

# Life Without Me

Daniel Keene, 2010

# What You Need to Know

1. Keene's Context
2. How the characters represent Keene's context
3. How the play can be staged to reflect contemporary issues
4. Theatrical Styles – absurdist, farce, comedy, existentialist
5. Theatrical techniques – symbol, character/role, dialogue, structure, subtext, repetition
6. Elements of Drama
7. Production Elements

# Daniel Keene

## A LOBBY OF LOST STEPS...

The following is an extract from an interview with Daniel Keene for the MTC programme notes for *Life Without Me*.

'I'd had an idea in my mind for a while to write a play set in a public space where private things happen. There's a French phrase that came back to me: "The room of lost steps". [*Le salle des pas perdus*] It's somewhere that lies between one place and another: so, an airport lounge, a railway station, a hotel lobby. I settled on a hotel lobby and then it was literally a matter of doing what I always do once I have my starting point: I just wait. I just listen. Eventually someone speaks.'

'I never know what is going to happen. I just knew there were two characters in the lobby, you know, and they talked and eventually I knew who they were. Then someone else came in, and then someone else, and then someone else, until I began to understand what the play was.'

'I wanted the play to do two things at once, seemingly opposite things. It appears to be a comedy at the start, perhaps a farce. It has two entrances, it has an elevator, it has stairs – the set up is like a farce. I had in mind Feydeau, Ionesco, even Arrabal, who set up in their plays highly artificial environments, absurd elements. I wanted it to be funny, but at the same time I also wanted underneath serious questions, moments and situations.'

'You must strike a balance when the world of the play is not real. This play, it's kind of absurd, kind of strange. But the emotions of the characters are real, truthful - must be. If they cannot be believed by the audience as honest and truthful the play won't work. The emotional truth holds the play together'

# Daniel Keene

- \* Play was written in 2010
- \* Global Financial Crisis 2007/2008 – Australia was still recovering from the uncertainty felt at the time.
- \* Many people lost who they were – the financial security and independence they may have had was taken away – the future was not secure.
- \* Kevin Rudd/Julia Gillard leadership – a lack of confidence grew in the political system. The prime ministership became somewhat of a farce itself!

# Characters in Context

- \* All of the characters must come to have a clearer understanding of who they are and what their place and purpose is in the world – they are trapped in the hotel until this purgatory is complete. The set symbolises this – the broken elevator, the revolving door.
- \* Characters represent the social concerns about the future of Australia post GFC. John has forgotten who he is and where he should be, Roy and Alice become people they are not in order to build a future, Tom and Ellen pretend to be others in order to escape the revolving nature of life.
  - \* “My life just seems to go on, but... without me in it.”
  - \* “... not yet properly arrived, or not entirely departed. You’re in between. A person is always somewhere, but in a hotel lobby... where are you exactly?”

# Character and Role

- \* While the characters interact and tell the story of the play, each character has particular **ROLE** that represents important idea about society.
  - \* John & Nigel → the people who are stuck in a rut; they go about day to day life without any thought or enjoyment
  - \* Tom and Ellen → represent the regret of unexplored options
  - \* Roy and Alice → question the concept of happiness and what we expect it to be, and what form it might take
  - \* Mrs Spence → symbol of how loss can effect people and how they cope

# The Play in 2017

- \* Do people know their place in the world?
- \* What's effecting the future's certainty?
- \* House prices, political issues, global warming, etc. → where are we left?

# Theatrical Styles

- \* Absurdist
  - \* Existentialist
  - \* Absence of character development
  - \* Lack of motivation
  - \* Time and place blurred – how much time passes during the play?
  - \* Illogical and repetitive movement (elevator button, revolving door, the lounge and sleeping bag bit)
  - \* One mood to the other without notice
  - \* Sombre and serious to comical very quickly
  - \* Illogical, repetitive and rhythmic dialogue
  - \* Frequent use of silence and monotone delivery
  - \* Slow dialogue accompanied by a fast-paced monologue



# Theatrical Styles

- \* Physical Theatre
  - \* Light bulb – opening sequence with umbrella and revolving door
  - \* Repeated actions
- \* Situation Comedy
  - \* Common environment
  - \* Inherently theatrical
- \* Farce
  - \* Buffoonery and horseplay
  - \* Highly exaggerated comic situations – extravagant and improbable
  - \* Physical humour and absurdity

# Elements of Drama

- \* How are they used in the play?
  - \* Time
  - \* Place and situation
  - \* Language and movement
  - \* Dramatic tension
  - \* Character
  - \* Role
  - \* Mood
  - \* Symbol
  - \* Contrast

# Production Elements

- \* How would you use...
  - \* Sound effects
  - \* Lighting
  - \* Costume
  - \* Set
  - \* Props