hedda Gabler* (1891). His works are known for their complex characters, psychological depth, and bold questioning of societal conventions, making him one of the most important playwrights in literary history.

Today, Ibsen's plays continue to be performed and studied worldwide for their timeless exploration of human nature and social issues.



Education Activities

If your teacher has access to a script of *A Doll's House* this could be helpful as you work through the following activities.

Initial unpacking:

Read through the 'synopsis' 'characters' and 'author biography' individually completing the following actions:

- Circle words or sentences that interest you.
- Underline ideas that you would like to discuss with a peer.
- Highlight information that prompts further research.

Once you have completed this activity individually get into pairs and extend on your ideas together:

- Discuss with your partner why you choose to circle the words or sentences that interest you.
- Discuss the ideas you underlined together. Why have you underlined them, do you need to ask your teacher questions?
- Go through your highlights and discuss what you need to research. You could research together or divvy up the research and share what you find on a google doc or shared space.
- After you have worked through the first three bullet points in pairs, start to create a glossary of important information and link to physical examples that you both saw in the performance. Add small sketches to remind you how the information you have identified links to what was happening on stage.

Sketching *A Doll's House*:

Read through the opening stage directions from the original play:

“A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly. At the back, a door to the right leads to the entrance-hall, another to the left leads to Helmer's study. Between the doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a

door, and beyond it a window. Near the window are a round table, arm-chairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, at the farther end, another door; and on the same side, nearer the footlights, a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking-chair; between the stove and the door, a small table. Engravings on the walls; a cabinet with china and other small objects; a small book-case with well-bound books. The floors are carpeted, and a fire burns in the stove. It is winter.

A bell rings in the hall; shortly afterwards the door is heard to open. Enter NORA, humming a tune and in high spirits. She is in outdoor dress and carries a number of parcels; these she lays on the table to the right. She leaves the outer door open after her, and through it is seen a PORTER who is carrying a Christmas Tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who has opened the door.”

- Create a rough sketch of how Ibsen imagined Nora’s world. Try not to reference the way The Court Theatre has staged it, rather from the stage directions how do you imagine Nora’s world?
- Add notes around the sketch about what you think is ‘trapping’ Nora. You will want to think about the time in history which this is originally set. Use quotes from the material above in your annotations.
- Share your sketch with a peer and discuss how your sketches are similar or different. What have you each picked up?
- Write a short paragraph in response to the following question: “Why do you think Ibsen called the play *A Doll’s House* and why is the set an important character in the story?”.
- Save your sketch and the short response in your workbook or in a digital space so that when you come to the design activities you can reference it.



A Doll's House

By **Henrik Ibsen**

In a version by **Christopher Hampton**

Cast

<i>Nora Helmer</i>	<i>Acushla-Tara Kupe</i>
<i>Torvald Helmer</i>	<i>Jonathan Price</i>
<i>Kristine Linde</i>	<i>Hester Ulllyart</i>
<i>Nils Krogstad</i>	<i>Cameron Douglas</i>
<i>Dr. Rank</i>	<i>Roy Snow</i>
<i>Anne-Marie</i>	<i>Kim Garrett</i>
<i>Helene</i>	<i>Jorja Baylee</i>
<i>Hanna</i>	<i>Annabelle Laurenson</i>
<i>Emmy</i>	<i>Willow Mugford</i>
<i>Ivar</i>	<i>George Sutherland</i>
<i>Hanna</i>	<i>Emilie Sweeney</i>
<i>Emmy</i>	<i>Charlotte Taylor</i>
<i>Ivar</i>	<i>Ben Santry</i>

Creatives

<i>Director</i>	<i>Melanie Luckman</i>
<i>Set Designer & Properties Manager</i>	<i>Julian Southgate</i>
<i>Properties Construction</i>	<i>Rochelle Wright</i> <i>Krissy Clark</i>
<i>Costume Design & Construction</i>	<i>Pam Jones</i> <i>Pauline Laws</i>
<i>Costume Construction</i>	<i>Daniella Salazar</i> <i>Findlay Currie</i>
<i>Wig Designer & Stylist</i>	<i>Zoe Buckland</i>
<i>Composer, Musician, Co-Sound Designer and Young Actors' Performance Coach</i>	<i>Amy Straker</i>
<i>Co-Sound Designer</i>	<i>Matt Short</i>
<i>Lighting Designer and Stage Manager (from 24 Oct 2024)</i>	<i>Jo Bunce</i>
<i>Technical Manager</i>	<i>Giles Tanner</i>
<i>Stage Manager (to 23 Oct 2024)</i>	<i>Haydon Dickie</i>
<i>Workshop Manager</i>	<i>Matthew Duffy</i>
<i>Set Construction</i>	<i>Edward Roche</i> <i>Seth Edwards-Ellis</i>
<i>Choreographer</i>	<i>Hillary Moulder</i>
<i>Intimacy Director</i>	<i>Kira Josephson</i>
<i>Chaperones</i>	<i>Marcella Herrera</i> <i>Maezee Burgess</i> <i>Jill Macgregor</i> <i>Bradley Mutch</i>
<i>Production Manager</i>	<i>Tim Bain</i>
<i>Artistic Director</i>	<i>Alison Walls</i>
<i>Production Coordinator</i>	<i>Emma Finlay</i>

Other Acknowledgements:

Alex Wilson, the parents/caregivers of young performers, Caelan Thomas (Pianist), Ryan Chin (Original Composition Sound Engineer), Jem Anderson-Gardner of Commotion Studio (behind the scenes photography), Charlie Jackson of Charlie Rose Creative (photography), and Jude Streeter of Hey Judes hair salon.

Christopher Hampton's version of A Doll's House was first presented at Chichester Festival Theatre on 25 May 1994.

Running Time: approx. 2 hours 45 minutes (including 20-minute interval)

Content Advisory: Contains references to suicide, including means of suicide, and to terminal illness.

A Doll's House staged at The Court Theatre 12 October to 9 November 2024.



Historical Context.

In 19th century Victorian Europe, society placed strict expectations on women, especially in terms of their roles within marriage, family, and the broader social structure. Women were generally seen as subservient to men and were expected to dedicate their lives to being obedient wives, dutiful mothers, and efficient homemakers.

Marriage and Gender Roles

Marriage was often considered the defining role of a woman's life. A woman's primary responsibility was to care for the household, her husband, and her children. In many middle- and upper-class families, a woman was seen as her husband's possession, expected to fulfill the duties of a nurturing wife and mother. Men were viewed as the breadwinners and heads of the household, while women were expected to be passive, dependent, and self-sacrificing.

A wife's role was largely limited to the private sphere of the home, with few opportunities for personal growth or financial independence. Women were expected to be submissive, and in many societies, it was widely believed that women were less capable of intellectual and moral reasoning than men. Thus, they were rarely involved in political, economic, or decision-making matters, both in the home and in public life.

Financial Dependence

Women had very little financial independence during this period. Legally, a married woman's property, income, and assets were typically controlled by her husband. This lack of financial autonomy meant that women were reliant on their husbands for economic security. Divorce was rare and heavily stigmatized, leaving women with limited options if they found themselves in unhappy or abusive marriages. Without access to well-paid work or the ability to own property, women were often trapped in marriages out of financial necessity rather than love or mutual respect.

In The Play

A Doll's House reflects these rigid societal expectations and the limited choices available to women. The character of Nora Helmer represents many of the struggles faced by women in Ibsen's time. Nora is financially dependent on her husband, Torvald, and is expected to act as the perfect wife and mother. Throughout the play, she is treated as a "doll" or child, lacking agency over her own life. However, as the plot progresses, Nora begins to recognize the restrictions placed on her and ultimately makes the bold decision to leave her husband and children to find her own independence.

Key Themes.

A Doll's House deals with several powerful and relevant themes, which challenge societal expectations and explore complex human emotions. Below are some of the key themes in the play, along with script excerpts that illustrate them.

Gender Roles and Feminism

One of the play's central themes is the critique of traditional gender roles, particularly the societal expectations placed on women in the 19th century. Nora, the protagonist, is treated as a possession rather than a partner, confined to the roles of wife and mother. The play is often considered a landmark in feminist literature because of Nora's ultimate rejection of these expectations.

Script Excerpt:

HELMER, (Calling from the study.) Who's that chirping out there? Is it my little lark?
NORA. (Busy opening the parcels.) It is.
HELMER. Is it that squirrel rummaging about again?
NORA. Yes.
HELMER. And when did my squirrel get home?
NORA. Just this minute. (She puts the bag of macaroons in her pocket and wipes her mouth.) If you come out, Torvald, I'll show you what I've bought.
HELMER.. Do not disturb! (A moment later, he opens the door and looks in, pen in hand.) Did you say bought? What, all those things? Has my little prodigal been out frittering away all my money?
NORA. Oh, Torvald, surely this year we can let ourselves go a little. It's the first Christmas we haven't had to pinch and scrape. (Act I)

These affectionate but diminutive nicknames reflect the way Torvald views Nora as a childlike figure, not an equal partner. As the play progresses, Nora begins to see the limitations of her life and asserts her independence.

Marriage and Relationships

Ibsen presents a critical view of marriage in *A Doll's House*, particularly marriages built on social convention rather than genuine partnership. The relationship between Nora and Torvald seems happy on the surface, but it is revealed to be one-sided and based on power dynamics rather than mutual respect and understanding.

Script Excerpt:

HELMER. You've destroyed all my happiness. You've ruined my whole future. It doesn't bear thinking about. I'm at the mercy of a totally unscrupulous man. I'm completely in his power, he can make any demands on me he likes, order me about whenever the fancy takes him . . . and I'll have to do what I'm told without a murmur. To think I should have to sink so low because of a woman's irresponsibility.
NORA. When I'm out of the way, you'll be free again.
HELMER. Oh, spare us the grand gestures! That's like your father as well, he was always ready with a glib phrase. Anyway, what good do you suppose it would do me if you were out of the way, as you put it? It wouldn't do me any good at all. He could still tell people about this. And if he does, I might be suspected of having known about your crime all along. Or they might even think that it was my plan and that I encouraged you to do it! And this is what I've got to thank you for, after looking after you so well all through our marriage. Now do you realize what you've done to me?
NORA. (Calmly and coldly.) Yes. (Act III)

In this scene, Torvald reacts not with concern for Nora, but with worry over how her actions will affect his reputation. It reveals how superficial his love for her truly is—rooted in maintaining appearances.

Identity and Self-Discovery

At the heart of the play is Nora's journey of self-discovery. She starts the play as a seemingly happy housewife but gradually realizes that her entire identity has been shaped by others—first her father and then her husband. The climactic decision to leave her family is her assertion of her own identity, separate from the roles imposed on her by society.

Script Excerpt:

NORA. No. Cheerful, that's all. You've always been very kind to me. But our house has never been anything but a playroom. I've been your doll-wife, just as I was Daddy's doll-child when I was at home. My children as well, they've been my dolls. I used to enjoy it when you played games with me, just as they enjoyed it when I played games with them. That's all our marriage has been, Torvald. (Act III)

This line is central to the play's title and theme. Nora compares herself to a doll, manipulated and controlled by the men in her life.

Sacrifice and Duty

Sacrifice is another key theme in the play. Nora sacrifices her own integrity by secretly borrowing money to save Torvald's life, but this act is not appreciated and instead becomes a source of conflict. Other characters, like Mrs. Linde, also make significant personal sacrifices for the sake of their families.

Script Excerpt:

NORA. Keep your voice down. Torvald might hear us. He mustn't ever find out about it. Nor must anyone, Kristine. No one except you.
MRS. LINDE. What? Find out about what?
NORA. Come here. (Brings her over to the sofa and sits next to her.) You see . . . There's one thing I can be proud and happy about. I saved Torvald's life.
MRS. LINDE. Saved his life? How?
NORA. I told you about our trip to Italy. Torvald wouldn't have recovered if he hadn't been able to go on it.
MRS. LINDE. Yes, so your father gave you the money you needed.
NORA. (Smiling.) Yes, that's what Torvald thinks, and so does everyone else. But . . .
MRS. LINDE. But what . . . ?

NORA. Father didn't give us a penny. I got hold of the money myself.

MRS. LINDE. You did? All of it?

NORA. Four thousand, eight hundred kroner, what do you think of that?

MRS. LINDE. Yes, but how, Nora, how could you! Did you win it in the lottery?

NORA. (Scornfully,) In the lottery? (Snorts,) There wouldn't have been anything very clever about that, would there?

MRS. LINDE. Well then, where did you get it from?

NORA. (Humming and smiling mysteriously.) Aha!

MRS. LINDE. You couldn't possibly have borrowed it.

NORA. Oh, couldn't I? And why not?

MRS. LINDE. Well, wives aren't allowed to borrow without their husband's consent.

This moment reveals Nora's deep love for Torvald, but it also highlights the gender expectations of the time: women were not supposed to take financial control, and men's honour was seen as paramount.



Education Activities

Adding to your Glossary of Wider Context:

- Read through the Historical Context and Key Themes. You could use the strategy of circling, highlighting and underlining that you used in the first activity OR you could work in small groups/pairs to discuss information that you think is important to your understanding of the play.
- Add what you have found or what your group discussed to the glossary you have started.
- Discuss physical examples of how this looked on stage and add sketches to your glossary - remember to always link to what was physically happening on stage.
- Add notes on how seeing these themes brought to life on stage made you feel, think or gave you a gut reaction in the moment.

Performing with motivation:

Each of the key themes outlined above are followed by an excerpt of script. Explore each theme practically in pairs:

- Individually read through the Key Theme and underline lines of dialogue that reflect the theme.
- Compare the lines you have underlined with your partner. Discuss whether they match or if you have different ideas. Refine your underlined words to only those that have the most impact when you read the script aloud.
- Discuss how the theme could be used as a motivation for performance, think about how you would use body, voice, movement and space.
- Perform the scene, ensuring that you emphasise the words that you have underlined.
- Perform to another group, who have a different scene from you. Discuss whether the key theme came across in the performance? How the use of emphasis on the words enhanced the performance - were there other words that stood out to you as an audience member. Give each other feedback on how you could strengthen the scene.



Director's Vision.

A Doll's House is a classic for a reason. It is an important work in the theatrical canon, being one of the first examples of modern realist drama. But more than that, it reaches across time and still speaks to us today.

The play is inherently feminist, whether Ibsen intended it to be or not. This woman, trapped within the strict confines of a patriarchal society, rejects her role of wife and mother in search of her true self. It sounds very noble and heroic. What I love most about *A Doll's House* is that Nora's fight is neither noble nor heroic. It's much more real than that. It's messy, uncomfortable and domestic. Ibsen's characters are incredibly real - they all have flaws as well as redeeming features and I challenge you to discuss with your fellow theatre-goers who you think are the good guys and the bad guys.

My vision for this production was of a beautiful doll house within which these messy, real people exist. I feel incredibly grateful to be surrounded by a master design team of long-time collaborators who have created this beauty you are about to see. And to Acushla-Tara and the rest of the actors who have poured everything into realising these gloriously complex characters: thank you.

A final question for you, as you are about to embark on Nora's journey: Are you a product of your upbringing or of your society? Or can you just be yourself?



Melanie Luckman
Director

Melanie is a freelance theatre director based in Ōtautahi Christchurch. She holds a Master of Theatre Arts (Directing) from Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School & Victoria University and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Canterbury. She is a previous Associate Director of The Court Theatre. Her Court Theatre directing credits include *Groundswell*, *The Great Art War*, *Constellations*, *In The Next Room, or the vibrator play*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *ONCE*.

Melanie is the Artistic Director of Cubbin Theatre Company for whom she has created and directed *Up and Away*, *Play Play*, *Me and My Nana*, and *Sportsball*. Mel is a board member of PAYPA (Performing Arts and Young People Aotearoa).

Interview with Melanie Luckman - Director.

A Doll's House has been interpreted in many ways over the years. What is your specific vision for this production, and how do you think it resonates with today's audiences?

The play has been done in so many different ways that it almost feels rebellious to set it in its original time! My vision for this production is to be true to the period in looks, but to try and make it feel fresh in the performance of it. Ibsen (and Christopher Hampton in this translation) has written these amazingly complex and real characters and they are the thing that will resonate with the audience. The period makes sense for the logic of the play, and it looks absolutely stunning and theatrical, but the words coming out of the actors mouths and the actions they take should feel very in the present.

How do you approach directing the character of Nora as she evolves throughout the play? What key moments do you highlight in her journey of self-discovery?

She is an incredibly complex character. That's why we love her! The key is to have empathy for her from the very beginning and see her as a product of her society. She's doing her best under the circumstances of living in a patriarchal household. She has only ever been treated as an object by her father then by her husband, so she doesn't know that that isn't real love. I love working with Acushla to find her love of life, her joy, her incredible intelligence and savviness in playing all these roles for others to get what she needs, and finally her strength to stand up to Torvald.



In your opinion, what are some of the key themes in the play and how do you bring these themes to life on stage in a way that feels modern yet true to Ibsen's original work?

The key theme for me is the impact a patriarchal society has on women. Ibsen was looking more at society in general but to a modern audience, the feminism is clear. While things are much better than in 1879 (women are no longer a man's property hooray!); even today, it's challenging to be seen as more than a wife and/or mother. It's still shocking to us if a woman walks out on her family.

An expansion of that is the constrictive nature of gender roles - men as well as women are forced into playing roles by the laws of society. If Nora and Torvald were alive today they'd definitely have the most perfectly curated Instagram account.

A theme that shines through for me is patriarchal privilege. If you live tidily within the boundaries of society then you're fine, but what if you can't afford to feed your children? Or you can't get a job because you made a mistake and don't have good references? Do you believe that the sick and poor should be helped first? Or that that attitude "turns society into a hospital"? We've seen this conversation a lot in recent times with political elections.

Then there's the theme of masks, and deceit. Almost everyone in the play is hiding something. We're using light to represent this in the play. The lamps and the setting sunlight represent truth and honesty. The more light, the less hiding - pleasant or otherwise!

How do you ensure that the power dynamics in the marriage between Nora and Torvald are effectively portrayed? What are the challenges in directing those complex emotional shifts?

We're having a lot of fun playing with Nora and Torvald. We're building up a physical language between them which involves lots of affectionate but controlling gestures towards Nora, like tapping her on the nose, holding her neck and beckoning

her to follow him. Torvald is one of the trickiest characters for me because in today's world he is clearly a sexist man right from the very first scene. The challenge is not getting major "ick" from him from the start! We're working on making him more sympathetic in his early scenes by ensuring that they do actually love each other, he just doesn't know any other way of showing it than treating her like a doll, and they have a lot of fun playing this game of "little squirrel" and her teacher/ruler. Jonathan is doing an amazing job of making Torvald likeable.

I'm working a lot with Acushla and Jonathan to build strong trust and communication between the three of us so they can go to those dark places at the end of the play, but still feel safe. Everything is carefully constructed to look as genuine as possible, but without the actors having to truly feel all those feelings themselves. When you have to portray this level of emotional turmoil night after night, it's vital that the actors' wellbeing is cared for. Roles like this can get under your skin as an actor, but I believe that no job is worth sacrificing your mental health.



Education Activities

Unpacking the Director's Vision:

In small groups read through the Director's Vision and the accompanying interview. Using a large piece of craft paper and some pens, or by brainstorming on a whiteboard, collect information and quotes around the following prompts:

- What was Luckman's intention in bringing *A Doll's house* to the stage in 2024?
- What did she want the audience to think or feel about the story? What were her strategies for communicating this through her direction?
- Why did she choose to stage it in a way that resembles the original text and not modernise it?
- What did she want from her actors in telling this story?
- What themes, ideas, motifs or symbols does she mention?

As you brainstorm, link your note to important moments from the performance. Think about how Luckman's ideas translated from page to stage. Add sketches with annotations where relevant.

Practical Extension: Choose one of the ideas that you find compelling from the information and your brainstorm. Recreate this moment using tableaux:

- Create three tableaux that breaks down the idea you want to communicate to the audience.
- Add spoken thought or narration (you could incorporate dialogue from the play) that highlights the idea you want to communicate.
- Add movement transitions between the tableaux's that reflects the movement style of the victorian era; think about posture, the way clothing would have restricted movement, facial expressions and gesture.
- Photograph each tableaux and video your performance.
- Perform for your peers and ask for feedback around the following prompts. It might be useful to voice record your feedback for later reference:
 - What idea were we communicating through our performance?
 - How did the spoken thought or narration strengthen our performance?

The Actors Perspective

We interviewed both lead actors for this show to find out how they approach such an iconic role.



Acushla-Tara Kupe *Nora Helmer*

Acushla-Tara (Ngāti Maniapoto) cut her teeth performing for local theatre companies in Taranaki before heading to Pōneke Wellington to study business at Te Herenga Waka. During her tertiary studies she continued performing with the likes of Young and Hungry and Circa Theatre, eventually moving to the UK in 2016. There she continued her work in theatre, screen, and voice work, before returning home in 2020.

Her theatre credits include *Prima Facie* (Herald Theatre), *Emilia!* (PopUp Globe), *Anahera* (Finborough Theatre UK), *Twelfth Night* (London Open Air Theatre UK), and *A View from the Bridge* (Circa Theatre).

Acushla-Tara's television credits include *The Gone* (TVNZ & RTE), *Under the Vines* (TVNZ & Acorn TV), and *Mr Corman* (Apple TV+). Her film credits include *Chronesthesia*, *Encounters*, and *The Dead Room*.

Acushla-Tara is a proud member of Equity New Zealand.

Briefly tell us about Nora.

Nora is a woman defined by the time she lived. Her role in life, as defined by societal expectations, is to be a mother, a homemaker, and a wife. Although she is capable of much more than is ever acted on, she is constrained by the expectations of her father, her husband, and society's views of what and who women should be. We see glimmers of her intelligence in the way she obtains the money needed to save her husband's life, as well as the way she manipulates those around her with the tools she has, namely her sexuality and ability to play the part of helpless housewife in need of saving. It's not until she's so bitterly disappointed, and to a degree shocked, by her husband's actions in Act 3 that she discovers her independence.

Nora's character goes through a significant transformation by the end of the play. How did you approach portraying this emotional arc, from the dutiful wife to a woman seeking independence?

This came pretty easily to be completely honest, as her journey is one that modern women can relate to even now. Through my own experience as a woman in this modern world I've felt certain expectations placed on me, and it's as I've gained more experience and gotten older I've been able to find my own voice and use it. When I approach characters I always try to find links to my own life. When I first read this play I found it extremely difficult to relate to Nora, especially in the earlier scenes. But as we got further into rehearsal and started really digging into the scenes and her motivations I started to understand her and her choices so much more. On a technical level mapping out her journey and the moments throughout the play that challenge the status quo and knock her off kilter really helped me to understand how we go from the Nora we see in the opening scene to where we leave her at the end of the play.



How do you balance Nora's inner vulnerability with her outward determination, especially in the final act?

I would actually challenge this as a question. I feel like the vulnerabilities she feels, or is made to feel, are mostly external. They come from other's actions towards her and thoughts about her. When she realises she doesn't actually know who she is as a person there is a massive internal shift, so that determination comes from within. The balance itself starts very much towards the vulnerable end and dives deeper and deeper throughout acts 1 and 2 with flashes of strength as she prepares to sacrifice herself for her husband's reputation. It's when she realises that he places his reputation above her own life that she makes the full shift into following her own mind and desires, expressed outwardly as her leaving her husband and children behind to discover who she is.

The final scene is iconic in theatre history. How do you prepare for that pivotal moment when Nora decides to leave her family behind?

It's all in the script. We see her poking and prodding at the fabric of her life from the moment Krogstad first challenges her about the illegality of her contract with him. Realising through her conversation with the nanny Anne-Marie that her children would have a better life if they were raised by her, just as Nora had been, and that her relationship with Torvald has never been a truly authentic one, we're able to understand how she's able to leave them all behind. In her mind, and possibly objectively too, she's absolutely right. Everyone's lives will benefit from her departure. Her children will be raised with kindness and love, and Torvald will be left to grow as a person by reevaluating what is truly important in life. To play these big moments as an actor I need to fully comprehend the motivations behind them, and beautifully her motivations are so clearly played out, especially in the final scene. So, the preparation for me has just been tearing the script apart to find these. I believe it's this clarity of motivation within the writing that has led to this play becoming that classic that it is.

The Actors Perspective

We interviewed both lead actors for this show to find out how they approach such iconic roles.



Jonathan Price
Torvald Helmer

Jonathan completed his BA (Hons) in theatre and English literature from Victoria University and further trained at the John Bolton Theatre School and Ecole Philippe Gaulier in Étampes, France.

In 2016 he appeared in Indian Ink's *The Elephant Thief* and Capital E's *An Awfully Big Adventure*. With A Slightly Isolated Dog theatre company he has co-created and continues to tour *Don Juan* (2015), *Jekyll & Hyde* (2016), *The Trojan War* (2022), and *Safety in Numbers* (2022).

Jonathan has taught theatre creation skills at Toi Whakaari, Unitec Te Pūkenga and The Actors' Program. He directed and co-wrote *A Traveller's Guide to Turkish Dogs* which premiered in 2020 and directed *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Circa Theatre in 2023.



Briefly tell us about Torvald.

To me, Torvald is a man who attaches his self-worth to what he can possess — nice house, nice things, beautiful wife. He believes in the idea of the “self-made man”, and he believes he is one. When we meet him in the show, his star is rising. He’s just been made manager of a prestigious institution. He has power and influence. He is meticulous, driven and wary.

Torvald is often portrayed as controlling or condescending, yet he believes he is doing what’s right. How do you humanise his character while still acknowledging his flaws?

The first part of this question, about humanisation, is THE question for a whole rehearsal and season worth of investigation! The second part, about acknowledging flaws, is not really my job. That’s for the audience. My job is to go into bat for Torvald. I’m his defence attorney! If I’ve done my job right, he’ll appear human, and all humans have flaws. I’m looking for opportunities to fill in the gaps in the text. What’s Torvald’s vulnerability? When is he goofy, or charming, or heroic?

What are the key aspects of Torvald and Nora’s relationship that you focus on in your portrayal, particularly as their dynamic shifts in the play’s final scenes?

Actually, the final scene is the easier one to get a handle on — it’s a man going through a break-up. He’s losing the thing that is most important to him and the reason is just out of his grasp. It’s a joy to play because he starts in high status, and by the end he’s reduced to a little boy. However, the beginning is where Acushla and I have done a bit of work to puzzle things through, because so much of what seems toxic or wrong about the relationship is a function of the text’s age; it’s 145 years old! So we have gone into this wanting to bring warmth and intimacy to their relationship. So even if warning bells are going off in the audience’s heads, it’s really interesting if the characters think they’re in domestic bliss!

How do you approach the challenge of portraying Torvald’s reaction when his world unravels at the end of the play?

Oh man ... it’s a challenge because it could so easily become 20 minutes of generalised, red-faced shouting, which I don’t want to subject anyone to! For me it’s a mixture of using my artistic/actor brain to chart a course using all the tools available to me, setting targets, tactics, beat changes, etc. Maybe ruling some things out (like, don’t shout continuously for 20 minutes, for starters). And then it’s a matter of dropping into my body, being aware of the imagined world, watching Acushla like a hawk and being open to what comes up.



Education Activities

Building a character profile:

Split up into groups of 4 or 5. Your teacher will assign you either Nora or Torvald, there will be an equal amount of groups discussing each character.

- Use the attached Summarizing (narratives) chart from the NCEA Drama Literacy Guide to summarise Nora or Torvald's purpose in *A Doll's House*.
- Incorporate information from the interview with the actor who played them.
- Glue the chart onto a large piece of paper so that you can annotate around the outside.
- Choose five key scenes from the performance that reflect the notes you have made on the chart. Describe what the actors were doing in that moment, with reference to their use of body, voice, movement and space, as well as what the actors motivations might have been - include quotes from the interviews.
- Add dialogue that stood out for you in the performance, with a short description as to why.
- Photograph your group's work and upload it/save it to a shared space so that you can reference other groups' work for revision purposes and for the next exercise.

Comprehensive Role on the Wall:

Your teacher will likely have introduced you to the idea of a 'Role on the Wall' at some point in your drama learning. This activity will use the same guidelines, but allows you to be much more comprehensive. Instead of using a gingerbread or outline of the character you will use symbols to explore the inner and outer lives of three characters in *A Doll's House*. Split into groups of three, you will each take one character to focus on.

Sketch or find an image of the following for each character (you could construct this digitally using Canva, Google Slides or another digital application if you prefer digital over sketching). If you are doing this on paper, sketch the image into the middle of a large piece of paper. Make sure there is room on the inside of the image to write and follow the instructions for each character. Once you have each

completed Role on the Walls, share them with each other. You may want to add further information and new ideas. Save them in a shared google space to reference for report writing or revision:

- Sketch a bird cage for Nora
 - Inside: Motivations, how her internal thoughts contradict the way she behaves, quotes or physical behavior that communicates what she is thinking. The actors' use of drama techniques in the moments before and the moment Nora walks out of the house. Nora's key relationships and how they control her or impact the way she behaves.
 - Outside: What does the character say and think, including quotes/dialogue from the performance. Notes about what is said about Nora and the way that impacts the way she behaves? Notes on the structures that keep Nora entrapped. Add details about how the actor used drama techniques throughout the performance, especially to highlight the notes you have made. Notes on costume and physical appearance, how this impacted your understanding of Nora.
- Sketch *A Doll's House* for Torvald and have an image of him sitting outside of the house
 - Inside: The people that Torvald keeps in his doll's house, the relationships he has with them and how they impact the way he behaves (you might think about what rooms you place notes about each character in, and why you place them there.) What does Torvald think, including quotes/dialogue from the performance. Make notes about what motivates Torvald.
 - Outside: How Torvald manipulates or cages those in his world, how the actor used drama techniques to communicate this. Does he know that he is doing this or is it the structure of his time? What does the character say and think, including quotes/dialogue from the performance. What is said about Torvald and how does that impact the way he behaves? Notes about his costume and how this impacts how he moves, how does this impact the way you understand Torvald?
- Sketch puppet strings for Krogstad, with a marionette controller at the top, leave the strings floating
 - Inside bubbles at the ends of the strings: what Krogstad's motivations are, including quotes from the play. What he thinks about Nora and Torvald. How he communicates these thoughts through his use of drama techniques. How he manipulates Nora. Why do you think he has chosen this specific moment to come back into the Helmer's lives?
 - Outside: How he uses drama techniques to come across as charming and sincere, how his behaviour covers up his true intentions. Notes on costume and physical appearance, how this impacted your understanding of Krogstad. Make notes how Krogstad's arrival and presence helps Nora realise she is a doll in the doll's house. Why does he feel like a puppet master?

Exploring relationship dynamics through play:

The play comes to a climactic end at the time of first staging, a shocking ending. In pairs, use the script below to brainstorm and discuss why you think this was shocking at the time and why it still challenges the audience now.

Allocate the characters and follow the instructions to bring the scene to life:

- Individually read through the script and highlight a keyword or phrase in each line.
- Do a seated reading together, emphasise your keyword or phrase as you read
- Think about the words your partner emphasised, give each other feedback and make any changes.
- Get the scene up on its feet, think about where you stand in relation to each other, how you stand as the character, where you are looking and what gesture's you might use, what is happening with your posture and breath throughout the short scene. Think about how long you might hold eye contact with each other before Nora leaves. Hold the ending.
- Perform your version of the scene for another pair and gain feedback on your choices.
- *Reflection: Go back to the notes you made during your initial discussion, what new information have you learnt about the characters and what happens in their relationship. What did it feel like to act this moment out? What did it make you think about?*

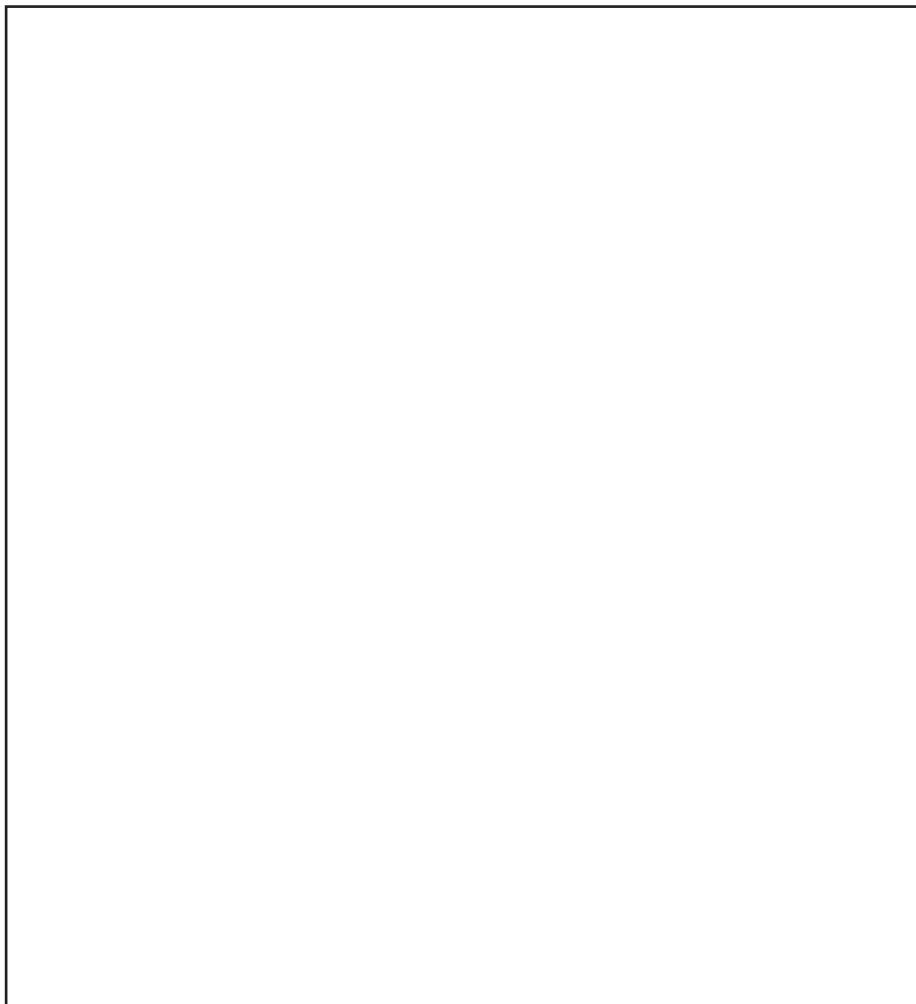
Torvald Nora--can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?
Nora [taking her bag]
 Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.
Torvald Tell me what that would be!
Nora Both you and I would have to be so changed that--. Oh, Torvald,
 I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.
Torvald But I will believe in it. Tell me! So changed that--?
Nora That our life together would be a real wedlock. Goodbye.
 [She goes out through the hall.]
Torvald [sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands]
 Nora! Nora!
 [Looks round, and rises.]
 Empty. She is gone.
 [A hope flashes across his mind.]
 The most wonderful thing of all--?
 [The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]

Add to the Glossary of Wider Context:

Individually synthesise or collate the notes that you have made throughout the actors perspective activities, adding them to the glossary that you have started with the first three sets of educational activities.

References:

NCEA Drama Literacy Pedagogy Guide: [Supporting literacy development in Drama](#)
A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying the lower half of the page. It is intended for students to write or draw their responses to the activities.

Summarizing (narratives)

Name: _____

A summary is a brief overview of a narrative story. Most stories can be summarized by using the **Somebody Wanted But So Then** method.

1. Write the title and the author.
2. Summarize the story by filling in each of the blanks below.

Title and author:

Somebody
Who is the main character?

Wanted
What does the main character want to accomplish?

But
What conflict or problem does the main character face?

So
What does the main character do in response to the problem?

Then
How is the problem solved?

Write a summary of the text that includes the details above.

Summarizing (narratives)

Name: _____

A summary is a brief overview of a narrative story. Most stories can be summarized by using the **Somebody Wanted But So Then** method.

1. Write the title and the author.
2. Summarize the story by filling in each of the blanks below.

Title and author: Stellaluna, by Janell Cannon

Somebody
Who is the main character?
Stellaluna

Wanted
What does the main character want to accomplish?
She wants to be with her bat family.

But
What conflict or problem does the main character face?
She gets separated from her mother and she doesn't know how to fly.

So
What does the main character do in response to the problem?
She is taken in by a family of birds and learns to eat insects and worms.

Then
How is the problem solved?
She learns how to fly and is reunited with her bat family.

Write a summary of the text that includes the details above.

Stellaluna wants to be with her bat family, but she gets separated from her mother and doesn't know how to fly. So she is taken in by a family of birds and learns to eat insects and worms. Then she learns how to fly and is reunited with her bat family.

Designing A Doll's House: Costume Design

The costume designers take us through their process when working on the show



Pauline Laws
Costume Design & Construction

Pauline first worked at The Court Theatre in 1980 as wardrobe supervisor and has been a costume designer on many productions since. She designed, with Pam Jones, *Man in a Suitcase*, *Pacific Post*, *The Women*, *The Great Art War*, *Le Sud*, and *In the Next Room, or the vibrator play*. She has worked as a pattern maker/cutter and sewer on many other productions such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Mary Poppins*, *Chicago*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Jersey Boys*, *Something Rotten!*, and Disney's *The Little Mermaid JR*.

Pauline's other credits include Canterbury Opera, Wellington Opera, and New Zealand Opera as a pattern maker/cutter and The Royal New Zealand Ballet Company as wardrobe supervisor. Her television credits include *Dancing with the Stars*, *The Tribe*, and *The Lost Children*. Her film credits include *Heavenly Creatures*, *Lord of The Rings*, *King Kong*, *The Last Samurai*, *Black Sheep*, *Predicament*, *Waterhorse*, *Avatar*, *What We Do in the Shadows*, *The Hobbit*, and her latest movie, *We Were Dangerous*.



Pam Jones
Costume Design & Construction

A lifetime love of creating clothing led to Pam's employment at The Court Theatre, where for nine years she designed and produced costumes for over 100 productions, including *The Curative*, *Oliver!*, and *Gys and Dolls*, before creating an independent company, The Costumery.

At The Costumery, she has designed and created costumes for The Court Theatre's productions of *Angels*, *Man in a Suitcase*, *Pacific Post*, *The Women*, *The Great Art War*, *Le Sud*, *Educating Rita*, *Steel Magnolias*, *In the Next Room, or the vibrator play*, and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Pam has also designed and produced costumes for nationwide touring shows *The Buddy Holly Story*, *South Pacific*, *HMS Pinafore*, *Grease!*, *The Sound of Music*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Social Climbers*, and *Cats*. In 2024 she was Head of Wardrobe for the New Zealand tour of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*.



In preparing for costuming *A Doll's House* we read the play a number of times to get the feel for costume elements. We then met with Mel, the director, and Julian the set designer. We work closely with both of them.

Mel has set the play when it was written in 1879. Julian ideas for the set included colour palette and textures.

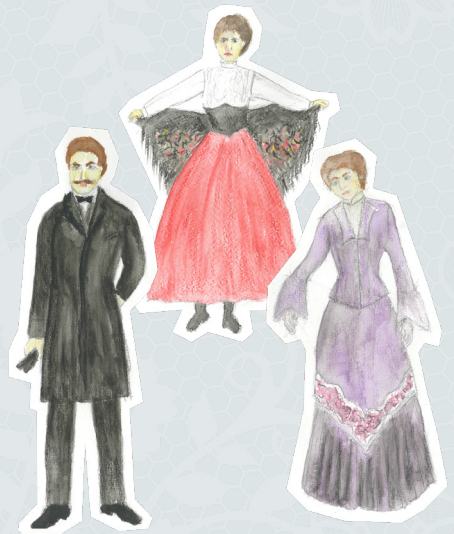
Next was hours of research into the clothes with a Norwegian perspective. The play is set in three days over Christmas, so the weather is snowy and very cold. The clothes had to have a warm textured feeling of wool and fur.

We then looked through the wardrobe department's extensive stock with the hope of finding anything we may be able to use, cut up and repurpose and were fortunate to find the outer wear, fabrics and the underwear.

The designs were then put to paper with swatches of fabric we were using. Once approved by Mel the build started. We were making most of the indoor clothes including the children.

Every garment is fitted a number of times until we feel they are perfect. We are both in our element making period costumes.

Choosing our favourite costume is difficult as each time we fit an actor our favourite changes. We get very excited bringing the character that Ibsen created 145 years ago to life.



Lighting Design



Jo Bunce

Lighting Designer & Stage Manager (From `24 Oct)

Jo graduated from Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School with a diploma in technical production in 1996 and has been working in theatre for over 30 years. She freelanced for many years in Wellington as a lighting designer/operator and stage manager as well as working overseas in London and Edinburgh and in film. She was an on-set production assistant for King Kong.

Jo is the Head Stage Manager at The Court Theatre and has been involved in over 50 Court Productions going back to 1996 including *Cabaret*, *Othello*, *Art*, *The Seagull*, *Amadeus*, *Pacific Post*, *The Motor Camp*, *End of the Rainbow*, *Blood Brothers*, *One Man, Two Guvnors*, *Niu Sila*, *The Ladykillers*, *Waiora*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Venus in Fur*, *Easy Money*, *Stephen King's Misery*, *Elling*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Ladies Night*, *Frankenstein*, *The Girl on the Train*, *Flavons and Foxtrots*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express*. Jo graduated from the University of Canterbury with a Bachelor of Arts in 1994.



How would you describe the lighting design you have created for this play?

I would call the design fairly naturalistic. The play was considered realism at the time so I have tried to design lights that would naturally occur in an inside room in 1880. We have a fireplace that emits light and some oil lamps that are onstage. I have tried to keep things fairly contained as those lamps would only have put out a small amount of light in a room. We also travel from daytime into nighttime scenes during the course of the play, so I have used different colours on the cyc at the back of the set to help indicate this.

What are some of the lights/fixtures you have chosen to use and why were they chosen?

There are two main types of lights used in this show. One is a Fresnel which produces a softer, more diffused light compared to other types of fixtures, which is great for reducing harsh shadows and is really good for general washes across the stage. The other main type of light is a profile. Profile lights are designed to project a sharply defined beam of light. They can focus and shape the light using various lens configurations and shutters, allowing for precise control over the area illuminated. Great for a special light on a person or on a piece of scenery.

In your opinion, what are some of the central themes in *A Doll's House* and how does your design help communicate them?

There are many themes within *A Doll's House*. One of the central ones for me was isolation and confinement both physically and within society. I have tried to use warm, soft lighting for scenes depicting Nora's initial happiness to create an illusion of comfort and security. As the play progresses and reality sets in, shift to harsher, colder lighting to reflect the breakdown of her facade.

Is there a particular moment in the play that you are especially pleased about in regard to your design?

This play has a long sunset that involves at least ten different lamps. It will take almost 20 minutes to complete. The hope is the audience are aware it is changing but like a sunset the movement is hard to actually see until the sun finally disappears. Look out for this effect!



Sound Design and Composition



Matt Short *Co-Sound Designer*

From the bustling streets of London to the vibrant stages of New Zealand, Matt's career has spanned the dynamic world of media and entertainment. Beginning as a marketing rep for a major record label at just 23 years old, he quickly moved into broadcast television, becoming a senior camera operator for British Sky Broadcasting. Mastering the Radamec and Stanton crane systems, Matt gained invaluable experience in live TV production, both in the studio and on international assignments.

Returning to New Zealand, Matt worked with TVNZ, co-filming, recording sound, and composing music for an adventure guide series. He then made his mark as a composer and sound designer for numerous high-profile advertising and marketing films. Now at The Court Theatre, Matt brings his extensive technical expertise and creative vision as a Technician and Sound Composer/Designer, ready to captivate audiences with his technical expertise and artistic vision.

What is the most exciting, interesting or fun thing about designing for *A Doll's House*?

Working with the multi-talented Amy Straker. Also working with the equally talented Melanie Luckman (director), whom I have collaborated with on several plays before. Place on top of that a fantastic cast and design team and you have a recipe for fun. Although we all take it very seriously, to be able to enjoy the process is a definite bonus.

What are the key considerations a sound designer must focus on when creating a design for a new play?

There are many considerations. The main one being composing or designing to fit with the directors vision. I approach a sound composition/design with the aim of supporting the script and action without being overpowering. Some plays require immense soundscapes and underscores and others can be very subtle such as with *A Doll's House*. There is also the physical logistics of effects speaker placement and mixing in the theatre during production week. The main thing is to have it all sounding authentic for the era the play is set. Choosing instruments which support that.

What is your top tip for a young person approaching a play as a sound designer?

You need to be authentic with design. No point having hip hop as an underscore for a period play. Unless of course this is the requirement. It takes many hours of trying ideas and offering them to directors until the desired feel of the music is found. I would expect roughly 30% of what I compose to be used. You need to judge which parts are working and be prepared to throw out ideas that aren't. There's always an opening night deadline.



What equipment/apps do you find you use most in sound design?

I use my own instruments where possible. I also have an advanced Midi controller keyboard which I use with the latest software from Propellerhead's Reason. I have been using this software for twenty years and I rate it as one of the best for innovation and creative freedom. I also spend a lot of money on quality external plugins to have an increased palette of sounds to choose from. It takes years to learn how to use it properly without ever finding the end of the learning curve. There are many other software workstations on the market for all budgets. It's a matter of finding one which suits your skill level. Logic pro is a great starter. In fact, a lot of producers use this platform.



Sound Design and Composition (Cont.)



Amy Straker
*Composer, Musician, Co-Sound
Designer & Young Actors'
Performance Coach*

Amy Straker is an actor, theatre maker, musician and performance coach. Since graduating from NASDA in 2005 Amy has performed throughout Aotearoa as an actor and musician. Her original music is played under the name Amy Grace and with The Swan Sisters. Amy is a co-creator of Cubbin Theatre Company making high quality creative experiences for the very young, and she recently co-wrote and designed the music for *Sportsball* with her brother, Nathan Straker.

Amy's performance coach experience extends across theatre and film. Current coaching credits she has worked on include *We Were Dangerous* (Piki Films), *Sister Josephine* (AJFilms), and *Fun Home*. *A Doll's House* is Amy's first show as a composer and co-sound designer for The Court Theatre.

What considerations were there for you in your approach to creating original compositions for this play?

Mel, the director first mentioned sourcing classical music pieces from the time period but then she had an idea of a really simple, atmospheric soundscape. She imagined piano and voice so I went to my piano and improvised several ideas and sent them to her via voice memo. She chose a handful that resonated with her and because I had already read the play a couple of times I was then able to write more specific pieces that will tell the story on another level.

How do you use sound and music to underscore the tension and emotional shifts in *A Doll's House*, particularly in moments of confrontation between characters?

For me with this show it's all about simplicity, timing and tone. There is a lot of dialogue and the audience needs time and space to digest all the information they're getting from each character. The sparse piano allows air and the repetition feels uneasy. It's like they're stuck in a time loop and can't get out. I imagine the vocal line is Nora's inner voice calling to her. Throughout the show it gets more and more intense. I'm playing around with dynamics and intention within the sung notes that have no words. At this stage in the process I'm still working out how much music is needed to support the story and the actors. My gut instinct at this stage is that less is more. I don't want it to feel cluttered or too 'on the nose'. Subtle and selective is what I'm aiming for. Watch this space....

What musical motifs or soundscapes did you develop to reflect Nora's internal struggle or the domestic setting of the Helmer household?

I have about 4 different musical ideas that start off quite separate and then overlap as the play goes on. I'm still exploring how far to push this. How cluttered can I make the sound / Nora's mind? When does she have more clarity? What does that sound like in comparison? Helmer often refers to Nora as his little lark so one of the motifs sounds like a bird. Initially it's a rather comforting sound but once I add the undertones of the more lost or intense ideas, the warm chords have a different effect. The bird sounds were initially inspired by the sounds my nearly 2 year old was making alongside one of my writing sessions at the piano. His little hands can only move so fast and often gather a few notes at a time. It was over the top of a very different styled idea and it sparked another round of writing. A good reminder that inspiration can come from anywhere at any time!

The play has a claustrophobic, intense atmosphere. How do you use sound to heighten that sense of pressure and entrapment within the Helmer home?

In all honesty, I'm not sure yet. I don't want the music to get in the way of the incredible dialogue and natural tension being created on stage. We need to keep playing around with this concept but once again, I think subtle and strong is the way to go.

You are also the performance coach for the children in this production. Can you tell us a little about what that involves?

There are three children in *A Doll's House* ranging from the ages of 7 to 11. They are only in one scene but their impact is powerful and important for the whole story. Having a performance coach to support these young actors means that they have a direct point of contact throughout the rehearsals as they navigate their characters and what it means to be on stage. I work closely with Mel Luckman, the director, as well as the grown-up cast to ensure the requirements of each moment are translated into a language the children can understand and relate to.

My way of working with is through play. Finding the game and keeping connected through intention. This helps the young actors feel empowered to take up space and be present with each other night after night. A huge part of creating authenticity on stage

is through building the relationships off stage. Part of the work in *A Doll's House* is to create an element of trust and comfort with the kids and their mother Nora (played by Acushla- Tara Kupa) and Anne-Marie (played by Kim Garrett) their nanny. In today's session I'll be hiding duplo around The Court Theatre for them to find as two teams, one with Acushla and one with Kim, then they'll have to create something with it. I'll also get Kim to read all of them a bedtime story, something her character would do every night for the kids and also for Nora when she was little.

Together we build the world of the play for the kids by sparking their imagination through drawing, movement, music, stories and play. By taking the time to focus on these details the children are able to come out on stage as a well-rounded character who has purpose and presence.



Education Activities

Connecting design to key ideas and themes:

Divide the class into four even groups. Place four pieces of paper around the room, with one of the themes below on each piece of paper.

- Gender Roles and Feminism.
- Marriage and Relationships.
- Identity and Self-Discovery.
- Sacrifice and Duty.

20 Minutes: Each group will need access to the design interviews and will be allocated to one of the themes. Write headings on the brainstorm around the main theme; costume design, lighting design, set design and sound design/composition. Read through the design interviews as a group and note down how different design choices brought that theme to life or highlighted it on stage. Make notes under each of the headings. Include quotes from the design interviews.

5-7 Minutes per theme: Rotate around the other brainstorms, read what has been written, discuss and add new information.

Once each group has rotated around all the themes and if you have time, discuss what you have collected on the brainstorms. Take photos and upload them to a shared google space for reference when constructing your report or revising for your exam.

Individual extension activity: Choose one of the themes and write a short response to the following prompt - How did a designer bring a theme to life on stage and how did this support the director's intention?

Sketching and annotating the claustrophobia:

One of the key skills in Level Two and Three respond to live performance and a helpful way of collating information in Level One is to sketch and annotate the technology you see on stage. Sketching and annotating can help you elaborate or add detail to any written answer.

Sketch and annotate the set of this production of *A Doll's House*. Make it as detailed as possible, within your drawing ability. Add annotations around the following prompts:

- How lighting interacted with the set.
- How the set reflected a claustrophobic environment for Nora.
- How other characters used the set to make Nora feel trapped.
- Notes about colours, materials and era specific set pieces and props supported a sense of time and place.
- Notes about symbols or motifs present in the set design.

If you are a Level One student, add notes about how the set and design choices communicated a key message to the audience.

Add to the Glossary of Wider Context:

Individually synthesise or collate the notes that you have made throughout the design activities, adding them to the glossary that you have started with the first five sets of educational activities.

A large empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for students to write their glossary entries.

Level One External Assessment Activities

After viewing *A Doll's House* your teacher will support you to unpack the show with your peers and to construct an individual report which you will submit this month. The following questions and activities will support you to unpack the performance with the assessment specifications in mind.

You can find the specifications for both Level One externals via this link: [Level One Assessment Specifications](#)

Your report will be based around the following three points:

- **Key message.**
- **The use of drama components; techniques, elements, conventions and techniques.**
- **Wairua of performance, which captures your personal response and experience of A Doll's House.**

You should aim to weave the three points throughout your report.

Unpacking key message:

When you get back to class, sit in a circle with a small bean bag or ball that you can pass across the room.

- Pass the ball or small bean bag across the circle when you have a key message to contribute.
- Someone should take note of all the ideas put forward.

There might be an obvious overriding message but try to think of all the messages that were communicated throughout the play, so that you can have a deep and robust discussion about the play.

Your focus question is:

“What do you think the key messages of A Doll's House were”

Once you have collated a big list or brainstorm of the key messages, have a discussion as a class about ideas that you feel were the most important in the performance; important could mean challenging, funny, thought provoking or entertaining.

- In groups or pairs choose one idea from the wider brainstorm.
- Write down how the message was communicated to the audience; through acting, directorial or design choices.
- Note down specific moments where the key message was highlighted to the audience (remember that this will be different from person to person, it is ok if your understanding is different from your partner.).
- From your discussions do a short presentation back to the class about your key message, how it was highlighted in the show and why you thought it was important.
- Gain feedback and gain thoughts from your peers.

Individual activity: Choose one of the key messages that haven't been touched on and complete one of the following activities to explore whether you had a personal reaction to it:

- A voice note or vlog discussing what the key message was, how it was highlighted and how you connected with it.
- A sketch with annotations of a specific moment that highlighted this key message.
- A short essay (200 words) about the key message and why you connected with it.

Exploring moments where drama components were used effectively:

Before you start discussing *A Doll's House*, make sure you understand what techniques, elements, conventions and technologies are. Break down a glossary of words with your teacher and make sure you know how to use them when you are talking and writing about live performance.

- Split into four groups with each group taking one component each.
- Note down important moments in the performance where that component highlighted the key message.
- Add brief sketches and annotate details of the moments as you discuss
- Add notes, quotes (from the actor/director/designer or from the play) and your own thoughts.

Each group will share their information back to the class and upload all the information to a shared space; such as a google classroom, OneDrive or up on your classroom wall.

Individual activity: Looking at all the unpacking your class has done together around use of components, complete the following activity to support the construction of your report. Extending on the key message you have already used or a new one that means more to you. You can record this work in whatever way suits you best; writing, slides, vlog, voice note or in role (be creative)

- Choose a moment where this key message was highlighted by all or a combination of components.
- Explicitly explain the moment and the use of components.
- Add details, examples from the performance and quotes.
- Use specific drama terminology in every part of your response.
- Sketch and annotate if you think that will help you to elaborate your ideas.

Wairua of performance:

As part of your reflection on *A Doll's House* and in the construction of your report you will need to explore your own personal response and the 'wairua of performance.' Your teacher will have access to the unpacking of this standard which gives you a more detailed explanation and can explore this with you in class.

“Personal response will be from their perspective, as either an audience member, or performer. They will also understand how the wairua of a performance is channelled through the performers, and how the use of drama components can influence how effectively it is projected onto the audience.” - 1.4 Unpacking

Questions to ask yourself to explore your personal response to the performance:

- What did you feel during the performance?
- What thoughts did you have during the performance?
- What have you been feeling since?
- What have you been thinking about since?
- What do you need to discuss further with your teacher, your family or your peers?
- What conversations have you had?

Group activity: in small groups, brainstorm all the moments that the audience visibly reacted during the performance.

Why were they reacting to these moments?

What was the actor doing at the time?

What decisions did the designer and directors make in these moments?

Did the audience's reaction impact your thoughts, feelings or ideas at this moment?

Individual activity: write or record a reflection based around the following prompt, incorporating responses to the questions above.

What thoughts, feelings or responses did the performance of A Doll's House prompt you to think about? How did the decisions that the director/designers made or the performance of the actor contribute to these thoughts, feelings or responses?

Once you have completed the activities outlined you can start to explore how you might use ideas, thoughts and evidence compiled to build your report. Remember it needs to be your own work and that you can present your ideas in a way that suits you best.

Revision questions for Level Two and Three

If you are a Level Two or Three student these revision questions are curated to support you to be able to answer your exam questions. You need to think carefully about the answers that come up as your work through the questions and how your thoughts, evidence and physical examples could be used in your exam responses.

The assessment specifications for both Level Two and Level Three are linked below:

Level Two: [Level Two Assessment Specifications](#)

At Level Two you “should be familiar with the use of drama elements, techniques, conventions, and technologies”. Questions may cover a combination of all four drama components.

Level Three: [Level Three Assessment Specifications](#)

At Level Three you will be expected to

- “Make connections between the director / designer’s concept(s) and the performance seen.”
- “Be familiar with the use of drama components such as elements, techniques, conventions, and technologies.”
- Think about wider context:
 - “the performance as a whole,
 - the playwright’s purpose,
 - the nature and/or purpose of theatre as an art form,
 - the social or historical context. Questions may cover a combination of drama components such as elements, techniques, conventions, and technologies.”

Questions to help you think about the actors creation of character and their use of techniques:

- How did an actor in the performance of A Doll’s House use their drama techniques to create their character? Give specific examples from the

performance. Answer this question for all characters in the performance.

- Describe how two actor's used their voices to communicate a moment of conflict or tension within the performance. Discuss why this moment was important to the story.
- How did the actor playing Nora use gesture and posture to communicate the characters age, thoughts and feelings?
- Choose an actor from the performance and discuss their use of the space to create a sense of time and place in a specific moment in the performance?
- How did two actors use space/proximity and eye contact to communicate their relationship to the audience? Why was this important to the story being told?
- Discuss how an actor used pace and body energy to move the story along? Give specific examples from the performance.
- Discuss how silence was used in the moment to communicate a moment of tension or conflict between characters.

Questions to help you think about the use of conventions in performance: *"strategies established to make meaning and connect to wider context."*

- Discuss a moment in the performance where a drama convention was used effectively to move the story forward.
- Explain how a convention or a combination of conventions were used in a performance. How did this use of conventions create a sense of mood or atmosphere?
- How did the use of a convention build tension during an important moment in the performance?
- Discuss how the use of a convention helped to create meaning in a moment in the performance?
- Describe how the use of a convention helped communicate the fact that Nora is trapped in a patriarchal 'doll's house'.
- Discuss how the use of a convention or combination of conventions in a specific moment helped you think about the big ideas and themes of the play.
- What was the wider context (socially, historically, politically or geographically) that this moment linked to?

Questions to help you think about the directors choices and use of drama elements:

- Choose a moment in the performance where you think the director tried to build tension?
- How did the director build mood and atmosphere?
- Discuss what you think the director's concept was and what key messages they wanted the audience to focus on.
- Discuss how the director collaborated with the designers to focus the audience on the key messages, ideas and themes of the performance?
- Discuss how the director created a sense of time and place in the choices they

- made around staging. Give physical examples from the performance.
- Discuss why you think this play is important for audiences to watch? Why this play, at this point in time?
 - Discuss how this play heals, entertains, educates or transforms the audience and the directors role in communicating that message.

Questions to help you think about design and use of technologies: reference the design information in this pack to support your answer.

- How did lighting and the choices the designer made create mood and atmosphere?
- Discuss how the costumes and hair/makeup supported a sense of place, time and linked to the source material - Ibsen's original play and this reimagining of it.
- Discuss how the set supported the pace of the play and reflected the realistic nature of Ibsen's play? Or how did it diverge from realism?
- How did sound enhance the tension and mood of the performance?
- Discuss the significance of the props used in the performance and how they communicated the themes, ideas, messages and symbols.
- Make notes on the purpose of the time period set and costuming, as well as setting it in one location - the Helmer house? Why was it important to the story?