HalfMoon

BEGIN/END Teaching Resources
Created by Liz Hague

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NOTES FROM THE CREATIVE TEAM

A Word from the Writer – David Lane

I've always been interested by the intensity of the friendships that we form - at all points of our lives, not just as young people - but there's something about that level of intensity when we're young that can become uncontrollable and so leads us into unpredictable situations. I suppose that struck me as a fairly good premise for a story. I suppose the different career ambitions of 'swimmer' and 'dancer' came from a desire for there to be connections but contradictions between the characters, and I was thinking in terms of physical presence and pressure – both of them striving to achieve in competitive physical arenas but in two completely different ways. Dancing is about the freedom of physical expression, creating physical poetry, whereas swimming is about athleticism and fitness (although both characters would probably argue for these things existing in their own activities!).

At a very early stage this piece was responded to by over fifty young people through Half Moon's Careers in Theatre programme, and their responses were crucial. I think the play would have been much more issue-led without their interventions, as the thing that interested them most was the secrecy, betrayal and bond between the two characters, not whether or not one of them was gay. They seemed pretty okay with the idea of someone being gay, so the focus of the play shifted from a hackneyed 'coming-out' issue to the simple nuts and bolts of a great friendship being destroyed, but destroyed through one character's discovery of love and desire interpreted by the other as betrayal of trust. The same story creates two completely different experiences.

Seeing the world from their perspective and communicating it to them in a way that holds their attention is the greatest challenge when writing for young people. I'm going to be 30 next year and twice the age of the average audience member at whom *Begin/End* is marketed. Contact with young people is absolutely crucial to this work and I think I'd find it really hard writing a play for young audiences if I didn't at some point include them in the process of research, development or writing.

Writing Exercise: TWO SIDES TO THE STORY
Create a simple story with two different opinions (ie, "I bought this chocolate bar" v "you stole that chocolate bar"). Write the story from these two different opinions and deliver the lines alternately.

A Word from the Director - Angela Michaels

Begin/End by David Lane is one of the most interesting plays I have come across. It has universal appeal, in that the thread that binds this piece is about friendship. Most of us will have been lucky enough to have had (or still have) an intense friendship with a 'best friend', in which shared experiences are magnified and reflected back through the gaze of the other. However, what happens when the gaze of one of the protagonists shifts? This shared space becomes a world of two perspectives, both looking at the same friendship but seeing different things. Unspoken thoughts fuel an intensity in one of the characters, that seeks recognition in the other's eyes, hoping that this evolution of a new world of feeling will be matched by them.

Begin/End is broadly a play about difference and identity. Within these themes it also addresses issues of friendship, trust, new and shared experiences and taking risks. These risks are not only seen in terms of ambition, i.e. a girl from East London wanting to train to be a dancer in New York, but also in terms of the self. This idea of self is explored through one of the characters allowing herself to experience and recognise new and unsettling feelings around her emerging sexuality. Ultimately the play deals with the beginnings of that life-long journey of not only getting to know who we are, but to like and own our individuality.

All this of course is implicit in this exciting play, set in East London, that roller-coasters along the highs and lows of teenage experience, a 'coming of age', taking us through some thought-provoking territory. My challenge then is how to realise my vision of a piece that is at the same time poetic, but also visceral. I felt I needed to approach it differently to realise the layers concealed within the writing. I have set myself the challenge and exciting opportunity to work with a VJ to produce visuals that underscore the piece, very much in the same way a musical score works. VJ's generally only work at music events, not theatre, so I am learning a whole new language. This means I have to think in a much more visual way before the actors are even in the rehearsal room – creating a storyboard for particular moments in the play. The set therefore needed to be abstracted to allow for this approach and also to allow the psychological impact of the piece to be foregrounded. The visuals need to also resonate with the music. So careful dialogue with all the creative team before rehearsals is crucial and the whole process probably more 'circular' than I've previously encountered, with every aspect of the production impacting on another. It's a risk, but it's an exhilarating journey and I feel honoured to be given the opportunity to work in this way.

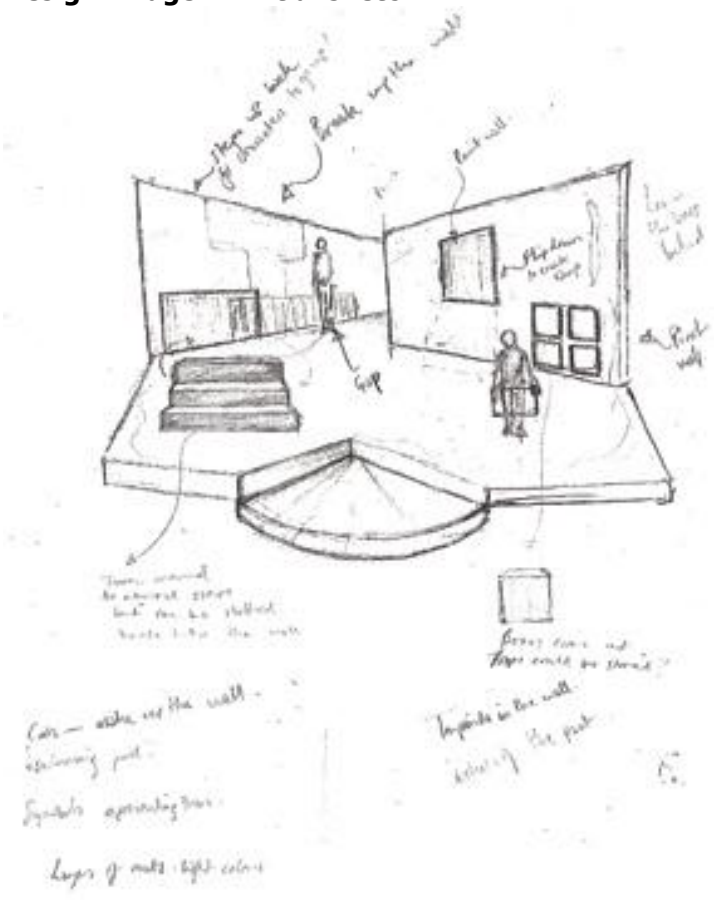
Directing Exercise: DIRECTOR'S PROCESS
Read a short extract from the piece; give your initial response and your director's vision for how it should be presented. Then rehearse your actors and present.

A Word from the Designer - Anna Harding

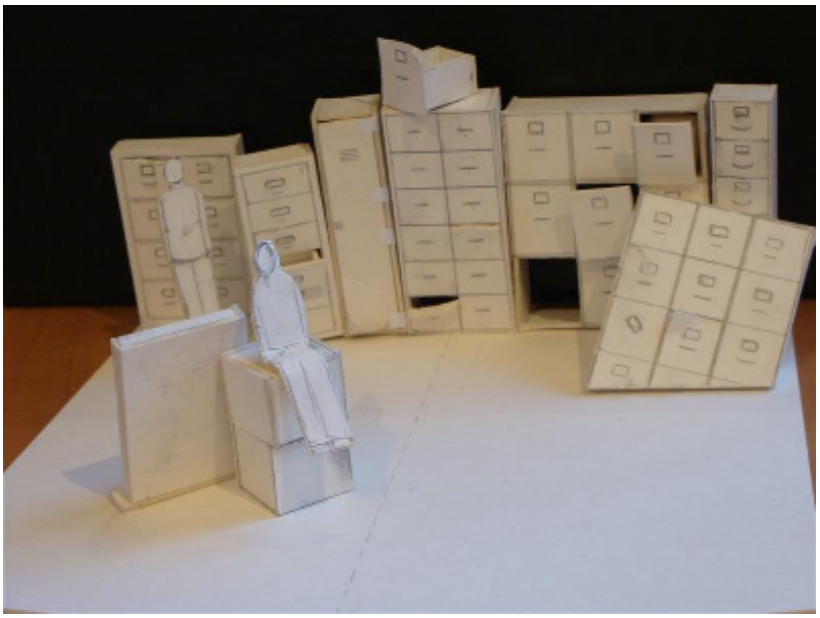
Angela and I discussed the themes within *Begin/End* and how it read to us individually. From this I gathered images that visually represented what we had been talking about. I went through quite a few designs and ideas before settling on the final one. Because of the abstract nature of the play, it is quite open to interpretation, which is exciting but quite a challenge. With the director the ideas grew and developed into the set we have today. Within the design I have explored Lili's world. It represents her memory space. The audience has been let inside her mind while she retraces her past, discovers who she is and where she fits into the world she lives in. I have used filing cabinets to build up a city landscape, but at the same time they represent her secrets and memories stored away. There are also hints of imprints, things that have already happened, to enhance the fact that she is reliving her past.

I have used grey/blue tones to create the urban landscape but it allows the lighting to completely transform the atmosphere of the whole space. The filing cabinets are all battered and a bit warped to create the feeling that she has gone through a hard life-changing experience.

Design Image 1: initial sketch



Design Image 2: white card model



Design Image 3: final model box

Design Exercise: DESIGN THE SPACE
Two designers place 3 or 4 objects in the performance space. Two actors must come in and improvise a scene which places importance on each object in the space. Noting how all set & props are in place for a reason.

A Word from the VJ Artist – Paul Hithersay

Being commissioned to integrate visuals with the script, the set and music of a play is a real treat, but also a big challenge. It is making me think beyond what I have done with video on a flat screen, because this is being designed to project directly on to parts of the set. This makes a lot of difference to how the images are seen, so it makes a lot of difference to the kind of images that I am going to choose and how I'll work with them.

I'm bearing all this in mind in the way I have shot video in the streets and places around Limehouse. There is a lot of inspiration in the physical make up of the place, the details and the setting. Making choices and judgements about the images and how to manipulate them for meaning, in relation to the narrative and genre of the play, is another big challenge. The direct inspiration of this is, of course, the powerful script.

Actually being able to find and create the right images and use them at critical points in the performance, so that they are absorbed into the audience's experience but do not distract their attention, is the crux of this challenge. At this stage I have got more material than I'll eventually use, so it's a process of selection, experiment, discussion, evaluation and further experiment. The interaction that I've had with other members of the creative team, the director and with the young people who are members of a Youth Theatre at Half Moon, have all been inspirational.

Visual Exercise: LITERAL & SYMBOL
Using just one simple object such as a chair or a newspaper, create 2 scenes. One which uses the object literally and another which uses the symbolism of the object. i.e. someone reading the newspaper followed by something which explores media influence.

A Word from the Sound Designer – Ed Thomas

My task is to compose the music for the play. This means I write and record pieces of music, sound FX and soundscapes. On first reading the script I began to think about how music could fit into the play, as a finished piece. I thought about what sort of music the characters, Yaz and Lilly might listen to. I thought about the sounds that would surround their lives, city sounds, street sounds and everything and anything else. Then I thought about the mood of the play.

I composed some ideas and sent them to the director. I then met with the director, Angela Michaels and listened to her thoughts and ideas for how she wanted the finished piece to look. We then agreed on certain points within the script where music could be placed. From here, I composed and developed some ideas. These might be used to add tension, create atmosphere or support themes in the script. The music develops and further meetings with the director establish more precisely where the music will go in the piece.

Once all the music is complete I compile a master CD of music and soundscapes to be used in the play, a master CD of sound FX to be used in the play, and a master CD of the music on the CD programme that you receive free when you see the play.

Music Exercise: SOUND DESIGN
Take any of the given extracts and mark any sounds which might bring this piece to life, split them into 2 groups; sounds effects & mood reflection. As a small group, work to create these sounds using your voices, instruments and props.

EXTRACTS FOR PERFORMANCE

Extract 1:
Monologue
(Notes: Can be swapped for a male character called Lee)

LILI: And everything stops being anything at all.
It wasn't meant to be like this
The words are still there under my tongue
The real words
Not the heat of the moment words
Not the volcanic words
But the soft ones
The musical ones
The words that send you to sleep night
And I want so much to be the one
That sends her to sleep at night
An' there's only one place I wanted to go then
I'd been for a swim already
But I went back anyway
Because I didn't have to think there
Think about anything
Bike
38 to Oxford Street
Drizzle
Cubicle
Shower
Pool
Saul with all the Greek hair
But no coach today
Just me and the water
Pounding up and down like I'm drilling to the core of the Earth
Breathe in
Stroke stroke stroke
Breathe out
Stroke stroke stroke
Breathe in
Stroke stroke stroke
Breathe out legs arms car
No
Breathe in bling arch back
NO
Stroke Yaz Theo breathe out in out
Legs Theo
NO SWIM GOD'S SAKE JUST SWIM
Don't think swim
Breath lips touching neck out in
Breathe stroke out Yaz in

And then
Body in bits and flailin' all over
Three big gulps happen so quick I don't even notice the taste
Lungs slowly filling
World getting darker and darker
And as I float down to the bottom of the pool
There in the tiles like a mosaic
I can see her looking up at me through the water
And I reach out to touch her face
An' she speaks to me
My mouth trembling
And there's this moustache in my face
Saul the Greek's hairy face bending over me
Blowing the air back into me
And I cough up a lung full of chlorine and children's piss
Reaching for breath and gulping down air
I'm on the poolside
And she's not there
Of course she's not there
She was never there at all
An' I cycle back to the estate
Alone

Exercise 1: EMOTION BUILD
Split the monologue into a beginning, middle and end and decide on an emotion that goes with each section. Play with the intensity of this emotion on a scale of 1-10, try going in both directions first increasing the feeling and then decreasing. Try swapping the emotions around and see what it does to the piece. Try completely opposite emotions to those you initially chose.

Exercise 2: ONLOOKERS
Write this monologue as a short story or list of plot points. Split it into two settings; the journey of Oxford Street in the rain and the swimming pool. Build up the atmosphere of these settings with the whole group creating a soundscape, introduce other characters to the world. Who are the onlookers/the passers' by? 'Thought Tap' these characters to find out what they are thinking at crucial moments in the story.

Extract 2:
Duologue
(Notes: Characters can be replaced by males Lee & Yavi. All lines further indented are spoken in reflection, other lines are spoken in the moment)

YAZ: Then before we know it

LILI + YAZ: It's summer again

(Sound of the sea. Feel of heat)

YAZ: And the heat is cutting through everything

LILI: Where we goin'?

YAZ: School's shut today.

LILI: What?

YAZ: Melted innit. All gone. Didn't you hear?

LILI: So we go to this shitty little stretch of beach on the Thames
Plastic bottles and dog turds
They say they clean it

YAZ: They never *really* clean it

LILI: But then make out like it's the Riviera
If you blot out the sound of police cars

YAZ: The smell of shit

LILI: The gunge underfoot

YAZ: And the grannies in knitwear

LILI: You could be in Iyanapa

YAZ: Lil. This is like, seriously lame.

LILI: I think I might puke.

YAZ: You got a Travelcard?

LILI: I got an Oyster Zone 6.

YAZ: We could get to East Croydon. On the Brighton line.

LILI: And in that beautiful stolen moment
Where nothing is said
The most amazing day of our lives begins

YAZ: Keep out of sight after Croydon

LILI: Dodging in and out of train toilets

YAZ: Hidin' behind pushchairs

LILI: Smell of the sea getting closer

YAZ: Smell of freedom gettin' stronger

LILI: Push through the gates at Brighton with a bunch of tourists

YAZ: Yeah um je suis une French girl je ne blah-de-blah de not understandee le billet tickety thing

LILI: No-one's listening
Heat dulling sounds and senses
Must be the hottest day of the year
Tops sticking to our backs
Sweat gathering
Glistening on our faces

Exercise 1: BALANCE & STATUS
Explore 3 physical indications of status;
High Status: Tactile, makes eye contact with audience & ability to find stillness in a moment
Low Status: Cannot hold anyone's gaze, cannot stand still & fidgeting hands.
Play with the status of these characters as you read the duologue, swap high and low. See what happens if they swap in the middle of the extract.
Further Discussion Points:
1. How balanced is their friendship throughout the piece?
2. Are there moments where status changes?

Exercise 2: SIX WORD SEQUENCE
Perform the extract as a pair and then perform the same scene again with no words, trying to get across the same story points. Then pick 6 keys words from the extract and find a physical gesture to respond to each word. Link these images together and repeat as a sequence to the music from the show.

EXTRACTS FOR ISSUE EXPLORATION

Extract 1:
Domestic Violence / Home Life
(Notes: Character can be swapped for a male called Yavi)

YAZ: It never stops, never stops and never starts and there's no middle and no in between and it just keeps going and going and I can't get in the way, can't do nothin' or say nothin' or even shout louder, an' it feels like I'm stuck in the middle of hell and no-one's listenin' to anythin' anyone is sayin', they're just tryin' to shout louder, shout better, shout harder until they sound like animals - and then they stop shoutin' and I can hear somethin' else, I can't hear words and voices, I just hear plates breakin' and a dull, dull thud over an' over an' over and then her cryin' becomes a wail, like a storm, a huge tornado flyin' through the living room an' I know it'll never get quiet because nothin' bad ever stops, it just gets worse and worse and worse and worse and I din't realise til now, that there's no silence anywhere, there's no silence and I just want it to get *quiet*.

Exercise 1: BEFORE & AFTER
Re-enact the argument, what was it about? What happened just before this moment & just after? Then send each character to someone else who they can talk to about the situation. Forum the scene by trying out suggestions from the audience of how they can try to make a difference.
Further Discussion Points:
1. Is Yaz the carer for her mother?
2. What do you do if you're the friend who notices the bruises?

Exercise 2: UNSEEN SCENES
- Create the moment when Lili was confronted by her parents about her sexuality.
- Create the moment when Yaz was confronted by her mother about going to America.

Focus on the volume & tempo of the different home life situations:- Yaz's loud, explosive relationship with her mother versus Lili's quiet and seemingly ok situation where nothing is discussed.
Further Discussion Points:
1. How could Yaz & Lili's parental relationships be improved?
2. What is good parenting?

Extract 2:
Relationships / LGBT
(Notes: Characters can be replaced by males Lee & Yavi or a mix of one male character & one female if you would like to focus on unrequited feelings more than same sex relationships, please note that other lines will need to be altered if you do this. All lines further indented are spoken in reflection, other lines are spoken in the moment)

YAZ: You didn't have to come over.

LILI: I did.

YAZ: Little Miss Olympics.

LILI: It's important.

YAZ: More than me?

LILI: No.

YAZ: I don't want any of them y'know. Them boys.

LILI: For real?

YAZ: I got you innit.

LILI:
Cast out again
A little bait
A little hook through the lip
And I hang onto the line

YAZ: Yaz. I gotta tell you somethin'.

LILI: Anythin'.

YAZ: But if I tell you, you gotta promise not to –

LILI: I promise.

YAZ: There's this dance college. And well. Yeah. I wanna go.

LILI: Where?

YAZ: America. It's in New York. This college. Like, all the professionals trained there, anyone who's anyone who ever got anywhere with this, they went there. I wanna go. I'm gonna go. And I don't wanna come back. Ever.

LILI: I don't know if you've ever felt like your heart wants to shit itself out of your arse
And take the rest of your organs with it
But that's something like what this feels like right now
Lungs flattened by sledgehammers
It's seems like ages until I hear someone say
What about me?

YAZ: Well there's this scheme, like, one in a thousand girls get it every year, and they pay the whole thing, straight up, the whole deal and they send you over and they get you a flat and you stay with all these other dancers and you train, you do everythin' and then that's it. You're a dancer.

LILI: …

YAZ: There's nothin' I wanna learn from school that's useful. There's music, my body, and you watchin' and helpin' me. That's what I need. Am I gonna get you to do my coursework for the rest of time?

LILI: I don't –

YAZ: I gotta send an audition tape. It needs to be good. Really good. Shit hot, the best, the best thing I've ever done.

LILI: So what am I supposed to do?

YAZ: Help me work it out. A dance. You watch me.

LILI: I watch you leave.

YAZ: You watch my dance.

LILI: So you can leave.

YAZ: Aren't you pleased? Don't you wanna congratulate me? This is me.

LILI: It's not HER
It's ME
Everything has been ME
I MADE HER AND I MADE US
She won't even see it

Exercise 1: THE CLOTH

- How we look at things from different perspectives. Throw a piece of fabric in the centre of a circle and ask everyone to look at it and see what picture they can see in the cloth. Share these ideas. Then move to another place in the circle and see what you can see from this new perspective. Take this idea further and get the group to make an image of how Lili views the friendship and how Yaz views it.

Further Discussion Points:

1. Was Lili being honest with Yaz?

2. How close should friendships go?

Exercise 2: 3 IS THE MAGIC NUMBER

- Begin with some simple exercises working in 3s, making shapes/objects/images with your bodies. In these 3s choose one person to be your shield and one to be your bomb, try to keep your shield as close to you as possible and your bomb as far away as possible – leads to a movement sequence. Discuss how it felt to be someone's shield or bomb.

Further Discussion Points:

1. Discussion of rejection & unrequited love.

2. How does Lili feel when Theo is on the scene?

3. Can take this further to discuss infatuation and sexual preference.

About Half Moon

"London's unique theatre for young people" (Time Out)

Half Moon Young People's Theatre is one of London's leading theatre companies producing work exclusively for young people. We offering two inter-locking strands of activity:

- Producing and presenting professional theatre at its base, in venues and in youth and schools settings
- An extensive participatory programme including youth theatres, school and community projects

Half Moon works exclusively with young people from birth to age 18 and, through them, with their teachers, carers and parents – placing a particular emphasis upon engaging those often excluded in terms of culture (ethnicity) and ability (disability). We have been producing work with and for young people in East London for over 25 years and are committed to writing and casting which reflects our culturally diverse community, and producing work that informs, challenges and shapes expressive artistic potential. This unique resource provides a place to watch and participate for over 32,000 individuals each year.

Half Moon is a revenue client of Arts Council England and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Visit Half Moon's website: www.halfmoon.org.uk
You can also find us on Facebook. Search for 'Half Moon Theatre Facebook'

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Supported by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

TOWER HAMLETS