

A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blue cable-knit sweater, is looking upwards with her mouth wide open in a dramatic expression. She is standing in a dark room with several bright, rectangular stage lights visible in the background, creating a high-contrast scene.

MALTHOUSE EDUCATION

THE

BIRDS

BY DAPHNE DU MAURIER, ADAPTED BY LOUISE FOX

VCE THEATRE STUDIES — PROMPT PACK B

MALTHOUSE THEATRE
ACKNOWLEDGES THE
UNCEDDED LANDS OF
THE KULIN NATION.
WE ACKNOWLEDGE
THEIR SOVEREIGNTY
AND THEIR SONGLINES.
WE PAY RESPECT TO
THEIR ELDERS AND THEIR
CHILDREN. WE EMBRACE
AND CELEBRATE THE
OLDEST CULTURE IN
THE WORLD.

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Malthouse Theatre presents *The Birds*.

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Prompt Pack written and compiled by Lyall Brooks,
Malthouse Education Coordinator

WELCOME

I hope you enjoyed our Malthouse production of *The Birds* – and that it's given you plenty of exciting things to discuss!

This Prompt Pack B picks up where Prompt Pack A left off; this time with a post-show collection of provocations, questions, observations and activities, designed to support you and your students' analysis and evaluation of this iconic production – and journey towards their final VCE Theatre Studies exams.

This pack is separated into three main chapters: **Putting It Together** gives you more background on our team, and compiles interviews and notes from several of our creatives; **Page To Stage** revisits some of the contexts and themes of the written playtext and is targeted at Unit 3's analysis of the interpretation of the text to stage; and **How Did They Do It?** is focussed on Unit 4's interrogation of the production's interrelationship between acting, direction and design to create a cohesive whole. Finally, there are **Resources** at the end to add to your comprehensive library of contextual and background information.

I encourage students to use the entire Prompt Pack, no matter which Unit's Playlist they are studying *The Birds* for. And of course, I highly recommend classes book in for Malthouse Education's **Revisit The Play** sessions later in the year in preparation for their final exams.

Remember that our Prompt Packs do not provide definitive answers; rather, students should use these insights and information to springboard into their own further study and discussion.

Whether it's related to this production, Theatre Studies in general, or even their wider school life, remember to keep alert to your students' wellbeing across this stressful time, and remind the classroom of the support offered organisations such as [kidshelpline.com.au](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au) and others you can find in Prompt Pack A.

As always, please get in touch with me on lbrooks@malthousetheatre.com.au if you have any questions, concerns, queries or quandaries!

All the very best, and see you again soon.



Lyall Brooks
Malthouse Theatre Education Coordinator



PUTTING IT TOGETHER



CAST & CREATIVE TEAM



DAPHNE DU MAURIER
WRITER

Daphne du Maurier (1907–89) was born in London, into a family with a rich literary heritage. Her father, Sir Gerald du Maurier, was a prominent actor and theatre manager, while her grandfather, George du Maurier, was a renowned author and illustrator. A voracious reader, she developed a love of storytelling and imaginary worlds from an early age, including creating a male alter ego for herself.

She began writing short stories and articles in 1928 and achieved widespread recognition in 1931 with her first novel, *The Loving Spirit*. A biography and three other novels followed, including *Jamaica Inn*, but it was her 1938 novel *Rebecca* that catapulted du Maurier into international fame. An instant bestseller, it made her one of the most popular authors of her day and was adapted into an acclaimed film by Alfred Hitchcock. Besides novels, du Maurier published short stories, most famously *The Birds* and *Don't Look Now*, plays and biographies, many of which have been adapted for film, television and the stage, and in 1969 she was awarded a DBE.

In 1932, she married Major Frederick Browning, with whom she had three children. She lived most of her life in Cornwall, which provided the atmospheric setting for many of her books. When she died in 1989, she left behind a remarkable literary legacy, and remains one of the most influential and beloved authors of the twentieth century.



LOUISE FOX
ADAPTOR

Louise's career has traversed television, film, theatre, and radio. She is the co-creator and showrunner of ABC/Netflix drama series *Glitch* which won the Logie and the AACTA for Best Drama Series. Most recently, she wrote on the drama series *Prosper* (Lingo Pictures/Stan) and *Significant Others* (ABC/Fremantle).

Louise wrote an episode of the critically acclaimed and BAFTA-winning UK drama *Broadchurch*, as well as *The Kettering Incident* for Porchlight Films. The latter series won the AACTA for Best Television Drama Series and Screen Producers Award for Best Miniseries. Louise wrote the feature screenplay *Dead Europe*, adapted from the novel by Christos Tsiolkas. The film premiered in competition at the Sydney Film Festival, was nominated for an AACTA and the screenplay won both the NSW Premier's Award and the Queensland Literary Award.

Louise's theatre work includes dramaturg at Sydney Theatre Company, co-devisor of *Excavation*, and writer of additional material for Paul Capsis's show at the Sydney Opera House. Her adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial* was staged by the STC in Sydney, the Malthouse in Melbourne, and Thin Ice in Perth. Her adaptation of Moliere's *Tartuffe* played at the Malthouse and her play, *This Little Piggy* was performed at the Sydney Theatre Company. Her adaptation of Dario Fo's *Elizabeth (Almost By Chance A Woman)* co-written with Luke Devenish was performed at Malthouse Theatre and the Queensland Theatre Company.



MATTHEW LUTTON OAM
DIRECTOR

Matthew Lutton is the current Artist Director of the Adelaide Festival. Prior to this, he was the Artistic Director & Co-CEO for Malthouse Theatre, and Artistic Director for Perth based theatre company, ThinIce.

Malthouse Theatre: *Macbeth (an undoing)*, *Hour of the Wolf*, *This Is Living*, *Monsters*, *The Return*, *Because The Night*, *Solaris*, *Cloudstreet*, *Melancholia*, *Bliss*, *Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets*, *The Real and Imagined History of the Elephant Man*, *Away*, *Edward II*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *I Am a Miracle*, *Night on Bald Mountain*, *The Bloody Chamber*, *Dance of Death*, *Pompeii, L.A.*, *On the Misconception of Oedipus*, *Die Winterreise*, and *Tartuffe*. Other Theatre: *Love Me Tender* (Belvoir); *Don't Say the Words* (Griffin Theatre Company); *The Trial*, *The Mysteries: Genesis*, and *The Duel* (Sydney Theatre Company). Opera: *Happy End* (Victorian Opera); *Make No Noise* (Bavarian State Opera); Strauss' *Elektra* (Opera Australia / West Australian Opera) and Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* (New Zealand Opera).



PAULA ARUNDELL
PERFORMER

Paula has worked extensively across screen and theatre nationally and internationally.

Malthouse Theatre: *The Real and Imagined History of the Elephant Man*. Other Theatre: *The Servant of Two Masters*, *Hippolytus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Henry V*, *The Tempest*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Bell Shakespeare); *The Master & Margarita*, *Sami In Paradise*, *Atlantis*, *Mr Burns*, *Mother Courage*, *Angels in America Part 1 & 2*, *Peter Pan*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Gethsemane*, *Scorched*, *The Adventures of Snugglypot* and *Cuddlepie and little ragged Blossom*, *Paul*, *Peribanez*, *The Three Penny Opera* (Belvoir); *Clark in Sarajevo*, *The Bleeding Tree* (Griffin Theatre Company); *Company*, *Measure for Measure* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Michael Cassel Group); *Night Letters* (State Theatre Company South Australia); and *Sweat*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Top Girls*, *The Bleeding Tree* (Sydney Theatre Company).

Paula has received various accolades including the 2016 Helpmann Award for Best Female Actor in a Play, the 2001 Sydney Morning Herald Award for Best Actress, the 1999 Green Room Award for Female Actor in a Featured Role, and the 1997 Green Room Award for Best Female Actor in a Supporting Role.



KAT CHAN
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Kat Chan is an award-winning theatre designer for theatre, dance, video installation and photography, living and working on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people. Originally trained as an architect, Kat has worked in practices in Adelaide and Tokyo before returning to Australia to study Master of Production Design at VCA.

Malthouse Theatre: Costume Designer for *Monsters* and *Because the Night*. Other Theatre: Set & Costume Designer for *English* and *I Wanna Be Yours*; Costume Designer for *Admissions*, *Touching the Void*, *Lifespan of a Fact*, *Torch the Place* and *Beached*; and Associate Designer for *Golden Shield* (Melbourne Theatre Company); Set & Costume Designer for *From Silence*; Set Designer for *Raymonda Act III*; and Costume Designer for *Annealing* (The Australian Ballet); Set & Costume Designer for *Mother* (IF Theatre / Belvoir); and Set & Costume Designer for *The People's Currency* (Asia TOPA Fed Square / 4A Centre of Contemporary Asian Art).



J. DAVID FRANZKE
COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Known as a composer and sound designer, music mixer and producer. His primary work is composing and designing for live performances and theatre. It also includes film, visual art installations as well as the production of albums.

Malthouse Theatre: Recent credits include *Because the Night*, *Cloudstreet*, *Melancholia*, *Away*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Night on Bald Mountain*, *Pompeii L.A.* Other Theatre: Recent credits include *Happy Days*, *Heartbreak Choir*, *The Architect*, *The Odd Couple*, *The Beast*, *Elling*, *Australia Day*, *The Joy of Text*, *The Grenade* and *August: Osage County* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Aviary* (Phillip Adams BalletLab / Melbourne International Arts Festival) *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (Sydney Theatre Company).

Film: *The Earth Above: A deep time view of Australia's epic history*, *Sonia and Cherry – Season 2*, *Kingdom of Doug*, *X*, *Dark Love Story*, *Acolytes* and *Rogue*.

J. David Franzke has won Green Room awards for composition and sound design for *Because the Night*, *Melancholia*, *Away*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Pompeii L.A.*

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM



NIKLAS PAJANTI
LIGHTING DESIGNER

Niklas Pajanti is an award-winning lighting designer whose practice ranges across contemporary art forms and performance styles.

Malthouse Theatre: *One Night the Moon*, *Kitten* (with Jenny Kemp) and *Not Like Beckett*. Other Theatre: *The Removalists*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Berlin*, *Così*, *A View From the Bridge*, *Astroman*, *A Doll's House Part 2*, *Rupert*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Beast* and *Queen Lear* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Così*, *When the Rain Stops Falling* (with Brink Productions), *Australia Day* (with Melbourne Theatre Company), *Spring Awakening*, and *I Want To Dance Better At Parties* (with Chunky Move) (Sydney Theatre Company); *My Urrwai*, *Angels In America*, *The Wild Duck*, *Baby Teeth*, *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Promise*, *Baghdad Wedding*, *The Pillowman* and *Yibiyung* (Belvoir); *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The School For Wives* (Bell Shakespeare); *Death of a Salesman* (GWB Entertainment); *Endgame* (with Melbourne Festival and tour to Enniskillen International Beckett Festival); *The Song of the Bleeding Throat*, *King John* (with Adelaide Festival), *Othello* (The Eleventh Hour).

Niklas has won 3 Green Room Awards and received 11 nominations across all categories, including Best Lighting Design for *A View from the Bridge* for Melbourne Theatre Company. He has also been nominated for Helpmann Awards, Sydney Theatre Awards and APDG Awards for his lighting design.



GIDEON COZENS
SOUND ASSOCIATE

Gideon is a journeyed audio generalist, musician. Once described as 'too rock for theatre and too theatre for rock', Gideon ekes out an existence doing odd jobs here and there.

Malthouse Theatre: Sound Associate for *This is Living*; and Audio Operator for *Away*. Other Theatre: Sound Designer for *Oscar* (The Australian Ballet); *Sharehouse the Musical* (Arts Centre Melbourne); *Spinifex Gum* (Gondwana Choirs) and *Choir of Man* (Andrew Kay & Associates); and Production Sound Engineer for *The Rocky Horror Show* (Crossroads Live). Screen: Sound Effects Design for *My Rock* (Barbarion). Gideon has also toured as a sound operator with a variety of artists, including Chunky Move, Soweto gospel Choir, Choir of Man, and Australian Chamber Orchestra.

Gideon works at the nexus of art and technology and relishes his role as a creative problem solver within the arts community.



MARNI MOUNT
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Marni Mount is a director, actor, and dramaturg living and working in Naarm. Focusing on new Australian writing for the stage and screen, she makes work that is formally inventive, visually imaginative, and unafraid to take on big ideas.

Malthouse Theatre: Debut. Other Theatre: Director for *POTUS*, or *Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive* (Lightning Jar Theatre); *MinusOneSister* (Double Bluff); *The Camel* (Flick Flick City); and *Trophy Boys* (The Maybe Pile/Soft Tread Enterprises) which received four Green Room Award nominations including for Best Independent Production and Best Director. Associate Director for *Werewolf* (Arts Centre Melbourne, dir. Gary Abrahams); Assistant Director for *Hamlet* (Melbourne Shakespeare Company, dir. Iain Sinclair), *The Wolves* (VCA, dir. Yoni Prior) *The Spook* (VCA, dir. Daniela Farinacci).

Marni is a graduate of the Australian National University and the Victorian College of the Arts. She was the 2024 Red Stitch Actors' Theatre Hansen Graduate Director and is a part of the 2025 Melbourne Theatre Company MinterEllison Future Directors Initiative. They are part of the 2025 Malthouse Artist Development Program, specialising in directing.



SIDNEY YOUNGER
ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER

Sidney is a Green Room Award-winning Lighting Designer, and a 2021 graduate of the BFA (Design and Production) degree at the Victorian College of the Arts.

Malthouse Theatre: Debut. Other Theatre: Lighting Designer for *Werewolf* (Arts Centre Melbourne/Melbourne Fringe); *A Case for the Existence of God* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre); *Meet Your Maker* (Brisbane Festival); *Ghost Quartet* (Antipodes Theatre Company/Hayes Theatre Co.); *Every Lovely Terrible Thing* (Lab Kelpie); *Parade*, *Songs for a New World* and *Spring Awakening* (Soundworks); *The Addams Family* (Stars & the Moon); *Insert Self* (Chunky Move); *Redhealer* (Back to Back Theatre); *Songs of the Flesh* (Danger Ensemble); *Bach's Universe* (Brandenberg Orchestra); *Niusia* (La Mama); *Still Buried* and *The Hello Girls* (VCA). Assistant Lighting Designer for *Bananaland* and *Salamander* (Brisbane Festival).

Sidney's works have been seen by audiences across Australia, praised by reviews as 'one of the best lighting designers Melbourne has to offer'. He is part of the 2025 Malthouse Artist Development Program, specialising in lighting design.

IN THEIR WORDS

MATTHEW LUTTON (DIRECTOR)



Click on the above image to watch the whole interview, or use the links to specific questions below. The whole video with timecodes of individual questions can also be found at vimeo.com/malthouse/BIRDSDirector

- What inspired you to take on this work? [Link](#)
- For you, what are the main themes and ideas underpinning this work? [Link](#)
- How do you work with actors in rehearsals? [Link](#)
- How did you approach staging the changes of character, place and time? [Link](#)
- How do you collaborate with the designers when creating this production? [Link](#)
- What has been the most challenging aspect of interpreting this play for the stage? [Link](#)
- For you, what's the most exciting part of this production? [Link](#)
- What do you want the audiences to take away from this work? [Link](#)

J. DAVID FRANZKE (COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER)



You can read the transcript of our interview with J. David Franzke in the **Resources** at the end of this Prompt Pack.

IN THEIR WORDS

PAULA ARUNDELL (ACTOR)



Click on the above image to watch the whole interview, or use the links to specific questions below. The whole video with timecodes of individual questions can also be found at vimeo.com/malthouse/BIRDSActor

- How did you prepare for the play? [Link](#)
- How do you build the 'arc' of the main character Tessa? [Link](#)
- What do you do to delineate your many characters? [Link](#)
- How are you supported in your acting work by the director, designers, and/or other production elements? [Link](#)
- How aware are you (or your character) of the actor-audience relationship? [Link](#)
- What part of the play do you have a strong connection with? [Link](#)
- What's the most challenging part of performing this work? [Link](#)
- How do you take care of yourself when performing trauma or horror? [Link](#)
- What do you want the audiences to take away from this work? [Link](#)

KAT CHAN (SET & COSTUME DESIGNER)



Click on the above image to watch the whole interview, or use the links to specific questions below. The whole video with timecodes of individual questions can also be found at vimeo.com/malthouse/BIRDSDesigner01

- Can you describe your inspiration and development process for the set and costume design of *The Birds*? [Link](#)
- What's the creative collaboration process on this play like? [Link](#)
- How does your design support the many locations and characters of the play? [Link](#)
- What part of your design process have you found the most challenging? [Link](#)
- What most excites you? [Link](#)
- What would you like the audience to take away from this work? [Link](#)

IN THEIR WORDS

SIDNEY YOUNGER (ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER)



Click on the above image to watch the whole interview, or use the links to specific questions below. The whole video with timecodes of individual questions can also be found at vimeo.com/malthouse/BIRDSDesigner02

- How did you become an assistant lighting designer? [Link](#)
- What are some of the major considerations you had to take into account when designing this production? [Link](#)
- Can you describe the inspiration and development process for the lighting design of *The Birds*? [Link](#)
- Could you give us some examples of some of the atmospheres you have to create? [Link](#)
- What are some of the biggest challenges of your role on this production? [Link](#)
- What are you most excited to see on stage? [Link](#)



SCENE TWO

WE DISCOVER TESSA, REPAIRING THE PARTS OF THE HOUSE THAT WERE DAMAGED
AT THE END OF ACT ONE:

* ANNOUNCER (O.S)
....causing obstruction and even damage.

TESSA
Tell us about it, mate/

* ANNOUNCER (O.S)
There is no official government statement on the phenomena but households are being
advised to keep windows, doors and chimneys closed for the safety of children, the
elderly, and the vulnerable.

TESSA
Next, check the attic upstairs is locked. Will you?
We've got an hour before school's closed.

* ANNOUNCER (O.S)
Citizens are advised to follow instructions and please call your State Emergency
Service number if...for the...when...
THIS LAST ANNOUNCEMENT IS NOT SHOWN IN THE NEWS MAKING IT HARD TO HEAR.

TESSA
When?
TESSA TURNS THE RADIO MORE TOWARDS THE TUNE INTO THE STATION.
SHE WHISPERS ONLY DEEPER INTO THE STATION AND A PANEL OF EXPERTS DISCUSS.
SHE LISTENS AS SHE RETURNS TO HER JOB.
[TESSA'S PHONE RINGS]
[TESSA ANSWERS]
[TESSA'S PHONE RINGS]
[TESSA ANSWERS]

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This chapter aims to support you to recollect your experience of the production, structure your analysis, and begin to articulate your evaluation of how effectively the contexts and themes implied in the written script (as highlighted in Prompt Pack A, as well as how you understand them) were interpreted on stage.

Consider how each **production role** contributed to the creative and imaginative interpretation of these contexts, and remember to keep these **key questions** in mind:

- HOW DID IT HAPPEN?
- WHY DID IT HAPPEN?
- WHAT DID I THINK OF THAT CHOICE?
- WHAT EFFECT DID THE CHOICE HAVE ON THE AUDIENCE?
- WAS THE EFFECT POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

Following are some of the contexts and themes of *The Birds* you may have researched prior to seeing the show, together with a small selection of simple provocations to get you going.



CONTEXTS

THE SOURCE MATERIAL

Back in Prompt Pack A, you explored how *The Birds* began its life as a 1952 short story by Daphne du Maurier – a work of slow-burn psychological horror that offered no answers, no catharsis, and no heroes. You might also recall how Alfred Hitchcock’s 1963 film version shifted the focus toward cinematic spectacle, while retaining the eerie ambiguity of nature turned violent.

Now that you’ve seen this version live on stage – stripped back to a single performer, immersive soundscape and a barren set – how did the Malthouse Theatre production respond to its source material(s)?

Some provocations to consider:

- Was there a sense of *du Maurier’s dread* or *Hitchcock’s chaos* in the way the bird attacks were staged? How was tension built differently in this live performance?
- Was the *lack of explanation* for the birds’ behaviour preserved – or did this version offer new clues, theories, or metaphors?
- What did the adaptation *gain* by making the protagonist a woman and a mother, telling the story alone? What did it lose by stripping away ensemble or subplot?
- Did this production feel like a continuation of *The Birds’* artistic legacy – or a complete reimagining?
- How did the production use *sound* (headphones, voices, bird calls, static) to shape your emotional experience of this horror story, compared to the written versions?

You might also recall from Prompt Pack A how du Maurier’s story has influenced decades of apocalyptic fiction and eco-horror. How did this stage version feel situated in that tradition? Was it timeless, or very much about our time? Did you feel that this adaptation was about nature, about survival, or about something else entirely?

‘I did what I hope to do in all adaptations, which is keep what I think is essential to the architecture, the themes and the plot and jettison what doesn’t feel relevant.

I imagined this story happening now, in a seaside town on the Victorian Coast, to someone that I could access and understand. I loved a lot of Du Maurier’s language and imagery but a lot wasn’t colloquial or contemporary enough and described a Cornwall setting not relevant to the Australian landscape. So, I think this adaptation has more Australian-ess and humour in it.

I also felt the short story was very action heavy and didn’t delve deeply into the psychology of the characters. So, I think that’s another area that has developed in the process of the adaptation: understanding what the characters are thinking about and the kinds of question they’re asking themselves.’

LOUISE FOX
ADAPTOR
Aussie Theatre Interview



CONTEXTS

TIME

Prompt Pack A described how the script's world felt like 'contemporary Australia', haunted by climate anxiety, media mistrust and a mysterious past 'incident'. But how clearly did this time period translate in the Malthouse production you saw?

- Did the production feel rooted in the present, or more like a possible near-future?
- Were there any design or performance choices that hinted at a specific era – or avoided it entirely?

How did this affect your experience of the characters' decisions, fears and strategies for survival?

PLACE

We have previously explored the idea of a small Australian coastal town – sleepy, isolated, but vulnerable. In performance, did that sense of place come through?

- How clearly was the town itself represented in the staging and soundscape?
- Did the production feel naturalistic and local – or did it create a more abstract or symbolic environment?
- Was the town portrayed as a character in its own right? And if so, what kind of character was it?
- How did the idea of the sea – and the birds arriving from it – shape your interpretation of the setting?

CONTEXTS

SOCIETY, POLITICS & CULTURE

Prompt Pack A posited the world of *The Birds* as one already unravelled – with class divisions, government failure, and community fragmentation. On stage, how were these ideas made visible or audible?

- Did you notice moments where institutions failed the characters? What effect did this have on the story?
- Was the breakdown of society shown gradually – or did it feel sudden and overwhelming?
- How did characters like Tessa, Nat and Muriel reflect different positions within the social structure?

What did the production seem to be saying about trust, responsibility, and who gets left behind?

STORYTELLING, MYTH & RITUAL

You were encouraged in a bonus-material 'insert' for Prompt Pack A to think of *The Birds* not just as a thriller, but as a ritual of remembering. In performance, did it feel like Tessa was retelling her story – or reliving it?

- Was this a memory? A warning? A confession?
- Did the staging feel like theatre... or like a campfire, a sermon, or a myth being passed down?
- What role did you, the audience, play? Were you a witness, or something more?

What happens when one woman becomes the storyteller, the subject, and the myth?





CONTEXTS

THEATRE HISTORY & STYLE

In Prompt Pack A, you were introduced to the eclectic theatrical style of *The Birds* – a blend of Poor Theatre minimalism, immersive sound design, psychological realism, and Australian Gothic. You might also recall elements of horror theatre, expressionism, and eco-theatre.

Now that you've experienced the live production, which styles stood out most strongly? Which ones felt clearest – or most effective – in shaping the audience's journey?

- How did the combination of Poor Theatre (simple chair, minimal set) and High Tech (binaural sound, lighting) affect your understanding of the story?
- Did the play feel grounded in realism – or did it change into something more abstract, symbolic, or surreal as Tessa unravelled?
- Where did you see examples of Australian Gothic or horror conventions? Were these played straight... or subverted?
- In your opinion, did the production's style heighten or undercut the fear, tension, and emotional resonance of the story?
- Was the style consistent across the whole performance – or did it shift as the production played out?

'The Birds is a thriller about a family who are living through an extraordinary crisis – the day birds, as an entire species, turn on humankind. Paula is one of the country's most astonishing actors, and this will be the performance of a lifetime, and you'll be in the theatre, wearing headphones, experiencing every whisper and every swoop intimately with her.'

MATTHEW LUTTON
DIRECTOR

CONTEXTS

THEATRE HISTORY & STYLE

Following is a (non-exhaustive!) collection of conventions of theatre styles that you may have noticed in either the script or the stage interpretation of *The Birds*. How you frame the intended style(s) of the play is entirely up to you – you can agree or disagree with any of these – so long as you can explain your reasoning!

(Always take special care to never label a play as ‘Eclectic’ without being able to identify the specific theatre styles and their conventions that contribute to and justify this ‘eclecticism.’)

How many of these conventions did you identify in the **written script** of the play? Take a scene of the playtext and underline any instance of the suggested conventions here. Work in a group, or take a solo pass at the scene before comparing your work with a friend and discussing.

How many of these conventions did you identify in the stage interpretation of the play?

Using a scene from the **stage interpretation**, consider each production role’s contribution and give examples of any of the listed style conventions that were evident. Were they clear? Were they effective in supporting the other production roles/elements, and ultimately the interpretation?

HORROR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Sustained atmosphere of dread→ Well-timed jump scares→ Graphic, confronting content evoking a visceral response→ Transformation of the familiar into the terrifying→ Disempowered protagonist in escalating chaos
POOR THEATRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Minimalist staging that encourages imaginative co-creation between performer and audience→ Focus on transformation of place, character, time→ Theatricality is acknowledged and embraced
BINAURAL THEATRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Spatialised sound to simulate 3D environments→ Directional attention via sonic cues→ Heightened intimacy with characters’ psyches→ Requires tight synchronisation between sound, lighting, and performance
AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Isolation of the Australian landscape as a source of unease or psychological disintegration→ Haunted characters (memory, trauma, or moral decay)→ Nature positioned as both majestic and malevolent

ECO-HORROR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Nature acts as antagonist or avenging force in response to human environmental negligence→ Uses horror conventions to critique anthropocentrism→ Themes of displacement, extinction, and solastalgia
IMMERSIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Audience is embedded in the experience→ Sensory manipulation→ Audience members implicated or addressed directly→ Subjective perspective (individual audience experience shaped by where they sit or how they focus)
METATHEATRE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Breaking of the fourth wall→ Overt, unhidden stage architecture→ Deliberate references to the theatre itself as storytelling platform
REALISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Recognisable costumes→ Believable characters→ Realistic movement→ Un-heightened speech and everyday dialogue→ Psychologically driven drama→ Protagonist rises up against the odds and triumphs
NATURALISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Naturalistic, unsymbolic costumes and props→ Exploration of harsh topics (ie murder, mental health, violence)
SYMBOLISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Symbolic set elements→ Lighting as atmosphere (or character) indicator→ Abstract or symbolic stage design→ Archetypal characters
EXPRESSIONISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Surreal atmosphere→ Abstract scenery→ Single central protagonist
BRECHTIAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Traditional proscenium or front-on theatre→ Mix of realistic and non-realistic movement or language→ Direct audience address→ Multi-purpose set elements→ Visible lighting equipment

THEMES

CLIMATE COLLAPSE & ENVIRONMENTAL DISPLACEMENT

The Birds reframes its horror around climate collapse – through freak seasons, invasive species, and a sense of solastalgia. On stage, how was this ecological unease realised?

- How did design and sound reinforce the sense of environmental disruption or imbalance?
- Were the birds presented as a force of nature, a response to human behaviour, or something else entirely?
- Did the town feel like a victim of the climate – or complicit in its downfall?
- Did this production provoke fear of the birds themselves... or fear of the world they came from?

SHARED TRAUMA & SOCIETAL BREAKDOWN

In Prompt Pack A, you explored how *The Birds* reflects shared trauma – from unspoken past events to present collapse. In performance, how was this breakdown of trust, order and mental stability portrayed?

- Did the production depict society falling apart... or was it already broken? (Did you feel like you were watching a disaster unfold – or a community already haunted?)
- Were there design or performance elements that captured escalating fear or isolation?
- How did the acting choices reflect trauma – especially in the character of Tessa?

THE MEDIA & MISINFORMATION

The Birds script quietly critiques unreliable media, distorted information, and our craving for answers. The production amplified this through layered sound and conflicting broadcasts.

- How did the use of radio, emergency updates or news segments shape your understanding of the crisis?
- Were you meant to trust the voices you heard? If not, what replaced that trust?
- Did sound design make you feel more informed... or more anxious?

How did misinformation become part of the horror?





THEMES

ECONOMIC ANXIETY & CLASS DIVIDE

Prompt Pack A highlighted how *The Birds* explores economic precarity – with characters like Muriel and Tessa already pushed to the margins before the attacks even begin.

- Were class or financial struggles made visible in the production? Through performance, direction or design?
- How did Muriel's fate reflect her vulnerability – or society's disregard?
- Did the production suggest survival is random... or that some people are more likely to be abandoned?

Did class shape how you interpreted who lives, who's heard, and who is left behind?

MOTHERHOOD & PROTECTIVE INSTINCTS

An extra theme explored in the later resource insert was motherhood – not as sentiment, but as fierce survival instinct. The production makes this primal.

- How did Tessa's relationship with her children shift as the threat escalated?
- Were Johnny and Jill the only children in the family? Did performer Paula Arundell's interpretation of Nat suggest something more than the script did – about his almost child-like relationship to Tessa and need for care and control?
- How were 'maternal' roles portrayed differently between Tessa and Muriel?
- What did the final act – Tessa's choice with Alice – suggest about protection, mercy, and moral limits?

Did the performance portray motherhood as heroic, horrifying... or both?



HOW DID THEY DO IT?



ACTING

PERFORMANCE

Consider the main character of Tessa. Analyse how performer Paula Arundell's use of her acting skills – including facial expression, voice, gesture, movement, stillness, and/or silence – helped the audience to understand this character's function, purpose, status, traits, motivation, and/or objective. Was there a particularly effective use of acting skills used by her to interpret Tessa? How was this achieved?

Now select one or two secondary characters. How did Arundell transform between them and Tessa? Consider voice, facial expression, and any subtle physicality (gesture or movement) she employed.

Provide an example of how Arundell used of non-verbal language to convey the intended meanings of the script.

Describe her use of focus during the performance. First provide an example of the actor *directing* the audience's focus. Then identify any moments of them *holding* focus in a scene. How well did they achieve that required level of focus?

INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH DESIGN

Analyse the different ways Arundell was able to leverage or manipulate the sound design and technology to tell the story, perform the character/s, and maintain focus.

Consider how she used one or more props to support the portrayal of their character.

Discuss and evaluate how one other design area was utilised by the actor in the performance. You could choose from set, costume or lighting.

ACTOR-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

Describe one or two moments during the performance when you felt the most engaged or 'part of the story'. What about moments where you felt you were more distantly 'observing'? Do you think these were intended?

How did the actor-audience relationship enhance your understanding of the ideas, themes, and story of the play?

How did the way different scenes and spaces were established or delineated affect the actor-audience relationship?

Provide examples of moments during the performance when you felt a strong connection to Tessa (or any other character) in the play. How did Arundell create a strong actor-audience relationship? Did this change throughout the play – and what was the effect of this change on you, the audience?

How did you feel when the fourth wall was broken by Tessa? How effective were these moments in revealing the themes, contexts or intentions of the play?

Describe any other strong actor-audience relationships that you witnessed during the production.



DIRECTION

SPACE & PERFORMANCE

How did director Matthew Lutton manipulate the acting space to support A) the individual locations and times in the script, and B) the overall story and meaning of the play?

Consider the blocking and use of gesture or non-verbal language. How was direction applied to portray the various statuses of characters?

How do you think the overall direction of the play impacted on the acting in the production?

Were there any moments in the performance where you felt the direction of the actor-audience relationship did *not* work? Why?

DYNAMICS

Identify three examples in the production of a major change in dynamics – energy, conflict and/or tension – led by the director. What was the impact of those changes or variations? Were they effective?



DESIGN

You may wish to refer to the video and written interviews with designers Kat Chan, Sidney Younger or J. David Franzke in the **In Their Words** or **Resources** section of this pack, or you may wish to explore the script and/or production for other scenes or moments that demonstrate the work of the *The Birds*' designers.

SET & COSTUME

How did Kat Chan's set design support the creation and establishment of the different spaces and worlds of the play?

What elements of the physical set design supported or offered opportunities for the director and actor to manipulate dynamics – energy, conflict and/or tension – or the actor-audience relationship?

In what ways do you think the costume design may have impacted on the acting and direction?

Were the set elements and props used to portray different characters' statuses, functions, emotional states, and/or objectives?

SOUND & LIGHTING

Identify specific elements of theatre composition that sound designer J. David Franzke applied to craft key moments in the stage production.

How effective were sound choices in communicating themes, contexts and/or intended meanings to the audience?

LIGHTING

Identify three ways in which lighting designer Niklas Pajanti manipulated the acting space to support the story and meaning of the play.

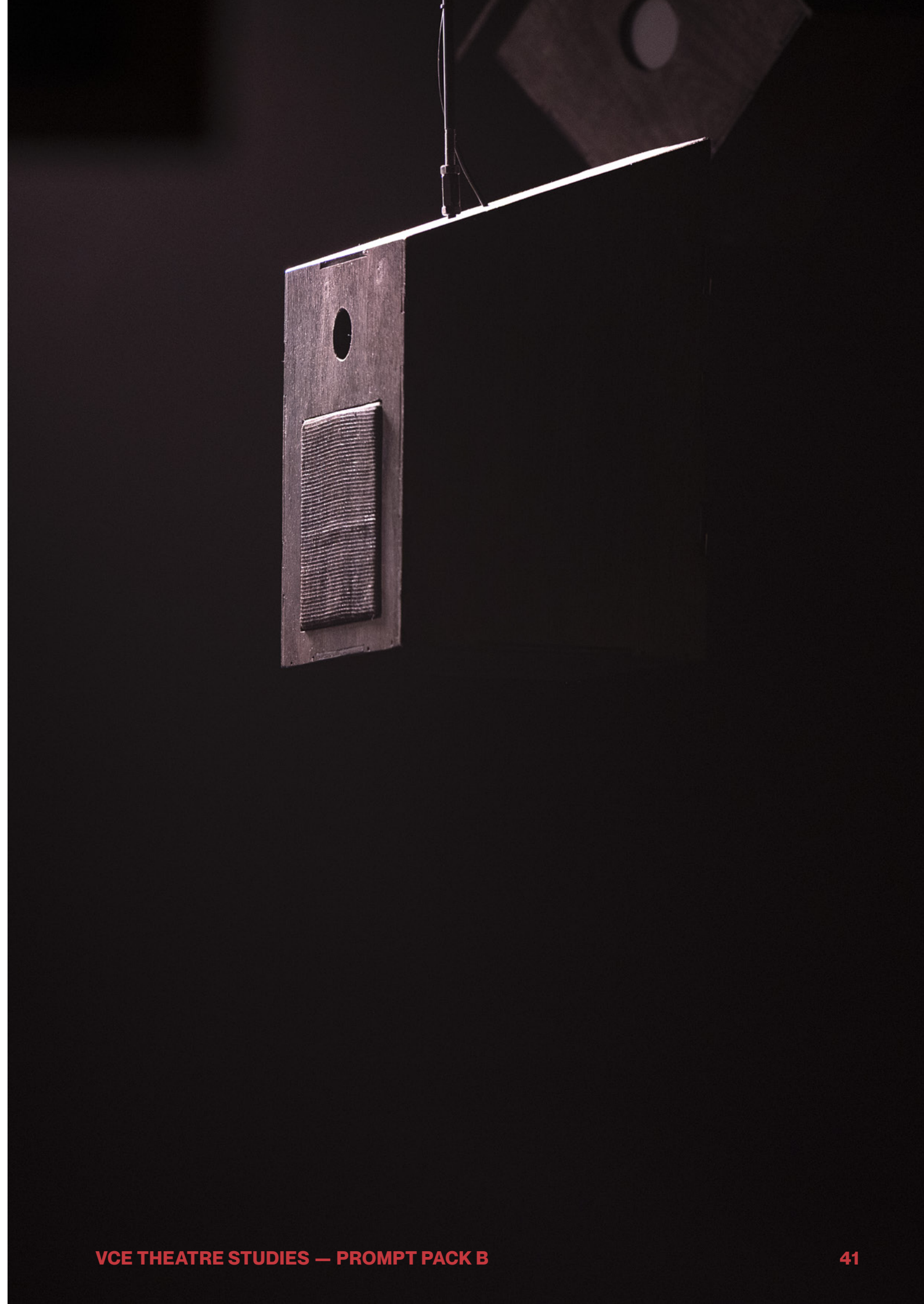
Analyse the interrelationship of the lighting design with both set *and* sound design, and evaluate at least two ways each that they worked together to utilise motion to create action and support intention.

THEATRE TECHNOLOGIES

Identify two major theatre technologies employed by the production.

How were they used? How might they have been constructed or operated?

Were the theatre technologies engaged by the stage production effective in supporting the telling of this story, or conveying the intended meanings and themes? Why or why not?



RESOURCES



INTERVIEW WITH THE SOUND DESIGNER

Driving back to the theatre from an early field recording day in Daylesford in March, Malthouse Education Coordinator Lyall Brooks (LB) took the opportunity to chat with the show's Composer & Sound Designer, J. David Franzke (JDF). Here's an excerpt of their conversation.

LB: What is it about *The Birds*? What drew you to the project?

JDF: Well, probably a lifetime of field recording of birds. When I was a kid, my dad was an officer in the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, and we used to walk through the bush together, and he'd hear a bird, and then he would whistle the exact bird cry, and the bird would call back to him. I thought that was pretty cool! And look, I've always been interested in recording *everything*, but birds have always been a big part of sound design for me. They're really great way of putting people in an environment.

But also because after reading the script, I realised it's all about circumnavigating the actual naturalistic world of birds and letting them take on a wholly unearthly – quite frightening aspect, which kind of opens it up to all sorts of different techniques.

So taking these recordings of birds, making them sound other-worldly – like turning them into MIDI notes, for example, and then playing them back with other sounds. So they have the *nature* of a bird, but they don't *sound* like a bird – not quite right at all.

LB: So would you say you were kind of simultaneously influenced by both real bird behaviours and the horror genre and its tropes?

JDF: Hmmm... I want to say *neither*. I'm really interested in carving a really unique path with this particular one. I said "I don't want it to sound like a Bernard Herman score" and I also didn't want it to sound like

pure bird song. I mean we've got to start somewhere, so of course we're going to start with the odd twinkle of pure, naturalistic, cute bird song, but we're just going to probably stick the knife in quite early, and by the end, I don't think you're going to really be hearing any birds – you might be hearing *strange notions* of what birds might sound like.

I've been tinkering with different apps where you can take micro fragments of sound and spit them over large areas, up to 100 metres or more – or kilometres, even – and then swirl them in and swirl them out again. So I've been doing things like running field recordings of, let's say a crow, for example, and starting them like *seventeen kilometres* away, and then recording them coming in in concentric circles – this is all just in software – and recording them with virtual multi-channel microphones.

LB: OK my head's already spinning haha – let's bring it back a bit ... Can you tell me what role sound is going to play in this production?

JDF: For this show in particular, sound is going to be the vehicle which creates a lot of the dramatic tension and, ultimately, horror – those visceral moments of pure terror and fear. Unlike most theatre shows, I think this one is going to be the one where the design elements really do that.

And it's not just my noise! There's going to be a real symbiotic flow between all the design elements – for example Nik and I are both utilising Kat's set design itself to house some of our hardware. We're trying to create a really holistic approach where the design elements drive this work - but in a more abstract and interesting way than you usually get in your mainstage theatre shows.

LB: So tell me... What is binaural sound, how do you capture it, and how does it change way we experience theatre?

JDF: That's simple – to explain, anyway! 'Binaural' just means two (bi) and ear (aural). We have two ears, and if we place microphones in our ears, we record

sound in the same way that we hear it in the natural world, which is in a 360-degree, fully immersive way. We can drop the audience into other worlds.

Today, for example, we were recording children getting on and off a bus. Now, if we deliver that binaural recording to the audience while she's on stage talking about this event, we're not only listening to her in real time telling us about it, but we're getting this immersive recording of being on the side of the road near a school with children coming and going on a school bus. So you're really placing the audience in real world environments that are completely immersive.

You can use anything to capture the sound, of course – you can attach them to a watermelon or a cantaloupe or any structure, as long as the mics are about 25 centimetres apart. Today we used a wigmaker's dummy head, stuck on a mic stand and with microphones attached either side, and I wore mics in my own ears as I walked around, plus I took traditional backups of the general sounds and ambience with boom mics.

LB: Thinking of the high-tech, dynamic final production the audience will experience, it feels pretty incongruous to imagine it might have just been recorded on a watermelon!

JDF: Hahaha, it will definitely be a spectacular experience – and the technology used in the creation and mixing and delivery is pretty advanced – but the concept of binaural sound itself is nothing new. This has been around since stereo – since we could record two tracks. As soon as we invented the notion of recording, we realised, 'Hey, if I put a microphone on either side of my head, right where my ears are, and then I listen back to that in headphones, that's like being in the real world!' It's almost like a Victorian era party trick, like Pepper's Ghost or ouija boards. The real skill is in the execution.

LB: I think you're selling yourself short! Tell me a bit more about some of your other tricks and secrets. How else are you leveraging theatre technologies – old skool or new! – in this production?

JDF: Well I guess there are three or four more things we're doing to really take binaural sound even further than we have before.

The first is I'm creating moulds of Paula's ears and having special clips built that fit top quality microphones into each of her ear canals. Then, when the audience wears headphones, we give them the close and accurate perspective of the performer herself. Everything she does – if for instance we're watching her pick up a drill and start drilling into a wall – it will feel uncannily like we're experiencing what she's experiencing in real time, sonically, with these live sounds she's creating.

An extension of this is I'm going to put a surround sound system around the stage itself, and fire lots of audio at her – big, active digetic sounds that, again, her ear-mics will pick up and the audience will hear in their own ears but as if they are in Paula's head.

It's both sonically and dramatically exciting – she's going to be pretty much fighting a soundtrack in real time. In rehearsals we're basically going to spend four weeks supporting the text she's saying but *spitting the sound* at her so she's got that to react off. It's almost the opposite way you usually run a rehearsal room where you're constantly told to turn *everything* down hahaha – this is more about interrupting, almost making her yell, like she's got to play up to what I'm doing.

Also – and this is a really cool way to support the multi-character element of the script – I can hide microphones on either side of objects on the set, so when she runs over and screams at this inanimate object, it'll feel like *we're* being yelled at as a third person, another character. That's the plan anyway!

Next is how we rig the speakers in the audience itself – a proper Dolby Atmos system with four speakers in the ceiling, seven speakers around and sub woofers underneath the seating bank - so we'll be able to put voices and sounds out in the house that operate independently of the audience's headphones.

The beauty of these headphones is they're an open headphone, and very light. So you can have this other sound system playing *outside* of the headphones, and you will hear it perfectly clearly. And it can be a much bigger, stronger sound than that's going directly into your ears, so at times it'll be almost like you've got two sonic environments competing against one another at times, but other times it can be a mixed diageic and non-diageic soundtrack that can be played, subtly and from different directions, ultimately augmenting the binaural experience to build the greater world of the play. I'm really looking forward to the challenge of balancing all this!

LB: What about the rumours I'm hearing of the wacky things you're planning in the empty theatre over the next few weeks?

JDF: Of course! This is the final layer where we take things even further and create the impression of birds attacking or flying around and crying out and doing things *in the theatre itself*.

We're kind of playing with these two worlds: You have the world of the story, and we're often hearing it through Paula's ears, but then you possibly get this immediate, meta world where you're reminded that you're sitting inside a theatre, being told that story, and the theatre itself is under attack.

And how are you doing that? Well, we'll probably put quite a massive PA on the floor of the offices above the theatre, and record the sound of the theatre being attacked from above. We'll also be recording a lot of windows smashing and doors slamming, and all sorts of other sounds within the theatre space. Theoretically it will sound as if all of a sudden in the theatre a bird screeches or a window smashes, or a bird thumps against a door that isn't there – but you feel as if it just happened right in your ear or right just in front of your face.

It's what I'd term 'holographic sound'. It's been recorded in the space right in front of you a month ago, but then we play it back at exactly the right time, at the right volume,

your brain is triggered into thinking it really just happened in front of you. That's the idea.

LB: Sounds like there are so many levels to this sound design and delivery – some of them even quite subliminal...? What effect do you want to have on the audience?

JDF: I want to draw them in, and keep on drawing them in, closer and closer, in – you're right – almost an unconscious and subliminal way, spiralling inexorably towards that doom. By the end I imagine the sounds have morphed into, as I said earlier, something that doesn't necessarily reflect entirely naturalistic, real-world sounds. We know it's birds, right, but I want to take it far beyond that, which makes it even more frightening – and I want the audience to not have realised when things began to change.

I also want to balance that with a pulled-back sonic representation of the performer's inner thoughts, and that will be pretty scary and gnarly sometimes. I don't know yet how far I can take it, but I'm going to give it a red hot go!

LB Once you've created this monster, how is it delivered? What does [sound associate] Gideon Cozen's job look like each show?

JDF: Well he's in charge of being able to shift where our performer's voice emanates from at any point in time. So when she takes on the persona of the other characters within the script, I want to be able to throw that voice in a way that we know immediately it's somebody else. That's just one of Gideon's jobs, and that may require putting that voice in a completely different framework. It may have a slightly (or very) different equalisation, or a reverb – each one of them will have a different feel and flavour.

He's also going to be just *riding those levels*, from really gentle, intimate dialogue through to probably screeching, screaming dialogue, and being able to manipulate that so we never feel like it's distorting in our ears or anything. So, yeah, there's going to be a lot of dynamic range at his fingertips all the time.

LB: What's the biggest technical challenge with a show like this, whether that be in the design stage or during the performance itself? Levels, binaural fatigue...

JDF: Yes – both of those for sure. The more you work on this binaural stuff, the less sensitive your brain is to it. So you have to remind yourself to give the audience a break and let them recalibrate – ready for the next onslaught, if you like. You can't just constantly be feeding them this stuff for an hour and a half. It's a bit like when you go to Times Square; if you caught a plane to New York City and the first thing you do after your 24 sleepless hours on a plane is if you go straight to Times Square and get totally aurally and visually overloaded with absolute rubbish... after an hour or so, your brain would be completely fried, you'd probably just drop into a coma haha so you've got to really give the people a chance to take a breath before you slug them again with another dose. So yeah, that definitely might be my biggest compositional challenge.

What I've done a lot before is make a graph, you know, with an x axis for time and y axis for levels, and I plot out energy of the sound over the course of the production. You can plan your ideal journey and see how differently the actual compositions are landing in comparison.

Also, as much as we've talked about all the firepower in this production, it probably will be one of the quietest designs I've ever made, because, in a way, I'm limited by the capabilities of the headphones we can use – and people's sensitive, very human ears.

LB: Thanks so much, David. We're all really looking forward to experiencing your work on *The Birds*.

JDF: I hope everyone enjoys it!

FURTHER RESOURCES

The following resources can be used in conjunction with those provided in **Prompt Pack A** to form a comprehensive bank of assets. Once again, these are a mix of resources referenced in the body of this document, and extra sources to further inform and stimulate.

Note that all resources are hyperlinked for those clicking on an interactive PDF version of this Prompt Pack but, for those holding a paper version, simple-to-type Bitly links have been provided.

RESOURCES DROPBOX

bit.ly/BIRDSPromptPack

In addition to the references and links in our two Prompt Packs, you can head to the above general **Resources Dropbox** that will be populated on a rolling basis for the rest of the year with extra material like:

- Recorded Q&As from our school matinee performances
- Production, rehearsal and behind the-scenes photos
- Set and costume design presentation and materials
- Press and reviews from the Malthouse season
- Behind-the-scenes stage management and production documents
- Further reading and research
- Prompt Packs A and B

PROMPT PACK B RESOURCES

- **Video Interview with Director Matthew Lutton**
vimeo.com/malthouse/BIRDSDirector
- **Video Interview with Actor Paula Arundell**
vimeo.com/malthouse/BIRDSActor
- **Video Interview with Set & Costume Designer Kat Chan**
vimeo.com/malthouse/BIRSDesigner01
- **Video Interview with Associate Lighting Designer Sidney Younger**
vimeo.com/malthouse/ BIRSDesigner02
- **Interview with Adaptor Louise Fox**
Aussie Theatre | bit.ly/BIRDSResources02
- **What is Binaural Audio? How Binaural Recording Works**
Splice.com | bit.ly/BIRDSResources03
- **Kat Chan**
Designer Website | bit.ly/BIRDSResources04
- **Sidney Younger**
Designer Website | bit.ly/BIRDSResources05
- **Marni Mount**
Director Website | bit.ly/BIRDSResources06
- **Stories of M**
Malthouse Theatre's Database of Productions, People, Stories and History | bit.ly/BIRDSResources07
- **The Birds Digital Program**
bit.ly/BIRDSResources08

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