

RUBY MOON
by Matt Cameron

Teacher

Resource Kit



Introduction

SYNOPSIS:

It begins like a fairytale...

Descend into a suburban dystopia of loss and fear with this haunting production of Matt Cameron's acclaimed Australian play for young adults, Ruby Moon.

In the suburban quiet of Flaming Tree Grove, life appears to be picture perfect; until the day little Ruby sets off to visit her grandmother at the end of the cul-de-sac and is never seen again. Her parents fracture. Grief-stricken, they search for answers behind their neighbours' doors. Then a mysterious parcel arrives and Ruby's ghostly presence is felt again ... and again.

A cyclical story of loss and fear, Ruby Moon explores the relentlessness of grief as two parents continue to return to the same place with more questions than they have answers.

Matt Cameron's cleverly crafted play blends Theatre of the Absurd, Australian Gothic and Brechtian techniques, challenging the classic 'whodunnit' narrative it employs.

Filled with tension and unpredictability, this stirring contemporary production will challenge senior drama students as they attempt to solve the mystery of Ruby Moon.

TARGET YEAR LEVELS:

Years 10-12

STYLE / FORM / THEMES / CONTEXTS:

Drama

Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking

A blend of Theatre of the Absurd, Australian Gothic and Brechtian techniques

A cyclical story of suburban isolation, dystopia and ghostly presence.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Producer:	Artslink Queensland & The Arts Centre Gold Coast
Writer:	Matt Cameron
Director:	Helen Howard
Production Design and Construction:	Josh McIntosh
Sound Design:	Phil Slade
Original Songs:	Andrew McNaughton

For THE ARTS CENTRE GOLD COAST:

Lighting Designer / Technician:	Alex Fox
Performing Arts Manager:	Brad Rush
Associate Producer:	Vicki Buenen
Production Coordinator:	Scott McCaig
Marketing Coordinator:	Michelle Macwhirter
Education Officer:	Kaitlin Bell
Graphic Designers:	Nathan Herbertson and Chris Bouffler

This production is a co-production between Artslink Queensland and The Arts Centre Gold Coast. A Theatre Season opened on 17 July 2014 before the tour traveled to schools throughout Queensland for 6 weeks.



Australian Gothic Theatre and Ruby Moon

This style of theatre explores a vision of Australia that is the familiar made strange and foreboding. It warns us of the dangers that under the façade of the ordinary and mundane images of the Australian landscape. This style of theatre is built on the post-colonial notions of Australia as a topsy-turvy landscape where swans are black instead of white, the seasons are reversed, the trees lose their bark rather than their leaves and the water spins in a different direction. The familiar European view of the world was somehow jarred by the Australian landscape, conjuring notions of the supernatural and other worldly. Ruby Moon similarly takes the familiar landscape of a suburban streetscape and distorts it into a place of mystery and secrets.

Playwright Matt Cameron further plays on audience's perceptions of the familiar as he makes strong inter-textual links to the fairytale; Little Red Riding Hood. Ruby ventures from her home to visit her Grandmother's house and never arrives. The tale is familiar, yet twisted as we explore the mystery of Ruby Moon's disappearance. Fairytales and other children's narratives dealing with lost children are familiar to audiences; Hansel and Gretel, The Pied Piper, Snow White, Wizard of Oz and Alice in Wonderland. Yet the familiar made unfamiliar is key to making audiences feel unease as this production unfolds.

The lost child is not only found in fairytales, but figures as a much feared and recurrent theme in Australian literature. Ruby Moon strikes upon this fear of the missing child. Cameron reveals that, "the challenge with Ruby Moon [was] finding a way of writing a play that told a fictional story about a missing child that was distinctive because in some ways it is familiar territory." (Malthouse Theatre 2008) The fear of the child lost in the woods is embedded deep into the Australian psyche and is evident in literature such as; Picnic at Hanging Rock, Babes in the bush and Dot and the Kangaroo. The play transforms from location to location in the suburban street that is home to the Moon family, the familiar people and places reveal strange and unsettling characters. Through the descriptive street name, Flaming Tree Grove, and the dead end insinuations of the cul-de-sac the symbolism, Cameron has made reference to the Australian fears of the bush. Ruby Moon's distorted images of the familiar, compels audiences to question where reality lies and what sinister presence lies beyond the walls of the Moon family home.

"Ray: What were once neighbours' quirks of behaviour soon become the flaws of depraved minds when a child goes missing." (Original Script, Published 2003, Scene 12, p.51)

Malthouse Theatre (2008) [http://www.govo.wa.edu.au/courses-program/senior-school/Curric-Resources/Ruby%20Moon%20Background%20Notes\[1\].pdf](http://www.govo.wa.edu.au/courses-program/senior-school/Curric-Resources/Ruby%20Moon%20Background%20Notes[1].pdf)

CONVENTIONS OF AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC THEATRE FOUND IN RUBY MOON

- Fluid/ doubled characterisation
- Supernatural intrusions into the drama
- Fourth wall (realistic acting, where the supernatural is accepted into the fiction)
- Setting as a character (the urban streetscape; Flaming Tree Grove)
- Forboding mood
- Use of sound to underscore tension
- Episodic / Cyclic Plot
- Motif (visual, verbal and sound)
- Symbolic set and props rather than representational
- Fluid location / transforming settings
- Use of lighting to create atmosphere
- Intertextuality

Pre-Performance Activity #1

LOST CHILD

The lost child is a motif in Australian literature and is a tragedy that strikes at the heart of all Australians. Research some prominent stories of real life 'lost children'.

Examples:

- The Duff children
- The Beaumont children
- Azaria Chamberlain
- Clara Crosbie
- Madeleine McCann

Further Reading:

- <http://www.smh.com.au/national/a-country-of-lost-children-20090814-el8d.html>
- <http://jonesfamilyhistory.wordpress.com/2013/06/06/three-lost-children-daylesford/>

Pre-Performance Activity #2

BABES IN THE WOOD

Ruby Moon blends dark content with fairytale like qualities and intertextual references. Similarly, the traditional song/nursery rhyme Babes in the Wood takes the tragic tale of 2 children who are lost (and ultimately die) and presents the tale as a children's story.

Babes in the Wood

My dear, do you know,
How a long time ago,
Two poor little children,
Whose names I don't know,
Were stolen away
On a fine summer's day,
And left in a wood,
As I've heard people say.

Among the trees high
Beneath the blue sky
They plucked the bright flowers
And watched the birds fly;
Then on blackberries fed,
And strawberries red,
And when they were weary
'We'll go home,' they said.

And when it was night
So sad was their plight,
The sun it went down,
And the moon gave no light.
They sobbed and they sighed
And they bitterly cried,
And long before morning
They lay down and died.

And when they were dead
The robins so red
Brought strawberry leaves
And over them spread;
And all the day long,
The green branches among,
They'd prettily whistle
And this was their song-
'Poor babes in the wood!
Sweet babes in the wood!
Oh the sad fate of
The babes in the wood!'

Author - Anonymous

TASK:

- Divide students into groups of 5-7. Read through the text of Babes in the Wood.
- Ask students to create 4 freeze frames to accompany each stanza of the nursery rhyme. Every member of the group must be in the freeze frame, creating the setting of the narrative.
- After they have created the 4 freeze frames they will need to create movement transitions between each freeze frame.
- Next, students will select lines or phrases from the text to be incorporated into the freeze frames. It is crucial that only a small portion of the text is included.
- Present work. Discuss the clarity of the narrative.
- Now, they are to add a soundscape to each freeze frame. They should consider using rhythm, voice, body percussion, literal and non-literal sounds. Students can remove some of the text if they feel it is appropriate.
- Re-present work. Discuss the creation of mood and tension in the work.

Pre-Performance Activity #3

INTRUSIONS INTO REALITY

When working with an Australian Gothic text it is crucial that actors and directors realise that despite the supernatural themes and intrusions, the work is still presented in a naturalistic or realistic style, so the acting techniques employed will most closely align to Realism. The style is in fact known as; Magical Realism.

Magical Realism is a style of performance where fantastical or supernatural elements are a natural part of an otherwise mundane, realistic environment.

WARM UP:

- Ask students to move around the room naming everything they see out loud.
- Now ask them to repeat this activity naming the objects they see what they are not. E.g. A book may be called a dog, a table may be called a bell, etc.

EXERCISE: Storytelling

- In pairs, students will be telling a story. One student will be the storyteller and one will be the interrupter.
- Before beginning ask the interrupter to write down random 6 words (nouns; places, names, objects, etc.)
- The teacher will give the storytellers an opening line from which to build their story. E.g. There once was a house on the hill...
- As the storyteller progresses through the story, the interrupter must call out their 6 words. The storyteller must incorporate these words into their story as naturally and seamlessly as possible.
- Discuss how successful they were in incorporating the interruptions. What was the impact on the story? Was their initial instinct to make the inclusions realistic or ridiculous?

Pre-Performance Activity #4

MAGICAL REALISM ON STAGE

- Have students improvise a scene (max. 1 minute) depicting two siblings attempting to complete a difficult task. Prompt students that this scene must be realistic (Realism). Perform the scenes.
- Now ask students to add a supernatural intrusion into the scene. For example, a spirit may intervene and assist them, they may stumble on a location that reveal its history to them, they may see characters from the past, one character may actually be dead, they may morph into a character from history, etc. It is important that this supernatural intrusion is blended into the scene and the intrusion is accepted as natural rather than as a horror.
- Perform the scenes.
- Discuss the basis of Realism in their work and how it transformed into Magical Realism.

Post-Performance Activity #1

FAIRYTALE AND RUBY MOON

"Ruby: It begins like a fairytale.... But how does it end?" (Epilogue p.51)

Matt Cameron has relied heavily on intertextual references to fairytales, particularly Little Red Riding Hood. Have students brainstorm the intertextual references in the production.

Discuss the significance and dramatic meaning of these references.

Explore whether as an audience they had expectations that the narrative would end like a fairytale. Why/why not? How did the match/mismatch of their expectation make them feel or think about the production?

Post-Performance Activity #2

DISCOVERING MOTIFS AND THEMES

Below is a table outlining some the motifs and themes commonly seen in Australian Gothic texts. As a think-pair-share activity, ask students to identify which if any of these they saw in the Artslink production of Ruby Moon.

Commonly Used Motifs and Themes in Australian Gothic Plays Archetypes & Tropes (stylistic devices)

BINARY OPPOSITES	MOTIFS	CHARACTERS
Good vs Evil Pure vs. Violated/Injured Light vs. Dark Entrapment vs Abandonment	Mirrors Paintings/ Portraits Death Disfigurement Ghosts, Spirits, etc. History erupting into the present Forboding doom Inevitability of future/ destiny Castles Storms, rain Secrets Winter, Autumn Shadow Familiar rendered unfamiliar Vanishing/ Sudden Appearance	The pure and innocent heroine Demon lover The violated one The disfigured one The undead or unborn one The evil one The doubled or shadowed one

Post-Performance Activity #3

BLENDING FAIRYTALE AND MOTIFS OF AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC

Revisit the table Commonly Used Motifs and Themes in Australian Gothic Plays Archetypes & Tropes (stylistic devices).

Divide students into groups of 4-5. Allocate a nursery rhyme to each group. Using the nursery rhyme as stimulus they are to create a scene depicting the nursery rhyme that includes at least 3 of the concepts listed in the table above. They must use some of the text of the nursery rhyme in the scene, but it does not need to constitute the entire script.

The following dramatic conventions may be layered into the scenes or provided as scaffolding for creation:

- Freeze frame
- Slow motion movement
- Vocal devices – call and response, echo and diminuendo
- Dream sequence
- Soundscape

Present scenes and discuss how the dramatic meaning was impacted by the added motifs and themes. Explore the audience reactions to the familiar nursery rhymes in the performances. Extend discussion into dramatic meaning and intertextuality.

A RING A RING A ROSY

Ring around the rosy
A pocketful of posies
"Ashes, Ashes"
We all fall down

Ring-a-Ring o'Rosies
A Pocket full of Posies
"A-tishoo! A-tishoo!"
We all fall Down!

A TISKET A TASKET

A-tisket a-tasket
A green and yellow basket
I wrote a letter to my love
And on the way I dropped it,
I dropped it,
I dropped it,
And on the way I dropped it.
A little boy he picked it up and put it in his pocket.

ROCK-A-BYE BABY

Rock -a-bye baby, on the tree top.
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock;
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall
And down will come baby, cradle and all.

BOYS AND GIRLS COME OUT TO PLAY

Boys and Girls come out to play
Boys and girls come out to play,
The moon doth shine as bright as day.
Leave your supper and leave your sleep,
And join your playfellows in the street.

Boys and girls come out to play,
The moon doth shine as bright as day.
Leave your supper and leave your sleep,
And join your playfellows in the street.

ORANGES AND LEMONS

Oranges and lemons,
Say the bells of St. Clement's.
You owe me five farthings,
Say the bells of St. Martin's.
When will you pay me?
Say the bells of Old Bailey.
When I grow rich,
Say the bells of Shoreditch.
When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.
I do not know,
Says the great bell of Bow.
Here comes a candle to light you to bed,
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head!

Post-Performance Activity #4

2D vs 3D CHARACTERISATION

Playwrights and directors know that audiences feel empathy and engagement with characters when they are depicted with depth of character, that is 3 dimensional characterisation. In contrast, 2 dimensional characters can alienate an audience and appear to be stereotypes.

DISCUSSION:

- Within the production of Ruby Moon, can you see 2D and 3D characters?
- Which characters do you empathise with and want to learn more about?
- Why do you think this is?
- What is the impact of this characterisation?

EXERCISE:

To explore the convention of 2D vs. 3D characters. Ask students to create a scene between a criminal and a policeman. Present scenes in a realistic style first of all.

Repeat and this time select one character to be performed as a 2D stereotyped character. This character should lack emotional depth and be somewhat of a caricature.

Discuss the impact of the second performance. Did this change the who the audience were sympathetic to? Did it create dramatic meaning?

Post-Performance Activity #5

WHERE DID RUBY GO?

Divide students into groups of 3-4. In their groups ask them to share their theories about what they believe happened to Ruby Moon.

As a group they then need to decide on a theory they wish to explore and then dramatically re-create a scene that shows us what happened to Ruby Moon.

Present scenes to class. Discuss the possibilities presented in relation to the clues in the production.

Post-Performance Activity #6

MUSIC & SOUND

Brainstorm examples of where music or sound were used in the performance.

Place the examples into the table below and complete the remaining columns.

EXAMPLE OF SOUND OR MUSIC IN RUBY MOON	NAME OF CONVENTION	ELEMENT/S OF DRAMA IS CONTRIBUTED TO MOST	DRAMATIC IMPACT

Ask students to write sentences or paragraphs analyzing the use of sound or music.

Post-Performance Activity #7

SYMBOLISM OF LYRICS

During the production a song is used, the lyrics are....

'She's not in the room
She's not outside
Hide from the world
The curtain girl...'

DISCUSSION:

- What is the impact of these lyrics?
- Why have they been included in the production?

Sample Ruby Moon Responding Assessment Task

Note: This is a generic task applicable to multiple Year levels. Edit, adapt and omit parts of the task to cater for the varying abilities and ages of student cohorts.

DIMENSION: Responding

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT: Extended Response

The Artslink Queensland production of Ruby Moon by Matt Cameron can be described as an example of the Australian Gothic dramatic style. It explores the dark side of life and human nature, just as the Gothic artists of the middle ages did, yet it taps into a fear deep in the Australian psyche; losing a child. Ruby Moon under Helen Howard's direction depicts a uniquely Australian landscape, employing the conventions of the Australian Gothic theatrical style.

After viewing Artslinks' production of Ruby Moon, you are to write an essay evaluating the how successfully the production engaged audiences by employing the dramatic conventions of the Australian Gothic style. You should consider the following in your essay:

- What impact did the performance have on the audience?
- Was there a dramatic meaning or dramatic purpose evident in the production?
- What was the dramatic style? Which dramatic conventions used indicate that style?
- Did the choice of any dramatic conventions create meaning or dramatic impact?
- Can you identify any key moments in the performance when the elements of drama were manipulated to great effect? (particularly consider, mood, tension, symbol, place, role) How were those moments created? Why were they successful?
- How did the actor's performance skills (voice movement, characterisation), the production elements (lighting, music and sound) and design (set & costume) assist in creating the dramatic style and dramatic impact. (Link these ideas back to your discussion of the dramatic conventions and elements of drama)
- Overall, was this a successful piece of Australian Gothic performance?

Your discussion must use specific drama terminology and must refer to specific dramatic conventions, skills of drama and elements of drama employed in the production. Use examples from the production to support your statements.

Below is a list of dramatic languages commonly used in Australian Gothic Theatre. Draw on these as you reflect on the production. Some or all may have been used in the production.

CONVENTIONS OF AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC:

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KEY ELEMENTS OF DRAMA IN AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC:

- Symbol
- Relationship
- Mood
- Tension
- Character
- Place
- Time
- Contrast

CONDITIONS:

Year 12

- Individual
- 2-3 weeks preparation
- Written: 1000-1200 words
- Spoken: 4-5 minutes
- Multimodal: 5-7 minutes

Year 11

- Individual
- 2-3 weeks preparation
- Written: 800-1000 words
- Spoken: 3-4 minutes
- Multimodal: 3-5 minutes

Year 10

- Individual, Analytical Essay
- 2-3 weeks preparation
- 600-800 words

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

DIRECTOR : HELEN HOWARD

Helen trained at Mountview Theatre School in London and is currently co-artistic director, with Michael Fletcher, of Matrix Theatre. She has performed lead roles for many companies, including Queensland Theatre Company and La Boite. As a writer, both solo and with Michael, she has published several plays, notably the renowned *A Beautiful Life*. Helen has been an acting coach for theatre and screen (*Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *Slide* [Fox 8], *Mental*). Her directing credits include her own adaptation of Zola's *Therese Raquin* (*Zen Zen Zo*), a remount of *Piano Lessons* (Queensland Music Festival), and a co-direction with Michael, of their own 2013 adaptation of *1001 Nights* (QMF/QTC/*Zen Zen Zo*). Helen has won a Best Director Matilda Award for *Therese Raquin* and a Gold Matilda for her body of work in 2012.

PLAYWRIGHT: MATT CAMERON

An award-winning playwright and screenwriter, his plays include *TEAR FROM A GLASS EYE*, winner of Wal Cherry Play of the Year Award with productions by Playbox, Black Swan and London's Gate Theatre, where he was nominated for Evening Standard Awards; *FOOTPRINTS ON WATER*, winner of British Council International New Playwriting Award with productions by Neonheart, Griffin and La Mama; *MR MELANCHOLY*, winner of ANPC/New Dramatists Award with productions by Griffin, La Boite, Chameleon as well as in New York, Paris and Poland; and *THE ESKIMO CALLING*, produced by Neonheart at Malthouse Theatre and Belvoir B Sharp. For the Melbourne Theatre Company: *POOR BOY*, featuring the songs of Tim Finn, nominated for Victorian Premier's Literary Award and co-produced by Sydney Theatre Company; *HINTERLAND*, nominated for NSW Premier's Literary Award; *MAN THE BALLOON*, nominated for Victorian Premier's Literary Award; and a short play *WHISPERING DEATH*. *RUBY MOON* nominated for Queensland Premier's Literary Award and produced by MTC, STC, QTC, State Theatre of SA, Playbox, Neonheart as well as in England, Japan and Switzerland. Screen credits include *JACK IRISH* telemovie for ABC, *SEACHANGE*, *CRASHBURN*, *NEWSTOPIA*, script editor for *KATH & KIM* and co-creator/co-writer/director of *AWGIE* award-winning *INTRODUCING GARY PETTY*.

RAY MOON: MATTHEW FILKINS

Matthew has trained in a diversity of theatrical disciplines including stage combat, Le Coq mask, improvisational theatre (Edge impro), clowning (De Base), practical aesthetics (Andrea Moor), physical theatre (*Zen Zen Zo*) and studied with Shakespeare and Company in the US. He is also currently completing a BA in Arts with a double major in Drama. His past theatrical credits include *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (4MBS Classic FM), *The Miracle Worker* (Crossbow Productions), *The Merchant of Venice* and *Half Hour Hamlet* (Qld Shakespeare Ensemble), *Angry Young Women in Low Rise Jeans with High Class Issues*, *Secret Bridesmaids Business* and *Moonlight and Magnolias* (Mixed Theatre Company), *Short+Sweet Festival 2009*, *The Reunion* (Metro Arts Independents Program), *Crave* (Blacklight collective), *Cigarettes and Chocolate* and *The Pillowman* (23rd Productions), *The Perfect 10* (Emerge Theatre Company) *Far Away* (Volunteer Extra – Q.T.C.), *Homme Fatale* (and return season) and *By the Short and Curly* (Underdog productions), *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Nights Dream* (Harvest Rain Theatre Company), *The Merchant of Vengeance* (Dianne Gough Productions), *Blackrock*, *Wait Until Dark*, *Aftershocks* (Nash theatre), *A man for all seasons*, *MacBeth*, *Medea* and *Home* (Brisbane Arts theatre), *Romeo and Juliet* (Groundlings), *The Bald – Prima Donna* and *Antigone* (Q.U.T) and *Sheila Shorts 2002* (Debase Productions). His directorial credits include *The Vitreous Burglar*, *Wombat Stew* (Own adaptation of the children's book), *Trainspotting* (as assistant director) and *The Devil's Aftershave* (2010 Short and Sweet festival – winner of best drama and actor) Matthew has toured schools with the Artslink Queensland in the 2003 primary school tour of *Fair Play*, 2005 primary school tour of *The Bugalugs Bum Thief*, 2007 primary school tour of *Hermes* and the *Naked Flame* and in 2002 toured secondary schools with *Boneless Chicken Brecht* for Cracka theatre Troupe. Recent short films include *Christmas is here*, *The Day of the Deadline* and *Abigail Lancaster: The truth begins*. His past film and television appearances include *Waste*, *Flipper*, *Killer Instinct*, *Terra Nova*, *Down Under Murder Mystery Tours*, *The Digger: A History*, *Gruen Planet* and the current Carlton TVC campaign.

SYLVIE MOON: MARY EGGLESTON

Mary Eggleston began her professional arts career as a founding member of *Commotion - TIE* (1998), whilst studying a BA Drama at University of Queensland and training in Tadashi Suzuki Actor Training and Viewpoints with *Zen Zen Zo* Physical Theatre Company in Brisbane. After studying mime and physical theatre at dieEtage in Berlin (2001–2005), Mary developed and facilitated her own workshops throughout Germany for small children learning English as a foreign language and for the hearing impaired. In September 2006 Mary was invited to facilitate workshops for the *Osijek Festival* in Croatia. In 2006 Mary returned to Australia to direct *Solarcoaster Children's Festival*, a multi-arts Festival designed for 3-12 years olds on the Sunshine Coast. In April 2008 Mary co-founded *Egg Festivals Inc.* of which She is now director. *Egg Festival Inc.* is committed to the cultural development of children on the Sunshine Coast. She is also a member of the management committee for *The Sunshine Coast Creative Alliance*. In 2010, Mary founded the *School Of Dramatic Arts (S.O.D.A)* on the Sunshine Coast. Recently, Mary and Dr Sue Davis have combined forces and expertise to help provide quality drama productions to be created for young people on the Sunshine Coast, establishing *2Muse Productions*. Mary's career has focused extensively on mime, physical theatre and the youth arts industries on a variety of levels; ranging from founding director of *S.O.D.A* (2010), *2Muse Productions* (2010) and *Commotion TIE* (1998) & artistic director of *Spielsprache* (2004) to facilitator, performer and teacher to administration, marketing and entrepreneurial roles.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR : HELEN HOWARD

Ruby Moon is a disarming play. It tackles the subject of a child inexplicably missing, and there is nothing more catastrophic which can happen to a parent, robbed of their responsibility, their duty of care, of unconditional love and indeed their main function in life – to preserve, protect and provide for the innocent they brought into the world. For society, a missing child is a disturbing, distressing, oft-repeated failure – and when there are no answers we, and the parents, are left with only our imaginations to fill in the blank left by the child's absence. In the play, as in life, there is a pervading sense of guilt, and blame; sometimes that blaming is directed even at the child, who is conveniently unable to speak for her/himself.

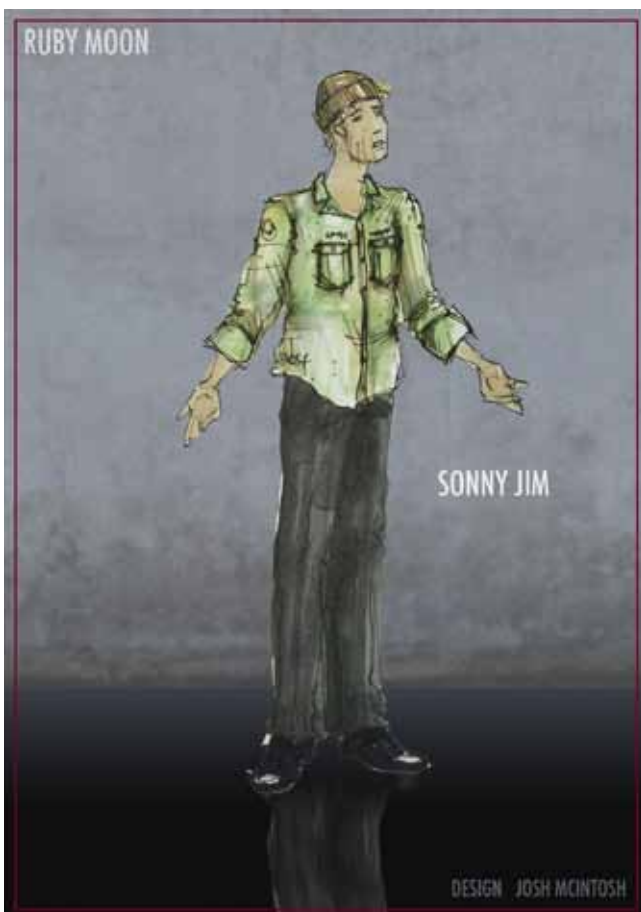
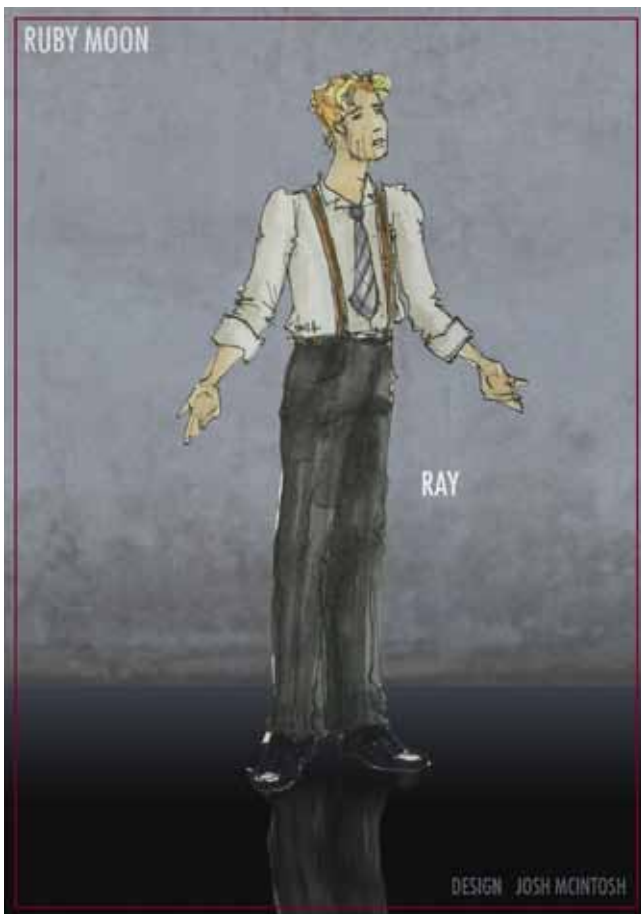
Matt Cameron places this much-visited theme – the stuff of fairy tales of ancient invention – under a high magnification. We by-pass the nuts and bolts of 'life after disaster' – we see them only in passing through to the deeper levels of their existence, things like work, eating, passing time – and look behind the scenes, inside the cut-loose minds of the major players. Cameron's 'parents', Ray and Sylvie, some years on from the loss of Ruby, are endlessly recycling their tragic experience, their moments 'on the day', the list of suspect abductor-murderers, looking first to their neighbours, then to their own doorstep, and at last to the safer choice of a stranger. They review what they know to set as ballast against the universe of what they don't know. This raises the stakes, enhances the size of their misery.

Cameron highlights the anchor-less tossing and turning of Ray and Sylvie in their own emotional detritus, underpinning the lack of equilibrium, by creating dialogue which seems at once banal and lyrical, sensible and lunatic. In Ray and Sylvie we see ourselves, every couple, and their reverse – a destroyed 'norm', an inch from where we now stand, but skewed, scuppered – with little or no hope of rescue.

He uses many techniques of absurdism.... characterised by Gothic features – to disturb us: the folkloric missing child, danger from outside, through a permeable barrier (a curtained window), perpetual night-time, wind, rain, bells, telephone calls from no-one – the sound of a distorted Ruby, knocks on doors, and insanity. For we find the inhabitants of Ray and Sylvie's world bizarre, unhelpful creatures, self-absorbed yet defensive towards the visiting afflicted parent, challenging their sense of perspective, of self – even their own knowledge of their missing child, questioning her innocence, at six years old. We are offered a complex glimpse into Ruby's life, by the neighbours, which seems at once disturbingly plausible and poignant and somehow misconstrued and distorted by their worn, clichéd reactions, as well as wilder constructions – like a black hole!

To direct this complex, deliberately inconsistent and unnerving play, primarily for a schools' tour, sans lighting, for a young audience of students, and also to provide The Arts Centre Gold Coast audiences with a satisfying, engrossing in-theatre experience, has been an exciting challenge. I've tried not to short change anyone, nor to explain the play in the playing of it! It's very clear episodic structure and its unashamed meta-theatrical, role-playing style assisted me greatly. It's a play of discoveries, both grim, surprising and ultimately, I feel, hopeful.

SET AND COSTUME DESIGN CONCEPT



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