

PROMPT PACK / EDUCATION RESOURCE

GOOD MUSLIM BOY



THE COOPERS MALTHOUSE
Beckett Theatre
9 FEB - 11 MAR

**MALTHOUSE
PROMPT**

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A co-production with

**QUEENSLAND
THEATRE**

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Prompt Pack created by Vanessa O'Neill for Malthouse Prompt—Malthouse Theatre's Youth and Education program.

COVER IMAGE / Zan Wimberley
INTERNAL PHOTOS / Tim Grey
DESIGN / Hours After



PROMPT PACK

#GOODMUSLIMBOY

ABOUT MALTHOUSE THEATRE

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

At Malthouse Theatre we collaborate with local and international artists to create inventive performances that cut to the core of the human experience.

Theatre has the power to interrogate, disrupt and to be an agent of change—and we think it always should. At Malthouse Theatre the work we produce explores the world personally, socially and politically.

Based in a dedicated venue, The Coopers Malthouse in Melbourne, we are a home for live experiences that entertain and provoke a dialogue with and within audiences.

Welcome to Malthouse Theatre.

PROMPT PACK

VIDEO RESOURCES



Co-Writer & Actor Osamah Sami discusses Good Muslim Boy



Co-Writer & Director Janice Muller discusses Good Muslim Boy



Rodney Afif & Nicole Nabout discuss Good Muslim Boy

CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM



Osamah Sami
CO-WRITER / CAST



Janice Muller
CO-WRITER / DIRECTOR



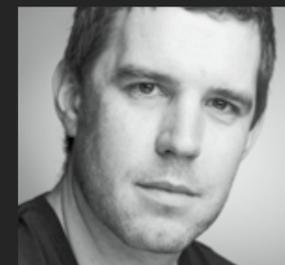
Rodney Afif
CAST



Nicole Nabout
CAST



Romanie Harper
SET & COSTUME DESIGN



Ben Hughes
LIGHTING DESIGN



Phil Slade
SOUND DESIGN & COMPOSITION



Jess Keepence
STAGE MANAGER

#GOODMUSLIMBOY

PROMPT // CUE, INDUCE, MAKE, MOTIVATE, PERSUADE, ENCOURAGE, STIMULATE, IMPEL, INSPIRE.

Welcome to the Malthouse Theatre Prompt Pack for *Good Muslim Boy*. When an actor forgets a line in rehearsals they may call for a prompt to provide a clue or a cue so that they can keep telling the story. This document aims to provide just that—a next step, a reminder, a series of provocations. It is full of information, but also poses many questions and discussion points for the audience. The Prompt Pack invites us to see how relevant and exciting contemporary theatre can be.

These pages are by no means definitive, but we hope they'll take you on an interesting journey and keep you travelling through the world of the play well after the curtain call. We encourage you to make particular use of the in-depth video interviews with members of the cast and creative team. Many of the questions and discussion points that we have outlined in this resource are a direct response to these interviews. We hope that this Prompt Pack will help you to engage deeply with the Malthouse Theatre production of *Good Muslim Boy*.



Vanessa O'Neill /
Youth & Education Manager

A NOTE FROM THE CO-WRITER & PERFORMER OSAMAH SAMI



So, I just came back from a walk along the Yarra River, where I witnessed the full moon, or as it was reported in the papers, the 'blood moon'. Not much blood was involved. Typical of the press to sensationalise.

It got me thinking about how lucky I am. Because I'm telling you about my bloodless, mundane walk when I could have easily still been a stateless Iraqi, caught up in the political turmoil of the Middle East. And it irritates me to have to say it because I'm not after the fleeting, 'oh, you poor refugee' sentiment, which I've heard one too many times. Refugees don't want sympathy, pardon my bluntness. Empathy, on the other hand, can heal our wounds collectively, as we begin walking in one-another's shoes.

This is why I wanted to tell my story. Not to show you my plight as a kid during the war, but to hopefully (inshallah) act as a conduit between your kind selves and a people who are otherwise only talked about, and rarely heard from. Emotions don't discriminate against our skin colour or faith. If you showed me a close-up photograph of tears rolling down someone's face, there is no way I could label them as 'Muslim tears' or 'Jewish tears' or 'African tears' or 'gay tears' or ... you get the drift. Okay, so all the talk about tears is

making this sound ominous. If you're reading this before the show, I guarantee you there's plenty of laughs in store. If you're reading it after, please note my guarantee is non-binding.

I guess I can't say much more beyond this. The play will hopefully speak to you in the universal language of emotion, and despite our many, many differences, I hope (again, inshallah) it can highlight our similarities and of course, be entertaining.

I thank the wonderful, theatre-smart production team and my beautiful, generous cast members (they've dealt with so many script changes, most likely even before the show you're seeing tonight). Thank you to Malthouse Theatre and Queensland Theatre for putting on show about a guy whose skin colour is mostly seen on cop shows. And a special TY to my director and co-writer, Janice, who patiently listened to my dad jokes and then told me to get on with it —she's an absolute pro and you see it in her work.

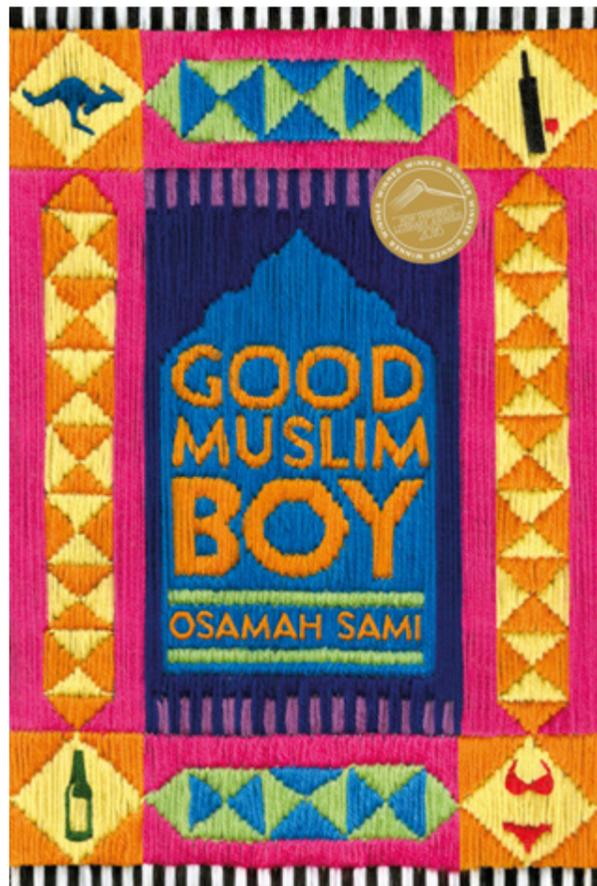
I must also acknowledge my work takes place on Indigenous country, and I pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, those who do not specify gender, it's a pleasure to have you in the audience. It really is.



GOOD MUSLIM BOY

THE BOOK, THE FILM AND THE PLAY



THE BOOK

Good Muslim Boy was written by Osamah Sami and published in 2015 as a memoir of his life; growing up as an Iraqi in Iran, during the Iran-Iraq war. It tells of the floggings that he received from the Iranian 'piety police' (the Monkerat) for trying to meet girls, his attempts to peddle fireworks on the Iranian black market and his life at home as the eldest son while his father fought in the war for Iran, as his uncles fought on the opposite side for Iraq.

In 1995, when Osamah was 13, his family left Iran and resettled in Australia. When he first arrived Osamah spoke no English, his first two languages were Farsi and Arabic. The contrast between Australia and the strict restrictions of Iran—including complete segregation from girls who in Australia wore jeans and no headscarves—was a source of wonder for the teenage Osamah.

Osamah's father became head cleric of Melbourne's Shi'ite community. This book is dedicated to him, who Osamah describes as 'my confidant, friend and absolute hero.' Quite apart from his father's religious status, we are given many examples of his father's capacity for wisdom, compassion and humour. A clear example of this is his father writing *Saddam: The Musical*, performed at his mosque, with Osamah in the title role of Saddam Hussein. When the cast attempted to enter the United States in 2005 to perform the musical, US Immigration interrogated, handcuffed and deported them. We also learn that Osamah's father had spent a year in an Iraqi prison as a young man, where he was tortured for opposing Saddam Hussein.

The memoir also recounts Osamah's attempts to live up to his family's high expectations, as he tries to be a 'Good Muslim Boy'. This results in him faking a medical degree (because the eldest son of a cleric *should* be a doctor) and running away from an arranged marriage (because his heart belonged to someone else).

The key story that frames the entire memoir is that of Osamah's journey back to Iran with his father, where his father unexpectedly dies of a heart attack. Subsequently, Osamah faces a struggle to return with his father's body back to Australia.

In 2016, *Good Muslim Boy* won the NSW Premier's Literary Award. In the same week that Osamah Sami attended the award ceremony, Peter Dutton, Minister for Immigration and Border Protection claimed that 'illiterate and innumerate' refugees would take Australian jobs or 'languish' on unemployment benefits, and Osamah tweeted back: *I'm a refugee and just won the #NSWPremiersLitAwards prize. For writing a book. In my third language. Can you read these words Dutton?*

Watch an interview with Osamah Sami discussing the book *Good Muslim Boy* / [YouTube](#)

See Osamah Sami's very amusing speech when he received the NSW Premier's Literary Award / [YouTube](#)

THE FILM

In 2017 the film *Ali's Wedding*, co-written by Osamah Sami and Andrew Knight, and directed by Jeffrey Walker, was released across Australia and overseas. It was billed as 'Australia's first Muslim rom-com' and focused on Osamah's attempts to fake his enrolment in a medical degree at the University of Melbourne, escape his arranged marriage, and reunite with the young woman from his mosque, who he was secretly in love with.

Ali's Wedding won an AACTA Award for Best Original Screenplay and the Audience Award for Best Feature Film at the Sydney Film Festival. It also won The Age Critics Prize at Melbourne International Film Festival. Osamah Sami was nominated for Best Lead Actor at the ACCTA Awards.

Watch the trailer for *Ali's Wedding* / [YouTube](#)

Watch Osamah discussing the film on SBS program *The Feed* [YouTube](#)



PHOTO BY / Ben Timony (c) Matchbox Productions Pty Ltd

THE PLAY

Adapting the memoir *Good Muslim Boy* into a play, co-writers Janice Muller and Osamah Sami were keen not to replicate the stories at the centre of *Ali's Wedding*. Instead the play begins a number of years after the events portrayed in the film.

The play focuses on the stories that frame the memoir: Osamah's relationship with his father, their journey to Iran (prompted by issues Osamah faced amongst his community at home in Melbourne), his father's sudden death and Osamah's attempts to return his father's body to Australia. Just as the memoir is a series of short chapters that swiftly jump in time, place and context; the play is close to 50 scenes that move through space and time. These include flashbacks to Osamah's childhood in Iran and his life in Melbourne, as well as exploring his struggles with the Iranian bureaucracy, police, courts, officials and airport staff in the days immediately following his father's death.

A key similarity between the memoir and the play is that both make sudden shifts between tragedy and comedy. Incredibly poignant moments in the story are juxtaposed by very funny moments (and vice versa). A quality that Osamah clearly shared with his father was the enjoyment of a good joke. The last time that we see Osamah's father (in Scene 11) he is telling a joke about Saddam Hussein, and in their final exchange, Osamah is trying to advise his father on how the joke could have been funnier. In the scene immediately afterwards, Osamah's father is no longer there, representing the moment when Osamah returned to his hotel room to discover that his father had died. These moments of humour sitting alongside tragedy are a constant thread throughout the play, just as they were in the memoir.

Listen to Osamah Sami discuss the play with Michael Cathcart on Radio National's *Stage Hub* / [ABC Radio National](#)



SUMMARY OF TITLES FEATURED THROUGHOUT *GOOD MUSLIM BOY*

Here is a summary of all of the titles which are projected onto the set throughout the play. The titles help the audience to keep track of the range of locations, timeframes and contexts being explored. As you read through these titles and locations (especially if it is prior to seeing the play) how do you imagine that the three actors will shift quickly between this vast range of settings? Consider the effect of having a series of titles that indicate a particular hour of the day. How does this emphasis on time help to build tension and to emphasise the urgency of Osamah's predicament? Finally, take note of the fact that *Good Muslim Boy* begins and ends at the exact same location: Cargo Office, Mashhad Airport.

- Cargo Office, Mashhad Airport, 2013
- 3 Weeks Earlier, Revolver Nightclub, Prahran
- Osamah's House
- Prophet Muhammad Mosque
- Imam Khomeini International Airport
- Holy Shrine Of Imam Reza
- Hotel Room
- Reza's Bazaar
- Mashhad Police Department 27
- Coroner's Office
- Courtroom
- Reza's Paradise
- Manager's Office, Reza's Paradise
- Mashhad Airport
- Osamah's House, 2000
- Australian Embassy
- Bus Terminal
- 9.30AM, Department Of Foreign Affairs
- 10.30AM
- 11.30AM, Department Of Births And Deaths
- 12.30PM
- 1.30PM
- 2.30PM
- 3.30PM
- 5.10PM
- Golden Palace Hotel
- Holy Shrine Of Imam Reza
- Cargo Office, Mashhad Airport



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ABOUT OSAMAH SAMI



#GOODMUSLIMBOY

Osamah Sami is an award-winning actor, writer and comedian, born in war-torn Iran to Iraqi parents. His critically acclaimed memoir *Good Muslim Boy* was the winner of the NSW Premier's Literary Award and Highly Commended at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. Osamah also co-wrote and starred in *Ali's Wedding*, which was the winner of the Audience Award for Best Feature Film at Sydney Film Festival, and won The Age Critics Award for Best Australian Film. His screenplay earned him an Australian Academy Award (AACTA), as well as an Australian Writers Guild Award for Best Original Feature Film. He also received an AACTA Award nomination for Best Lead Actor, as well as Film Critics Circle of Australia Award nominations for Best Screenplay and Best Lead Actor. In 2016, his work in Melbourne Theatre Company's *I Call My Brothers* earned him a Green Room Award nomination for Best Lead Actor. Osamah is recognised as a 'notable Australian Muslim' by the Commonwealth of Australia. He is hoping to be nominated for the Best Dad of the Year Award in the near future.

ACTIVITY / MEET OSAMAH SAMI

In this interview Osamah explains his approach to telling the stories of *Good Muslim Boy* through theatre. He shares his thoughts on playing himself onstage, the reasons for using a non-naturalistic style of theatre and the challenges of shifting through close to 50 scenes in 90 minutes.

vimeo.com/255682500

PROMPT PACK

ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION



1 / GOOD MUSLIM BOY AS A PIECE OF THEATRE

'Theatre is a magical space. There is an immediacy and an intimacy with theatre. I also like the fleeting and ephemeral nature of theatre. It resembles life in a way...' –OSAMAH SAMI

- How did you respond to the immediacy and intimacy of this production? How were you as an audience member affected by seeing Osamah's stories told within such an intimate theatrical space?
- If you have previously read the book *Good Muslim Boy* or seen the film *Ali's Wedding*, how was your experience of seeing the play by comparison? What can a piece of theatre offer that is distinct from the experience of reading the book or seeing the film?

2 / THE ACTOR-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

'At the end of the day I hope that we can tell these stories well and transport the audience into these worlds...To switch between scenes, between talking to the audience and back to the show. It's called a play, we are all just playing...' –OSAMAH SAMI

- Analyse the actor-audience relationship that was established by Osamah throughout the production. How was the actor-audience relationship developed? How was it maintained? How did you as an audience member respond to Osamah at different points throughout the play?
- Osamah plays himself in the production, as well as the role of a storyteller/narrator. How did his use of expressive skills (his voice, gestures and movements) change as he shifted between these two roles?
- Evaluate how effectively you believe Osamah was able to shift between being the narrator and playing himself within the various scenes?

#GOODMUSLIMBOY

ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION

3 / SHIFTS IN LOCATION, CONTEXTS AND RELATIONSHIPS

'You've got to trust your instrument and your body. There are fifty odd scenes and thirty different locations.' —OSAMAH SAMI

- There are close to 50 scenes in the play. How effectively was Osamah able to shift between the wide range of locations, contexts and relationships within the play? How did he use his vocal skills, facial expressions and movements to convey these shifts?
- Osamah refers to a specific example of Scene 22 set at Reza's Paradise Cemetery where he encounters two other characters mourning over a coffin. How effectively were all three actors able to convey the location, context, and mood of this scene? How did each of them use their expressive skills to do this?
- The central relationship within *Good Muslim Boy* is that between Osamah and his father. Evaluate how effectively you believe Osamah and Rodney were able to convey the complexities of this relationship.

4 / THE USE OF THREE ACTORS FOR THIS PRODUCTION OF GOOD MUSLIM BOY

'We've got around 50 characters played by three actors. Onstage there is this magical aspect and the audience goes with us. The play lends itself to this form of storytelling. You will go to different spaces and places and inside the mind at times. You can't be literal with any of that. Using this form heightens the drama.' —OSAMAH SAMI

- The play functions with Osamah as a central narrator and the two other actors playing multiple roles. As you watch this production, evaluate how well this format works as a means to tell the range of stories. How did this non-naturalistic style of production help to enhance the play?
- The shifts of character throughout the production are done very simply, with minimal changes of costumes and props. Analyse how effectively the transformations of character worked throughout the performance.
- Do you agree with Osamah that by using a non-linear and non-literal style of theatre, the drama within the play was heightened? What impact did the play have upon you as an audience member? How effective was it to experience such a wide range of scenes that shifted so quickly?

S BAZAAR



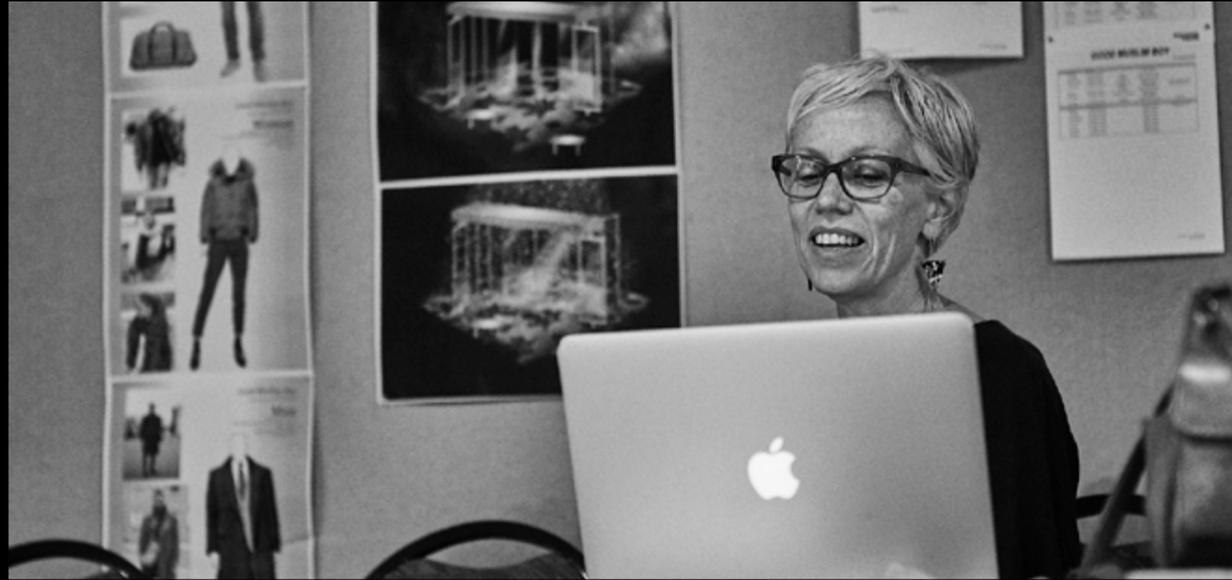


ABOUT THE CO-WRITER / DIRECTOR JANICE MULLER



Janice is a theatre and opera director. For Malthouse Theatre she has directed *Revolt. She said. Revolt again.* by Alice Birch, *Turbine* by Dan Giovannoni for The Suitcase Series (2016); curated a season of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* by Nassim Soleimanpour (2012) and with Meredith Penman, directed & co-adapted *A Woman in Berlin* (2010). Other credits include: *Biographica* (Sydney Chamber Opera, Sydney Festival); *Lake Disappointment* (Carriageworks); *The Tribe* for Bankstown Live (Urban Theatre Projects, Sydney Festival, Belvoir, Castlemaine State Festival & The Substation) *Alaska* by D.C Moore (ATYP); *The Country* by Martin Crimp (Belvoir) and *Crave* by Sarah Kane (The Storeroom, Belvoir). Janice was nominated for a 2016 Sydney Theatre Award for Best Director for *Lake Disappointment*. She received the Goethe Institut/Playwriting Australia Dramaturgy Scholarship in 2006, the VCA's Keith & Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship in 2003, and was a participant at the Royal Court International Residency in 2001. Janice was Malthouse Theatre's 2016 Director in Residence, supported by Craig Reeves.

A NOTE FROM THE CO-WRITER & DIRECTOR JANICE MULLER



Osamah Sami's memoir, *Good Muslim Boy*, is in turns thrilling, shocking, hilarious, confronting and tragic. It's life in all its contradictions: incongruous happenings, poignant meetings, laughter, loss and hope. When Osamah suggested we make a play out of it, I didn't take any convincing.

In the middle of last year *Ali's Wedding*— another adaption of the book billed as Australia's first Muslim rom-com—landed with a joyous thud in cinemas across Australia. Audiences laughed and cried as they followed Osamah's escapades as a young man finishing school and finding love. For the stage adaptation, we wanted to look at the events that occurred several years after those of the film, focusing on his relationship with his father and their trip to Iran in 2013.

Very quickly, it became clear to me that Osamah's presence onstage is what would make this version so special. This father-son tale is his own, he's actually lived it, and having him physically there brings such power to the work. His father meant a great deal to his religious community in Melbourne, as well as to his family and friends, but for Osamah he was a true hero.

Writing a new play takes a great deal of time and requires a considerable amount of support. Co-writing is a strange and delicate process that involves a lot of trust, intuitive decision making and a healthy dose of frankness.

Our process, which started over a year ago, went something like this: an initial intensive two-week writing workshop, a lot of discussion, production of a first draft, endless edits back and forth, further discussion, a workshop with actors, a reading, more rewrites, more discussion, more emails, a second workshop with actors and a new draft, two or three more versions of this draft and then the production of a final rehearsal script, which was completely re-written again during the rehearsal period.

Osamah doesn't mind biting off more than he can chew and his energy, enthusiasm and drive are infectious. Working together on this show has been a joy and a privilege. I am very grateful to him for inviting me to help bring his story into the theatre.

Thank you to the wonderful cast; Rodney, Nicole and Osamah; as well as the team; Romanie, Ben, Phil and Jess for their amazing work; special thanks to Alice Ansara, Luisa Hastings-Edge and Nicole Chamoun for their invaluable contributions during script development; particular thanks to Sapidah Kian for her wisdom and to the entire team at Malthouse Theatre for their generous support.

A big thank you also to the team at Queensland Theatre, which we look forward to visiting later this year.



ACTIVITY / MEET JANICE MULLER

In this interview Janice explains her approach to telling Osamah Sami's story onstage as well as the use of two additional actors to play a range of characters. Janice gives an insight into the challenges for the actors, her choices in the design and the performance styles within the production.

vimeo.com/255684436

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ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION



1 / ADAPTING GOOD MUSLIM BOY FOR THE STAGE

'When Osamah first brought the book to me and wanted me to work with him I was a little confronted because it is a real story, so there's a degree of a duty of care... We're talking about characters but they're actually real. His father really did die, he really did go on that trip. And it was very recently that these stories took place.' —JANICE MULLER

- Consider the significance of this play being based upon Osamah's real experiences. How did this impact the actor-audience relationship and your responses to the play as a whole?
- How effectively do you believe Osamah was able to shift between being the narrator/storyteller and playing himself in a wide range of scenes?

2 / THE SHIFTS IN CHARACTER, TIME AND PLACE

'From the very beginning the idea was of staging something that's going from place to place, from time zone to time zone, and we spent a lot of time trying to work that out: how many years the story jumps forward and back from, and how many different places. It lends itself to a theatrical representation. You can do that onstage. You don't need anything to just suddenly be somewhere else.' —JANICE MULLER

- The three actors in this production are working with very frequent transformations. As you watch the play, analyse and evaluate how these shifts are made between character, time and place.
- Evaluate how effectively the set, lighting and costume design enhanced the transformations of character, time and place.
- How did the initial location of a Melbourne tram stop work as a means to commence the journey of the play itself?

#GOODMUSLIMBOY

ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION

3 / THE ACTORS USE OF SKILLS IN REPRESENTING AND TRANSFORMING CHARACTERS

'I've cast actors that are physically and vocally adept and that can move quickly from character to character, who have a good emotional range and lovely voices. Also their ability to move well in the space was something that I was keen on.' –JANICE MULLER

- Analyse and evaluate the use of expressive and performance skills by the three actors throughout the production. How did the actors use their vocal skills, facial expressions and movements to convey the wide range of characters throughout the play?
- How successfully do you believe the actors were able to convey different characters through their use of physicality and the use of the theatrical space?
- There is minimal use of props and costumes throughout the production. Analyse how the actors worked with these minimal shifts in costume and props to convey their transformations of character and location.

4 / PERFORMANCE STYLES WITHIN THE PRODUCTION

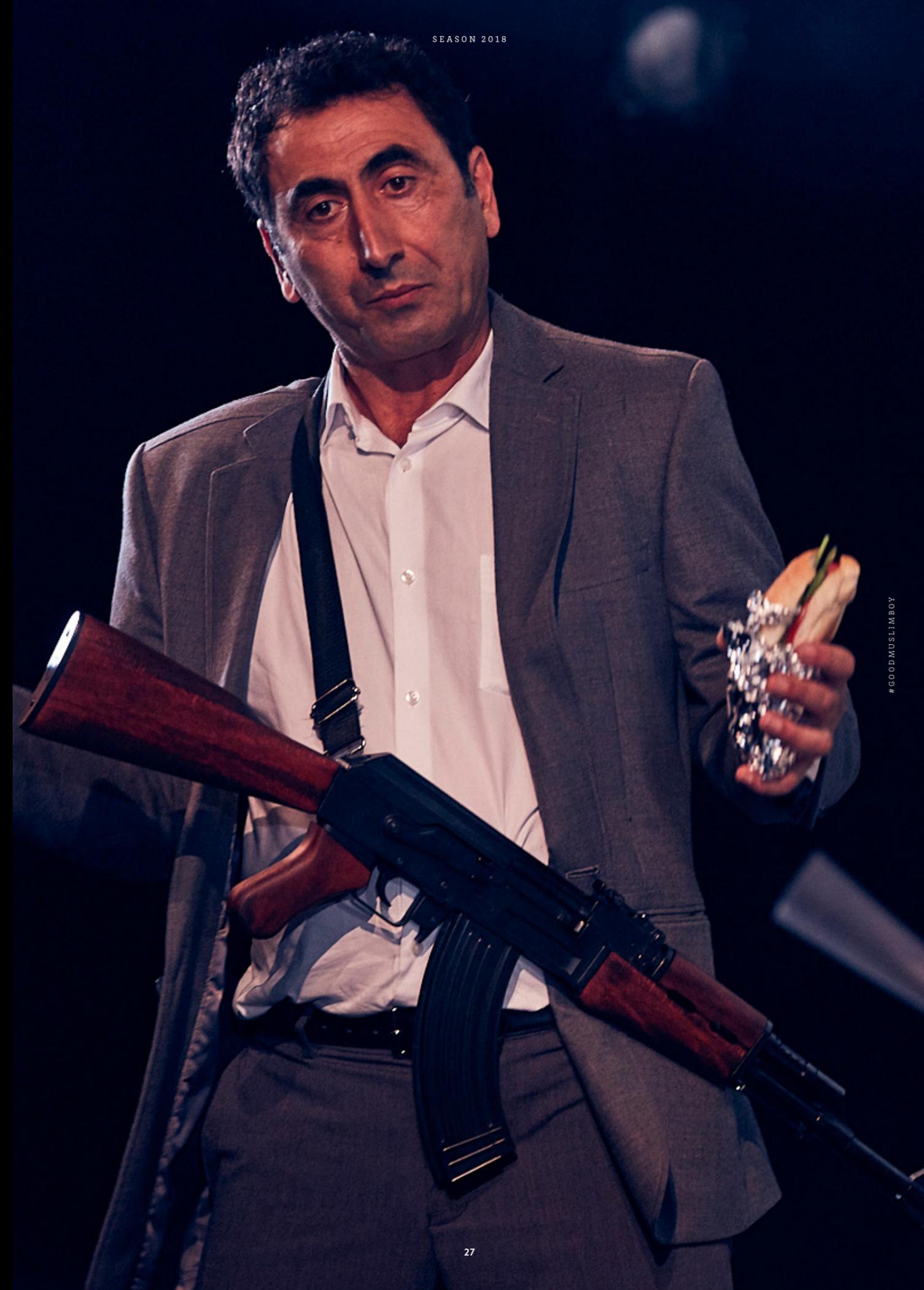
'There's certainly a Poor Theatre element in that we are not having major changes of costume. We don't have an elaborate set. We've got a particular space which is the tram stop, that becomes all of the other spaces and it is about endowing elements of the set with different realities. There will be times when the bench is part of a bus stop or a bed in a hotel room, or a coffin with a body in it. That kind of simplicity is there.' –JANICE MULLER

- As you watch this production, take note of the range of non-naturalistic performance styles. They include: Direct Address and storytelling, as well as elements of Poor Theatre, Physical Theatre and Epic Theatre. How effectively did the choice of performance styles and conventions work within this production?
- Evaluate the impact of the frequent use of direct address throughout the play. How well did this work?
- Analyse the use of minimal props and costumes, as part of the conventions of Poor Theatre. How appropriate was this choice for the production as a whole?

5. THE SET, COSTUME, LIGHTING AND SET DESIGN

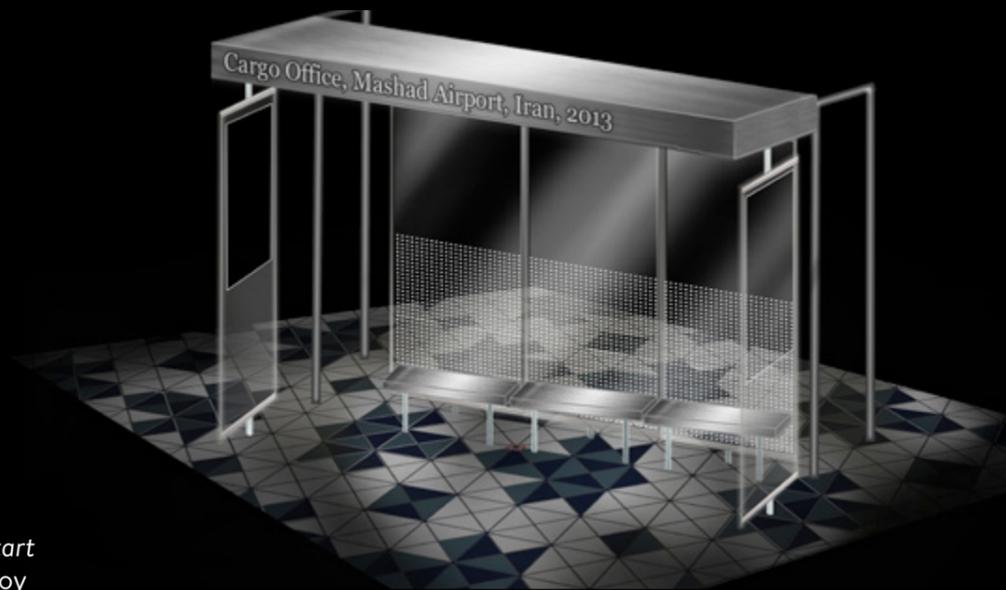
'The design of the show was a collaboration between Osamah and I and brainstorming with the designer Romanie Harper. We came up with the idea of the tram stop. The themes of the story are about transit. It's about going from one place to another, it's about growing up—transitioning into maturity—so there's this feeling of transit and travel.' –JANICE MULLER

- Evaluate how well the key themes of being in transit and growing up are represented within the set design.
- Analyse the use of sound and lighting in the production. How effectively do they convey the range of locations within the play?
- How does the sound design enhance the shifts of mood and emotional journey of the play?





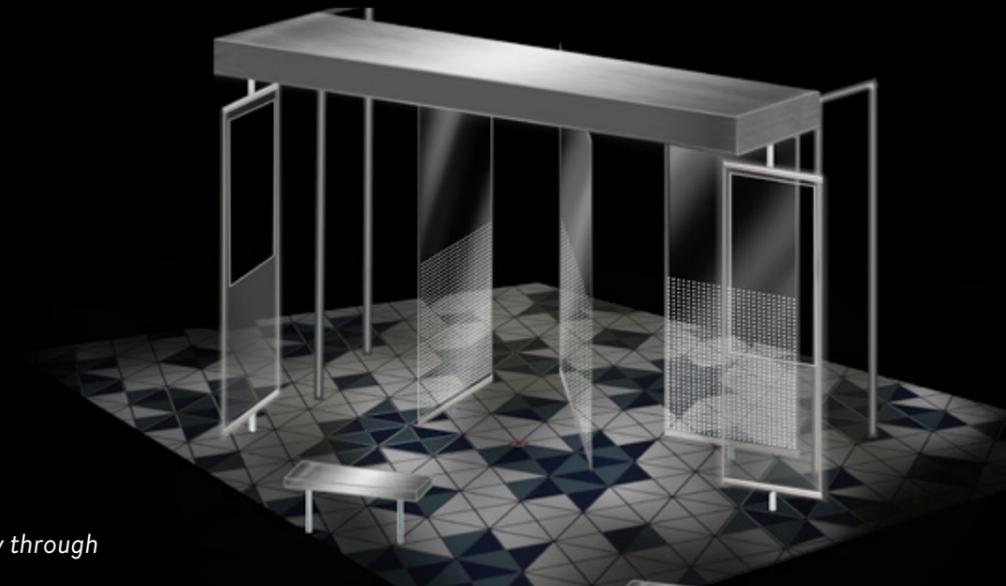
THE SET & COSTUME DESIGN OF GOOD MUSLIM BOY



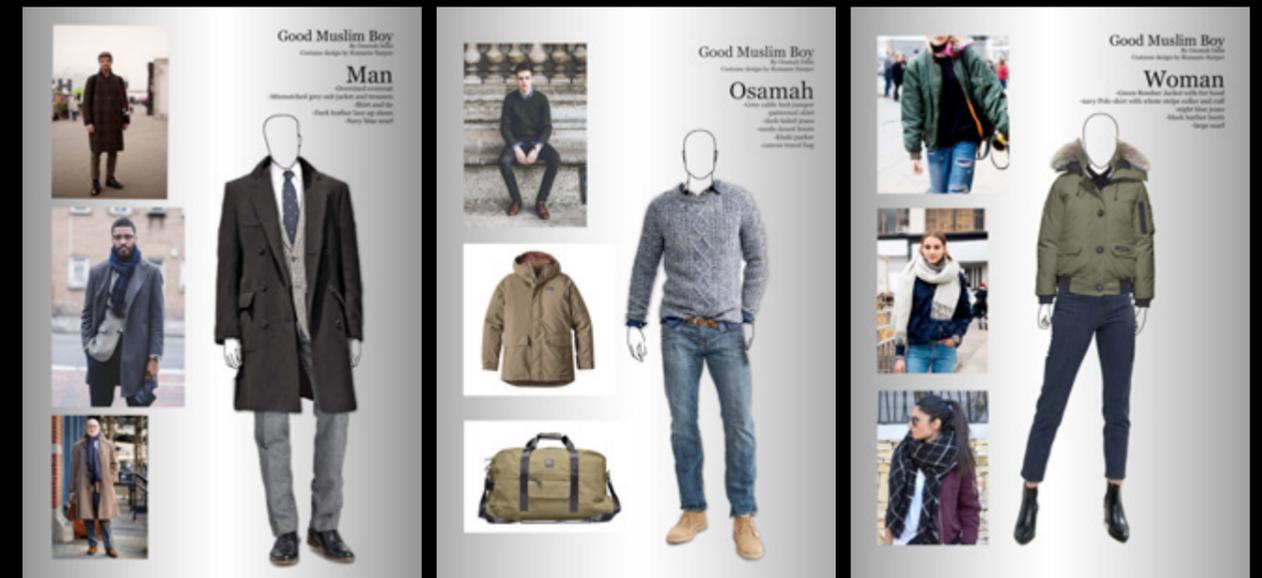
Set design at the start of Good Muslim Boy



Set design in Scenes 48 & 49 – where snow falls



Set design half way through Good Muslim Boy



Romanie Harper's set is deceptively simple. When we enter the theatre the three actors are at a bus or tram stop. All three wear contemporary winter clothes. They might be in Melbourne or any other city. There is also a middle-eastern scenic design on the floor. This is a replica of the patterns from one of the marble floors at the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad in Iran—the largest mosque in the world, which Osamah and his father will visit together at the start of the play.

In these first few moments of the play some of the key themes are established. This initial setting of a bus/tram stop at which three characters are waiting suggests people in transit. It introduces the notion of travel, of being in a liminal space, in a state of transition. We will soon discover that our central character and narrator has been caught in between destinations— unable to leave and unwilling to stay. As the play progresses we see Osamah struggling to fulfil a range of differing cultural expectations and we will see him constantly questioned about his identity: *Is he Australian? Is he a husband? Is he a father? Is he Iraqi? Is he Iranian? Is he a Muslim? Is he a good Muslim? Is he a son? Is he a good son? Is he in mourning? Which language does he speak? Which soccer team does he barrack for?*

As Osamah struggles to establish his identity for an array of court officials, detectives, police, clerics and bureaucrats, the set itself transforms. The tram shelter opens up to become a range of counters and department offices, and Osamah encounters a number of characters seeking to define him, and instruct him on the correct way to behave. Somehow Osamah manages to defy all of their expectations. He rarely fits neatly into any of their notions of how he ought to behave. Instead he remains in limbo—in transit—caught between worlds, between time zones and between rigid definitions.

The actors' costumes are a range of layers that denote the cold winter of Iran but which can also be adjusted for different characters. Changes in costume are minimal and all changes happen in front of the audience: the addition or removal of a scarf, or glasses, or a coat, are used to convey a wide range of characters. But there are also many instances when no change of costume takes place and there may only be a small shift in posture or voice to convey a new character.

The benches are also constantly moved and transformed. They become seats in a taxi, on a bus and in an office; they also become coffins, and a hotel bed.

ACTING AND CHARACTERISATION



Osamah Sami
CO-WRITER / CAST

Analyse and evaluate the ways that Osamah uses his voice, gestures and facial expressions as the storyteller and narrator using direct address throughout the play. Pay attention to the ways that Osamah shifts from narrator to playing in the scenes alongside the two other actors.

Take note of how Osamah uses his voice, gestures and posture to convey his mounting frustration and desperation throughout the play, as he battles the Iranian bureaucracy in his endeavour to get his father's body back to Australia before his visa expires.



Rodney Afif
CAST

Analyse and evaluate the ways that Rodney uses his voice, facial expressions, and movements to convey the character of Osamah's father in the early scenes of the play. How does Rodney establish the complexity and nuances of this crucial relationship (throughout Scenes 2–11)?

How does Rodney use his voice, timing and movements to convey the character of the taxi driver 'Bobby D' in Scene 26? How does he use his expressive skills to portray the worldliness and seductive charm of this character?



Nicole Nabout
CAST

Analyse and evaluate the ways that Nicole uses her movements, gestures and facial expressions to convey the character of Osamah's mother. Consider how this key relationship between Osamah and his mother is communicated on stage through only three short scenes (Scenes 9, 25, 30).

How does Nicole use her voice, timing and movements to convey Osamah's young daughter, speaking to her father from Melbourne (in Scene 21)? Consider by contrast how Nicole uses her voice, gestures and facial expressions to convey the woman in mourning by the coffin at Reza's Paradise Cemetery (in Scene 22).

AFTER SEEING THE MALTHOUSE THEATRE PRODUCTION OF *GOOD MUSLIM BOY* DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING:

- How did the actors use their expressive skills (facial expressions, voice, movement, gestures) to convey the extensive range of characters?
- How did each of the actors use their performance skills (focus, timing, energy, actor-audience relationship) throughout the production to convey the range of locations and contexts?
- How did the actors use the acting space—both through their use of movement and their use of stillness and silence?
- What sort of a relationship was established throughout the performance between the actors and the audience?
- How were lighting and sound used to create mood and establish various locations?



ACTIVITY / MEET THE CAST

In this interview, Nicole Nabout and Rodney Afif discuss their roles in *Good Muslim Boy*. They discuss the challenges of playing multiple characters and needing to transform very swiftly between scenes. They also discuss the shifts in location, context and mood throughout the production. Please note that this interview was filmed mid-way through rehearsals when many decisions about the production were still in the process of being made.

vimeo.com/255686410

PROMPT PACK

ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION



1 / PLAYING MULTIPLE CHARACTERS IN GOOD MUSLIM BOY

'Within each scene you always have Osamah playing himself, and then you have one of us or two of us playing the other characters...I go from playing an Iranian bus driver to Osamah's mother hearing for the first time about the death of her husband, then back to the bus driver again...I also play Osamah's eight year old daughter back in Melbourne, as well as an octogenarian waiting to register her granddaughter...The range is enormous.' –NICOLE NABOUT

'I go from playing a Cargo Officer in 2012 to Richard's mother in 1995, in a flashback, then swiftly back to playing the Cargo Officer again. We set up the convention that that can happen in this play...So it's extreme but it's not like I'm contorting myself to make that happen.' –RODNEY AFIF

- Both Nicole and Rodney cite examples of where they transform between very different characters. For Nicole, the example was going from a bus driver to Osamah's mother (and back again). For Rodney, it was from a Cargo Officer to Richard's mother (and back again). As you watch the production pay close attention to the ways each of the two actors shift the use of their voice, gestures and movements to convey these contrasting characters.
- Rodney points out that he doesn't have to 'contort himself' to shift character. Both Nicole and Rodney transform character simply and swiftly with minimal costume changes. How effectively do you believe the simple transformations of character were throughout the production?
- How do each of the actors convey the shifts in the relationships that their characters have with Osamah? How do they convey changes in status, as well as levels of familiarity or formality in relation to Osamah?

#GOODMUSLIMBOY

ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION

2 / CONVEYING A RANGE OF LOCATIONS AND CONTEXTS

'In the body language of the actors, when we move into a small space we reflect that physically...In the cemetery scene the idea is that it is massive and you can see that by the opening up of the body and the looking around, or the shift from being on the bus, to getting off the bus into the desert.' –NICOLE NABOUT

'Through the way that we focus we convey the breadth of the place that we are in. We try and take the play out of the actual place, into an imagined space.' –RODNEY AFIF

- How effectively do you think the actors were able to convey the range of locations, for example: a large cemetery, a desert, an airport terminal, a mosque, a nightclub, a hotel room, the black market, an embassy, a police department, a bus terminal and a street pavement in the early hours of the morning while it is snowing?
- Analyse how the actors movements and physicality shifted in accordance with the shift in location and context.
- Evaluate how effectively the set, lighting and sound design enhanced these transformations of time and place.

3 / SHIFTING BETWEEN A RANGE OF MOODS AND EMOTIONS

'In terms of switching emotions it's pretty quick. Not many of the characters have a journey. You're often getting only a snapshot of a character and you have to enter that emotion quickly. You don't have time to find it. It's got to just be there.' –NICOLE NABOUT

- Analyse and evaluate how effectively you believe the actors were able to convey the emotions of their characters. For example, with Nicole: the character of Osamah's mother when she hears about the death of her husband for the very first time. For example, with Rodney: the character of Osamah's father conveying his concern and love for his son.
- How did the lighting and sound design help to enhance the shifts in mood throughout the play?
- How did the actors use their expressive skills (facial expressions, voice, movement, gestures) to convey the particular emotional states of their characters?

ACTIVITY / DISCUSSION



4 / THE USE OF LANGUAGE WITHIN THE PRODUCTION

'The play has three languages– Farsi, Arabic and English... But the text is in English (because the characters are speaking in their mother tongue). Every now and then a character has to speak another language and that is where you see a difference.' – NICOLE NABOUT

'There are indications in the script when other languages are being spoken. For example, when the father and Osamah arrive in Iran, Osamah is disrespectful and he speaks in Arabic and the airport official insists that he speak in Farsi. It is all spoken in English, but we indicate which bits are in Arabic and which bits are in Farsi and which in English...And there is swearing in Farsi and religious invocations spoken in Arabic in the play.' – RODNEY AFIF

- As you watch this production, take note of the different languages that are being spoken by particular characters at different times in the play. Were the distinctions between the languages clear– even though the characters are almost exclusively speaking in English?
- How effective was the scene with Osamah when Nicole as the doctor intersperses her speech with 'blah, blah, blah' to indicate Osamah's disorientation and confusion (Scene 13)? How effective was the scene when Rodney's character on the bus pretends to speak Arabic (using gibberish) to the police officer (Scene 33)?
- How effective were the moments when characters used phrases in either Farsi or Arabic to capture the location and context of their scenes?

ANALYSIS IN RELATION TO VCE DRAMA UNIT 3

Here is a summary of some areas to discuss in relation to the use of the Non-Naturalistic Conventions, Dramatic Elements, Expressive Skills, Performance Skills, and Performance Styles that are featured in *Good Muslim Boy*. Analyse and evaluate how effectively you believe they were used throughout the production.

NON-NATURALISTIC CONVENTIONS

TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER

- Both Nicole and Rodney play a wide range of characters.
 - Consider how successfully they were able to convey the transformations of character with only minimal shifts of costume (and in some cases no change of costume).
 - How did these two actors use their expressive and performance skills to shift between characters?
 - Pay close attention to minimal changes of movement to convey their characters.
 - Which of their characters were most memorable to you and why?

TRANSFORMATION OF TIME AND PLACE

- *Good Muslim Boy* constantly shifts between different locations, times, contexts and countries.
- These locations include : various airports, a nightclub, Osamah's home, mosques, a hotel room, police departments, courtrooms, embassies, a cemetery, bus terminals, the black market, a hospital, the coroner's, various departments, a dark alley, a street, a bus and a taxi.
- How effective were the titles in helping to locate the range of scenes?
- How did the actors use of expressive skills help to convey the specific locations and contexts?

TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

- The benches were transformed on a number of occasions to become a taxi, a bus, coffins, hotel beds, and a tram terminal.
- This was consistent with the director's choice to have a minimal set design and to allow the set to constantly transform to help convey the range of settings.

HEIGHTENED USE OF LANGUAGE

- Throughout the play language is used in non-naturalistic ways:
 - In Scene 13, Nicole as the doctor makes repeated use of the phrase 'blah-blah-blah' to signify Osamah's confusion and shock at his father's passing.
 - A convention is established of the audience knowing that Osamah speaks a range of languages, so we recognise that other characters may not understand what he is saying.
 - Arabic and Farsi phrases and curses are occasionally part of a character's text.

DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

CLIMAX

As you watch the play consider what the most heightened moments of tension are throughout the production.

Consider the moment in Scene 31 when Osamah stands up to the group of Kurds—daring them to stab him if they really want to.

Consider also the moment in Scene 41 when Osamah is so overcome in his desperate attempts to obtain a death certificate for his father that he collapses on the ground.

What might be some other possible examples?

CONFLICT

Analyse the ways that power, status and authority were represented throughout the production and the conflict that was conveyed between these authority figures and Osamah's desperate attempts to return to Australia with his father's body before his visa expires.

CONTRAST

Analyse the ways in which contrast is used throughout the play in relation to the range of moods; between humour and tragedy and between the array of characters that were conveyed throughout the production.

MOOD

How was mood created in this production? What moods were evoked at different times throughout the play?

Consider the moments of pathos and desperation. How were these conveyed by the actors onstage?

Analyse how each of the key stagecraft elements (lighting, costume, set and sound design) were used to create and enhance mood.

RHYTHM

How did the use of rhythm vary between the scenes?

How did the use of sound and use of language contribute to the varying rhythm within each scene?

SPACE

Analyse the different ways that the stage was used throughout the production.

How did the use of the space help to convey the different settings and locations?

How did the lighting enhance the different use of the space?

SOUND

Consider the range of sounds used within the production and how they evoked different moods and emotional states.

How effectively did sound help to convey the range of locations?

What were some of the moments when sound was used most effectively?

SYMBOL

Consider the significance of the coffin located upstage at the beginning and the end of the play. How does this help to symbolise Osamah's quest throughout the production?

How did elements of the set design work on a symbolic level—whether it was the use of the bus/tram stop at the start of the play or the patterns on the floor representing the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza?

TENSION

What were some of the key examples of tension during the production?

How does the fact that Osamah has only four days until his visa expires create tension—as he struggled to meet the requirements of the various bureaucracies?

EXPRESSIVE SKILLS

VOICE

How did the actors vary their use of voice as they transformed between various characters?

Was there a shift in Osamah's voice between directly addressing the audience as narrator and playing himself within the various scenes?

How did the actors vary their use of vocal tone, pitch, pace and rhythm to convey status, age and emotional states?

MOVEMENT

How did the actors use of movement shift as they transformed character?

How effective were the moments of stillness as a contrast to the moments of hectic movement by the actors onstage?

GESTURE

How did the actors vary their use of gestures to convey their characters emotional states?

How effective were the use of simple changes of gestures to signify different characters?

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

How did the actors vary their use of facial expressions between characters?

Analyse how the use of facial expressions helped to convey the emotional state of the characters throughout the play.

PERFORMANCE STYLES

Here are some of the performance styles that were evident throughout *Good Muslim Boy*:

Brecht's **Epic Theatre**: for example, the use of direct address, disjointed timeframes, the use of quick short, episodic, non-linear scenes throughout the play, the use of titles, the mechanics of changing costumes and props in front of the audience, and references to political issues and contexts.

Grotowski's **Poor Theatre**: for example, the minimal use of set and props, to give primary focus to the performers onstage.

Analyse and evaluate how each of these performance styles were used at specific moments throughout the production.

PERFORMANCE SKILLS

FOCUS

Consider the use of focus throughout the play. How did the actors focus shift between characters?

How did Osamah's focus shift between the moments of direct address and playing himself within various scenes?

TIMING

How was timing used throughout this production? What were some moments where the timing slowed down? What were some of the moments of heightened pace and energy?

ENERGY

Consider the actors use of energy throughout the production.

What were some of the moments of particular intensity?

What were some of the lighter moments within the piece?

Was there a dynamic use of energy throughout the production?

ACTOR-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

How effective was the actor-audience relationship throughout the production?

How engaged were you during the sections of direct address/narration?

How did you respond as an audience member to Osamah's journey throughout the play?



CAST AND CREATIVES BIOS



Rodney Afif
CAST

Rodney works regularly across film, television and theatre. Recent film appearances include *The BBQ*, *Ali's Wedding*, *Hotel Mumbai*, the latest instalment of *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales* and six part TV series *Romper Stomper*. He played a lead role in the AFI nominated feature *Lucky Miles* and the award winning short, *Azadi*. Other feature film credits include *The Killer Elite*, *My Year Without Sex*, *Love's Brother* and *Serenades*. His many television projects include *Rosehaven*, *Offspring*, *Winners and Losers*, *East West 101*, *Satisfaction*, *Rush*, *All Saints* and *City Homicide*. Rodney's theatre credits include the role of Othello in the Eleventh Hour Theatre Company's production of *Othello* as well as *Wait Until Dark*, *Three Sisters*, *The Balcony*, *Two Brothers*, *The Golden Dragon*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* and most recently *Macbeth* (MTC). In 2005, he became a Clown Doctor and since then Dr Achoo! has worked at the Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital and in pediatric wards in many other hospitals.



Nicole Nabout
CAST

Best known for her work on television, Nicole is making her Malthouse Theatre debut. Theatre credits include: *King John*, *The Crucible* (The Eleventh Hour); *Secret Bridesmaid's Business* (Playbox Theatre); *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Australian Shakespeare Company); *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus* (Gas Theatre). Television work includes: *Newton's Law* (ABC); *The Doctor Blake Mysteries* (December Media); *Nowhere Boys*, (Matchbox Pictures/ABC); *Upper Middle Bogan* (Gristmill/ABC); *The Time of Our Lives* (JAHM Pictures/ABC TV); *Offspring* (Southern Star Entertainment/Channel 10); *The Lost Boys* (Matchbox Pictures ABC3); *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, (ABC); *The Librarians* (Gristmill/ABC TV); *Very Small Business* (ABC); *Blue Heelers* (Southern Star Group/Channel 7); *Last Man Standing* (Burberry/Channel 7); *The Brush Off*, (Channel 7). Nicole's film appearances include: *Treading Water* (CJ Flannery Productions); *Little Deaths* (Jason Byrne Productions); *Three Dollars* (Arena Films); *Red Rover* (P Mushin & J Jarman).



Romanie Harper
SET & COSTUME DESIGN

Romanie Harper is a theatre maker and designer. Design credits include *Little Emperors* (Malthouse), *We All Know What's Happening* (Arts House), *This Is Eden* (Fortyfivedownstairs), *Conviction* (ZLMD Shakespeare, Green Room award for design), *Bright World* (Arthur Productions), *META* (Malthouse Helium), *Madonna Arms* (Next Wave), *M+M* (Daniel Schlusser Ensemble, Melbourne Festival, Green Room nomination for design) and *The Sovereign Wife* (Sisters Grimm, NEON, Green Room nominated for design). In 2012-13 she worked in New York with The Wooster Group, and co-designed Radiohole's *Inflatable Frankenstein* (The Kitchen, NYC). She has co-directed and designed *The Collected Works of Victor Bergman* (fortyfivedownstairs) by The Family, and *Calamity* (MTC NEON) by ZLMD Shakespeare.



Ben Hughes
LIGHTING DESIGN

Ben's practice spans theatre, dance and opera; he is also Associate Artistic Director of The Danger Ensemble. For Queensland Theatre; *Scenes from a Marriage*, *An Octoroon*, *Noises Off!* (with MTC), *Constellations*, *Switzerland*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Seagull*, *Happy Days*, *Grounded*, *The Button Event*, *The Effect* (with STC), *The Mountaintop*, *Black Diggers* (with Sydney Festival), *Design For Living*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Kelly*, *Head Full of Love*, *Fractions* (with Hothouse Theatre), *Orphans*, *Fat Pig*, *Let The Sunshine* (with MTC) *The Crucible*, *25 Down*, *Stones in His Pockets*, *I Am My Own Wife*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Private Fears in Public Places*, *Waiting for Godot*. Other credits include *Black is the New White* (STC), *Snow White* (Opera Queensland & La Boite), *Straight White Men* (STCSA & La Boite), *The Hamlet Apocalypse* (The Danger Ensemble), *The Host* (Expressions Dance Company), *Giselle* (Queensland Ballet). Ben lectures in Lighting Design for Queensland University of Technology and is an accredited member of the Australian Production Design Guild.



Phil Slade
SOUND DESIGN & COMPOSITION

Next to being a registered psychologist and behavioural economist, Phil has been composing music for the stage and screen for more than 20 years. Along with his many film credits, Phil's theatrical credits include *Hamlet*, *1001 Nights*, *Bombshells*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *The School of Arts*, *Rabbit Hole*, *Grimm Tales*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Thom Pain*, *An Oak Tree*, *Man=Man*, *Treasure Island* and *The Exception and The Rule* (Queensland Theatre), *Faustus* (Bell Shakespeare), *The Wishing Well*, *Oodgeroo: Bloodline to Country*, *Danger Age*, *Sex:cubed*, *The Drowning Bride*, and *Salt* (La Boite), *Australia! The Show* (MTC & Hothouse Theatre), and *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Loves Labours Lost*, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Harvest Rain Theatre Company). Phil has won a Matilda Award for sound and composition on Queensland Theatre's *1001 Nights* and a Bell award for the music on La Boite's *Sex:cubed*. He is also a published author of a number of books on behavioural economics.



Jess Keepence
STAGE MANAGER

Jess is a freelance Stage Manager and a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts (2006). She has worked on many productions and projects but this is her first at Malthouse Theatre. Other productions include: Melbourne Theatre Company's *Hay Fever*, *Macbeth*, *The Odd Couple*, *Jasper Jones*, *Miss Julie*, *Buyer and Cellar*, *The Sublime*, *The Crucible*, *Other Desert Cities*, *The Birthday Party* and *Poor Boy*; Rawcus' *Song for a Weary Throat* and *Catalogue*; Ilbijerri Theatre Company's *Jack Charles Vs The Crown*; Arena Theatre Company's *The Sleepover*; Angus Cerini/doubletap's *Resplendence* and *Save for Crying*; MTC/ Belvoir's *Neighbourhood Watch* and *The Book of Everything*; The Rabble's *Room of Regret*; Ranters Theatre's *Holiday*; *Priscilla the Musical*; Sydney Theatre Company's *In the Next Room or The Vibrator Play*; City of Melbourne/Rimini Protokoll's *100%*, and *All the Queens Men/ Next Wave's Fun Run*. She has also worked on events such as *White Night*, *Melbourne Festival*, *Woodford Folk Festival* and *Castlemaine State Festival*.

REZA'S PARADISE



LEARN MORE

[Listen to Osamah Sami discuss the play with Michael Cathcart on Radio National's Stage Hub / ABC Radio National](#)

[Read the interview with Osamah Sami / Spectrum](#)

[Hardie Grant Publishing / Good Muslim Boy Teachers Notes](#)

[Writer and performer Osamah Sami draws on his award-winning memoir of the same name to spin a theatrical tale / Time Out](#)

[Good Muslim Boy production images](#)

[Good Muslim Boy Production Program](#)

REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCTION

[Drama, laughter and perhaps a strange symmetry between worlds and people who at first seem so far apart / ArtsHub](#)

[Good Muslim Boy review: A true coming-of-age tale unlike any other / The Age](#)



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