

**MALTHOUSE
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GARY'S HOUSE

DEBRA OSWALD

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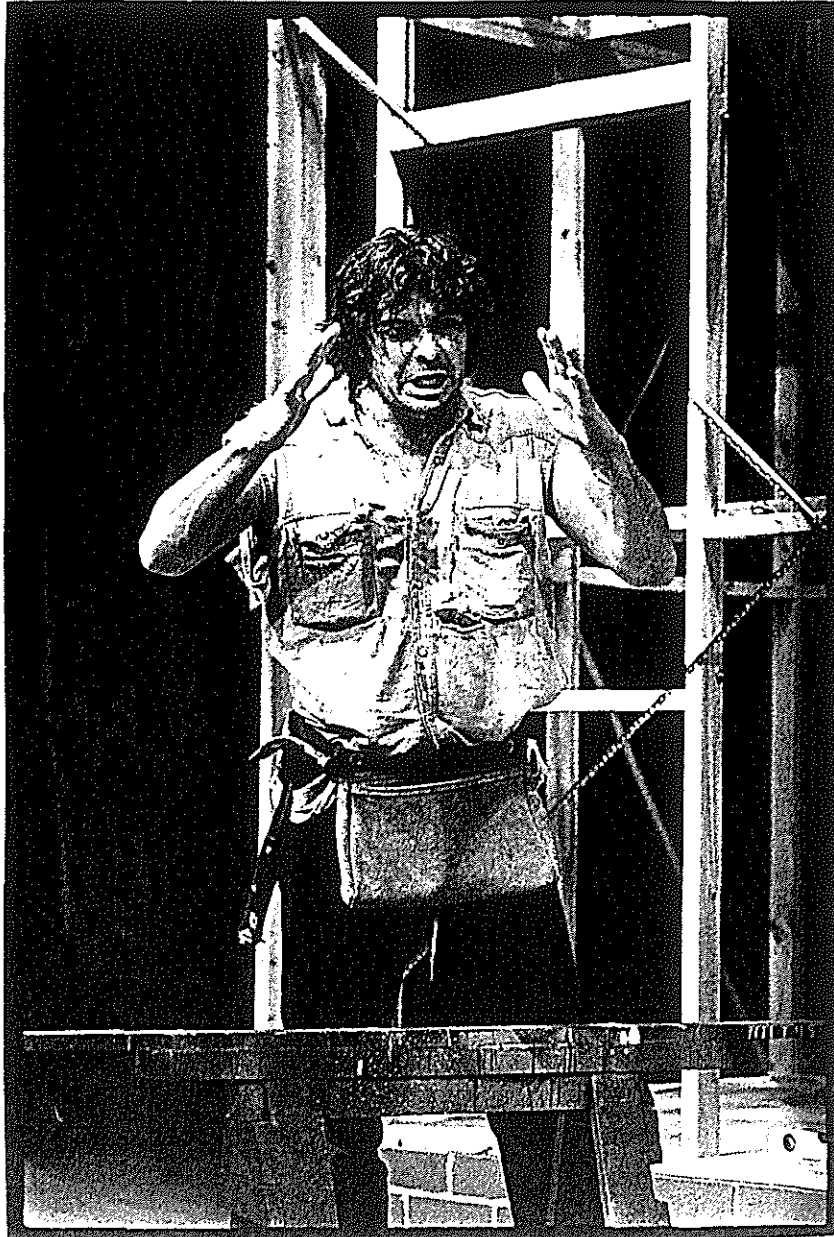
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BACKGROUND NOTES

GARY'S HOUSE

by

Debra Oswald



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AN INTERVIEW WITH DEBRA OSWALD

PLAYWRIGHT: GARY'S HOUSE

* What was the starting point for writing GARY'S HOUSE?

For several years before I began to work on the play, various characters and ideas floated around my head without a play to live in. In particular, early versions of Gary and Sue-Anne had been at the back of my mind for some time.

I've always been interested in the idea of people who've been damaged by neglect or cruelty finding ways to build better lives for themselves, repair themselves. Scraps of stories I'd collected around the idea were nagging at me but I still couldn't find the right form for the story. I was wary of writing something turgid and earnest, with self-pitying characters bemoaning their terrible childhoods.

Meanwhile, I've been involved for ten years with a group of people in the building of a mud brick house in the bush. Heaving building materials around up there one weekend, the blindingly obvious finally pierced my skull. My neglected, damaged characters could build their own house physically, as they try to build their lives.

The building story offered such potential for humour and striking visual stuff. More importantly, it's a potent image for the desire to create a home, to make something good and permanent and loving out of whatever you've got to hand. It also gave me the chance to explore the honour and restorative power of productive work. The building work provides a terrific active expression of Gary and Christine's drive and courage. Anyway, I'd found a way to tell the story I wanted to tell...

* From the initial concept to the finished play, what sort of process did you undergo?

I wrote the first act quite quickly, but then got stuck, not knowing how to finish the story I'd started. I had also taken certain wrong turnings with the plot which took me down dead-ends. I put the play aside in confusion for over a year. Coming back to it after a break, I was able to be sufficiently ruthless with the material I had written to reconceive the story. Then wrote the second act in a rush.

In November 1994, the play was given a one-day workshop and public reading as part of the Griffin Theatre's Festival of New Works. It was very useful to hear the play read by actors and as a result, I was able to make some improvements.

The play was then rejected by most theatre companies around Australia and I slumped into despair about it.

* Did you contribute to the rehearsal process at all?

The director, Kim Durban, was extremely generous in involving me in the rehearsal process. I attended almost every casting session and was involved in the casting decisions which followed. In the period before rehearsal, I sent Kim tapes of music I thought might be appropriate and we talked through how we both saw the play.

I attended rehearsal most days in the first two weeks and then occasionally until opening night.

* Did the script develop or change in any way through the rehearsal process?

Yes, a great deal. Certain changes were made to accommodate the particular physical details of the set and the production.

More importantly, there were still problems with the text that, with the help of Kim and the actors, I was able to look at. The character of Dave in particular needed clarification and fixing. Some new material was added, but changes mostly involved cutting lines. Some scenes were moved to give the drama a better flow and two sequences of scenes were reordered and squashed together to give the play more momentum.

I had experimented with the structure in early drafts, but we found that some of those ideas just didn't work on stage.

We were making changes right up until the end, only hours before opening night in some instances. We continue to tinker with lines even now. The contribution of the actors and the director has been enormous in helping make the best of the text. Rewriting during rehearsal can be an anxious but pretty exhilarating process.

* How would you describe your style of writing?

Hmm...I like to write material which is both funny and emotionally heightened. Most of my work has comic moments pushed up against sad, or at least serious, moments. If I can achieve it, I like to hear an audience laugh and then a second later, fall silent with concentration.

I love the energy, precision and muscularity of colloquial Australian speech and I have to be careful that I don't indulge the dialogue too much

I believe very strongly in clarity at all levels - I don't value ambiguity very highly. I often find that facile ambiguity is used in theatre as poor substitute for real depth and resonance. I want my writing to be as accessible as possible and I try to avoid being pretentious.

But by far the most important thing I try to do is reach people emotionally. As an audience member, I am always most satisfied when a play or a film pulls me on an emotional journey. As a writer, I hope I can manage that sometimes.

*** You have had a lot of experience writing for television. Has this influenced your writing for theatre? How does writing for the two forms differ for you?**

Television writing has had a positive influence on my playwriting. The process of generating a lot of story material does train you to plot more effectively.

Writing "Police Rescue" in particular has been very good for me. It's a show where plots often turn on life and death questions and I've learnt to be bigger and bolder with the scale of my stories. I've killed so many people in "Rescue", in such extreme situations, that it's shaken me out of being a small-scale domestic writer.

One great benefit of TV writing is the chance to see your work performed by actors fairly regularly, at a rate of production that even prolific playwrights rarely manage. Writing something, seeing it performed and gauging the result is the best way to learn.

TV writing has also kept me fed, housed and subsidised me for the periods of time when I write plays.

The big difference in writing for the stage is the freedom. Most TV work is commissioned - writing within the constraints of the format, style and characters of an existing show. Stage is the medium where I can give an original idea a chance to play itself out, without having to please anyone else, initially at least.

TV writing involves so many compromises - ideas, timing, budget, actors' wishes and so on. Stage can accommodate the writer's vision much more freely.

But having said that, I do believe that the two media are much more alike than they are different. Storytelling is the most important thing and that is common to both. Creating believable characters and moving them through a story in a compelling way is the same job on stage or screen.

*** What do you feel "Gary's House" has to say about contemporary Australian society?**

This is impossible to answer. If I could distil an answer in a few sentences then I wouldn't have needed to write a two hour play..

The details of the play are very Australian, I suppose, and I would hope that audiences recognise or realise what extraordinary characters we have living around us. But I hope the audience is drawn to think about the subjects that are true for many times and places...the damage that can be done to people by neglect or cruelty and how damaged people might be able to repair themselves. I hope audiences respect the courage of characters who are doing their best with the little they have and love them for it. I want audiences to think about what is and isn't "our business" or "other people's business" - whether we have a duty to take responsibility for other people when they fall across our path or whether we leave them to flounder. And to think about the honour of satisfying work and its ability to heal. I want audiences to feel the visceral thrill of babies and practical achievement and forgiveness and relinquishing yourself to love...oh dear, I'll stop now before I get carried away with more sooky rambling...

INTERVIEW WITH KIM DURBAN
DIRECTOR : GARY'S HOUSE

*** What were your initial responses to the play?**

Well, I remember reading it one Friday afternoon - straight through - and finding myself in tears at the end. It really moved me, and that response is quite rare. As you know, we would read maybe 80, 90 plays during the year and to have a response from a page which is that strong is unusual. So, it made me look at the play very closely.

While I was reading it, for a time, I was confused. I kept thinking - "These people are stupid, they're such no-hopers", and then, "oh no, don't say that, you idiot - oh god", and really found myself (I realised afterwards) terribly engaged with their mistakes and their stupidities. I cared very much that they got things right and when they didn't, I would suffer for them. So, to the director in me, that meant that the characters lived very strongly. I found these two responses within me made me look back at the story and think, "It's a story worth telling. I would like to direct it". Also, I said this morning in an interview that our current crop of modern plays has tended to be about middle-class people and, perhaps, their marriages. And, while I think those plays have been gorgeous and strong, it's very good to do a play which is about a different class of people because, like Shane (Shane Feeney-Connor who plays GARY), I grew up in a very rough, working-class suburb in South Australia and I don't see that kind of life portrayed very much in the theatre. And, if it is, it's usually about a bunch of people that society is going to kick out and get rid of. The fact that this story is only about those people makes it very powerful because, of course, inarticulate and poor people still have stories and they still have dreams. That also made me want to do it very much.

*** How have you approached the play in rehearsal?**

Well, we had a very short rehearsal period and so I think things were quite tight in the process. With a new play, usually one gets a workshop. Because this play had been done already as a reading in Sydney - and most of it appeared to be logical and to make perfect sense on the page - we didn't get a workshop. That, in a way, is a bit of tragedy because there were things in the play (as there are in every play) that could have done with a bit of exploration. So, part of the rehearsal period was a bit of a tension between trying to rehearse what the play was and trying to investigate what the text was. Consequently, there may be some slight differences between the Currency edition that people are looking at and the edition they see on the stage. That's purely come out from rehearsal.

As I normally would, I did a lot of character work with the cast but, in fact, I had to sacrifice some of my normal processes to the contingencies of the building of the house.

The building of the house is an intrinsic part of the action of the play; an intrinsic part of the design. It took a lot of working out. Shane, to his credit, decided that we made it too easy for him and so suggested that we “de-construct” the set to the point where he would have it in pieces. He then offered to spend time during rehearsal trying to work out what he could actually achieve during the action of the play. That meant, unfortunately, that some of rehearsal was about bricks and bolts and wood, at the expense of acting. And so things would not work because Shane would go off into a kind of hyperspace and I would stop and say, “You seemed to lose your way”, and he’d say, “Oh yes, there are no bolts in my pouch - I’ve just realised”.

A lot of the balance of this work has actually been about blending the things which actors do naturally but audiences may not be aware of - they are totally in character; they know exactly what they’re doing as that character; and they believe in their situation whilst remaining an actor and knowing how the audience is responding, and knowing exactly, what they have to achieve on stage. And I think, for the first time in my career, I’ve experienced (on their behalf and on mine) a collision between those two disciplines - that is, maintaining internal belief and achieving external action informed by technical awareness. And so that’s caused a lot of pain and difficulty. In the end, it’s a triumph that we can do both because I don’t feel that the play itself - now that it’s running - has been sacrificed to that process. However, I think it created a lot of anxiety (as you would imagine in a short working period) about how to resolve those issues.

We’re very happy with the set so that’s a relief. Because, if we hadn’t have been, I think we would have been in big trouble.

*** Would you call yourself a “method” director? Do you have a particular method that you use?**

As long as you don’t mean “the Method”, the American acting style. I have a method that I try to apply to all the working processes that I engage myself in, which tends to vary according to the needs of the play. So, for example, if I were going to do a Chekhov, I know implicitly that the rehearsal method that I use works for that style of writing, because it was the first style of writing where I kind of clinched this process. It deals very much with the inner life, the sub-text, the given circumstances of the characters - those sort of things. It involves research and improvisation from the world of the play. When you’re doing a new Australian play - particularly this one - it doesn’t have subtext. So some of what I usually do has flown out the window because, although I can set up exercises for the actors which might take them through an investigation of particular responses or emotions, the play itself works very clearly and you would see on the page that there’s very little ambiguity. Working on sub-text has more value with characters who can’t state what they really feel or mean. These characters do state their feelings.

I think the thing that we’ve had to spend some time on is the “map”. All of the characters are faced with choices all through the play, and those who live through the whole play are

faced with choices about the future: how to behave; how to live their lives; what to do in the world. That has had to take quite a lot of delicate mapping because different characters come to a resolution of ideas about themselves at different times in the play. And, in fact, there's one character (DAVE) that we've just realised is probably the person about whom the play is written, purely because he is the last penny to roll into the slot and take on a new life. So trying to track the shape of the play according to people's expectations and how much people change, was sort of interesting. CHRISTINE, for example, changes quite violently and abruptly and deals with it very badly, and then gets ahead of herself, but then rescinds on what she's decided to do. So she's got a very choppy journey. And one of the things I asked the actor playing CHRISTINE to do was to draw me an emotional map of her journey. And she chose on her map to give me two graphs: one was the progress of GARY'S house - the physical building - and the other one was the progress of her inner life before she achieves what she calls satisfaction or happiness. And it was pretty interesting to see where her emotional map mirrored the shape of the house: where it actually fell away, the house would suddenly soar forward; sometimes she'd go into a hole herself. So those sort of ways of dealing with the play have been quite useful.

We were lucky enough to be across the road from the Penrith Plaza (we were rehearsing the play in Penrith, NSW). The Penrith Plaza is a massive shopping centre and we would go there every day for lunch. So, in terms of genuine observation of real people in the world, they were about fifteen feet away from us sometimes, and I know that the actors often went out looking for their characters in the shopping centre and quite successfully found them. We didn't do much reading. I think all of us feel quite clear that we know the world of the play pretty well. We all had to do some learning about how to build a building and, even though we were doing a theatrical representation of that process, it was still fairly important to know some of the technical terms and some of the ways that things happen. And so when the builders (the men who constructed the set) delivered the set, they came in and gave everybody a lesson on how to do certain working tasks. And that was pretty thrilling for the actors to actually get their tools and start banging away. That was exciting. And then Sophie, for example, has never had a baby and so she spent some time talking to women who were pregnant and reading a few books. So, all the normal things that actors would do in rehearsal.

But I think a lot of our time was taken up with script work and by that I mean just testing that we understood the situation between the characters. In rehearsal we re-arranged the play in order to improve the dramatic tension. And there was a particular scene that we couldn't make work with three characters and we dropped one of them because we worked out (by talking and working on the scene) that if we just gave all the dialogue to two characters, they could carry it between them. All it took was a slight change in the talking style because we actually took some information away from DAVE and gave it to SUE-ANNE. Well, obviously, those two characters talk in a very different way and this has to be accommodated. But, in fact, DAVE's absence from this scene also allows us to see that there are times when DAVE doesn't appear. We were worried for a while that the logic problem of the play would be that people would think that GARY and SUE-

ANNE were never building without DAVE being present and, in fact, that's not true. So, by now, there is a scene in the play where he's not present and you can tell.

*** What are the main things that you're trying to highlight in your production of the play?**

Well I, personally, think that the play is redemptive and that means it's about people being saved from disaster - despite the fact that the play is filled with tragedy, from which I don't flinch. I think Debra is trying to write about a very unfashionable thing these days, which is hope. So, despite the fact that the play gets very dark, it is in my interest to give people a picture of optimism from the situation. I think she's written the play to prove that people - by their actions and by being confronted with large choices - bear witness, see themselves and will grow. When one is confronted with choices, one can make a decision which will change their life. And I think she's also teaching us that people can change because they must, because the only way they're going to survive emotionally is if they alter their own personalities. Look at the last scene of the play where it's quite clear that none of the characters has, in essence, lost the personal characteristics that make them who they are. But if you look at the stage picture at the end of the play, and you think of each of those characters when you met them first, they've come quite a way in terms of resolving the baggage they carry as human beings. I want the audience to care about that growth.

It's very important to me that people don't see the play as a joke. I've tried very much to tell the truth. And this is always the interesting question in a comedy: how far do you let the characterisations run before you admit that it's too big, too loud, too much, and that it's actually bordering on becoming a commentary on real people instead of just representing them? I think, like all comedies, on a good day we get it right, on a bad day we might lean too far one way or too far the other. Basically, we're aware that this is a very tough script. I've described it so far as a bucolic play, which is like a beautiful, country-setting play with a dark, black river running through it. And when you put your foot in the dark river the ripples go right through the whole play. Consequently, there are some evenings when the play is too bucolic and we don't have enough blackness and then we all remember - we remind ourselves that the blackness is an important part of the play. We've also done performances where it's too black and it's not very jolly. So it's a case of trying to keep a balance, stylistically, between those things.

I think Debra is saying there is no light without darkness and so I would want both things to co-exist successfully in the production. And I think she also believes that labour - pure work - is sacred; can save people; does change them. And so she's chosen to use as a metaphor the building of the house - which is quite an interesting one if you look at dream symbolism. If you dream of houses, it supposedly represents your life. And according to the kind of house that you dream about; whether you're inside or outside; whether you're upstairs or downstairs; whether it looks like a house that you know or not - this is supposedly a commentary on your life at the time. I think, therefore, that the house is a very successful metaphor but it could just as easily be a garden because, again,

part of her theme is about the pure change brought about by investing activity in something. And like all good plays, it's about love. So I would hate it if there was no love in it.

*** Could you comment on the style of the play?**

The more I work in theatre, the more I think that questions of style are purely invented by critics and theatre teachers.

I know that each play has its own way of being and I know that historically there is a glossary which explains very neatly what different theatre styles are, where they come from and how they're applied. But I have to say in my career, I have no evidence that theatre style is given so neatly by an author to a group of actors. Nor is it fully explored by a bunch of artists for an audience.

So, having said that, I think the great curse of the theatre now is naturalism. By naturalism I mean the kind of every-day behaviour that we expect to see when we turn on the television and see a normal piece of television about a bunch of people living in their daily lives. That's the style of acting that we're all highly familiar with and it's really a form of merely transmitting ideas. It tends not to be character-driven. It's all driven by plot and situations. So, the first problem for a bunch of artists making a play is that theatre is always a heightened activity and it's not just a reflection of real life. The fact that you've made a play in three dimensions in a live space means that you cannot continue a fiction of real life. So, in GARY'S HOUSE, one of the particular problems of the script (which I may or may not have dealt with successfully) is that the play takes place over about a year. In true naturalistic terms, unless you have a scene from every month in that year, you haven't produced naturalism. What the play does inside itself is it takes leaps of time and this is where Debra's experience as a television writer comes to the fore because she literally will jump-cut from one situation to another in order to point the audience's attention to where she thinks it should be. That's really what I mean when I say it's not naturalistic. It doesn't mean that the actors are not behaving like real people from the world but we know perfectly well that, if we put some of their behaviour on the street it would look OK, and other bits would be ridiculous. And naturalism in the theatre was invented as a theatre movement in reaction to another form of theatricality that had gone too far. We now don't have that form of theatre to react against and so I think the purpose of naturalistic acting has become blurred in everybody's mind.

The other thing that Debra does in this play which actually makes it a play and not just a linear story is that, when you first watch (probably for the first 25 minutes, I would say), you feel, from the audience's point of view, quite confident that you know who the major players in the play are going to be and you may even think (because I think Debra successfully gives you this feeling) that you know what's going to happen to them. You can see a pattern beginning to emerge in the action of the play - GARY building the house; DAVE coming to visit; SUE-ANNE whingeing - and although there are variations on a theme there, by the time you get about 25 minutes in, it's established. Of course, it's

very successful play writing because the minute CHRISTINE comes in, the whole play goes completely on its ear, and her function and impact as a character is quite violent and permanent. But, in fact, Debra's sympathy for her characters is quite interesting. By the end of the play, I think she successfully teaches you that every character is real and has meaning and dimensions that you may not have expected. And the play shifts focus, so you cannot confidently say by the end that you watched a play about GARY - you may have felt that at first but, in fact, all the other people in his life leap out. That's quite a clever way of writing a play because it withdraws from the audience the chance to make up their own minds in advance and become relaxed. I think the play's full of ideas, thoughts, moments where you, the audience, think you know what's going to happen and all of a sudden Debra will pull the rug. And, in my opinion, that makes the play very engaging to listen to and watch.

She's also given us a stylistic problem which is that the house is built on stage every evening during the action of the play. So, I remember when I spoke to Judith the designer, at first she said, "My one fear is that you're going to make me want to put a whole house on stage". And I said, "The one thing I would hate to see is a whole house on stage". So we knew then that we were in the same area. Consequently, what you see is a portion of the house. It's used as a visual reminder and a symbol of the imagined building of a larger dwelling. There are also jump-cuts in that process, though. If we were to sit there long enough to watch GARY building brick walls, applying cladding, putting in Gyprock, etc, we would be there until Christmas and that's obviously not the writer's interest. So, somehow, we had to find a way that would replicate the pure labour of what GARY does, which I think is a very impressive part of the performance. The fact that we do see Shane pick up things and lug them around and whack them together and build. But, hopefully, we never see that activity done at the expense of any other kind of character development. It means, as a director, that it's slightly confusing to work on - props don't always behave!

There is another play that people might have heard of called THE CONTRACTOR by David Storey. There was a very famous production of this play directed by Lindsay Anderson. The whole first half of the play is about a gang of contractors putting up a marquee for a wedding and the second half is all about pulling down the marquee. But in that play, the building is actually the content of the play, to a large extent. In this play, if you were not thinking carefully, you could also get sucked in towards that very dynamic activity of building the house when, in fact, it's not really the only interest of the play. So this has been a sort of a creative teaching for me, as a director, about how to balance that action. And you will be able to tell me at the end whether you think I've done well or not.

*** What effect do you think the ending - the final moments of the play - have on the overall style?**

Debra's made a theatrical leap of imagination for her final image. So our first call as the artists making the image was to make sure that it wasn't sentimentalised and that it might

be credible. If you're going to work an image rather than an event, you have to somehow make it palatable for people. On the nights where it's worked (and again we're dealing with live action so there are nights where it hasn't worked - but on the nights when it's worked) there's been a profound silence in the audience and it's felt like Debra has asked the audience to go to a different level of awareness in their minds and in the way that they might add up the whole story. To understand that the play is not just about happy endings. By the end, the play might have other images to give us about continuity, about death and about absent fathers. Because, for example, without that final image you could stop the play quite successfully as VINCE and SUE-ANNE argue over the baby - lights down, that is the ending of any comedy we can think of, really. But one of the things I loved about the play was the very last image, because I thought it reminded us that none of us comes into the world without strings. That's the very thing that Debra is writing about - and her choice to remind us of that continuity is a humane act.

As a theatrical image, some people will buy it and some won't, depending on their personal beliefs about spirits. But I think it gives the play a circular structure that I rather enjoy.

One more thing that I'd like to comment about regarding the style of the play is that the production of the play uses a lot of popular music. We had great fun choosing it - in some cases it's not music that I would listen to myself at home. But it started because I asked Debra about sound. Debra said in the very beginning, "Oh, there's lots of music", and I said, "Well, what do you mean? You haven't said so. It doesn't say that in the script". She said, "Oh well, you see, I always imagined that the sound of Joe Cocker's voice is what GARY is like. Not the songs particularly, but the sound of his singing style". I said, "Well, that's great, that's terrific. Who else?". So then she gave me a list of artists that she thought had the same kind of qualities as the characters.

Now it turns out that Debra lives about 45 minutes away from the Q Theatre* and she often plays loud music to herself in the car. During the process of writing the play (over the two years that it took her to write) she played a lot of music to herself while writing. So I'm not going to tell you which ones belong to Debra and which ones belong to me but she did give me a tape of songs that she thought were appropriate and artists that she thought were appropriate, and I have built on her compendium. As one of the Sydney reviews remarked, it was all the "singers of the under-class".

One of the things that I like about the production is that it's quite loud! There are loud chainsaws, there's loud music, there's loud acting. I think the last production that I did I loved because it was sensuous and detailed, in particular, and it's always good as a director to go in a different direction. Because it's so unashamed, the sound of this production pleases me enormously.

* in Penrith, NSW, where this production was first performed before moving on to Melbourne

AN INTERVIEW WITH JUDITH HODDINOTT

DESIGNER: GARY'S HOUSE

* What were your initial responses to the script of GARY'S HOUSE from the point of view of a designer?

My initial response was - what a technically difficult and demanding script! There is so much that is talked about in the script that we must see. Even though it would be simpler to abstract the house more, it would not fulfil the demands of the script.

* How did you go about tackling the obvious difficulty of building a house on stage through the show? What were the steps involved in this process?

At first I talked to friends of mine who had just built their house. They had a wonderful book called "The Owner-Builder's Manuel" (that we ended up using as a prop in the play!) I read and studied this book intently. I also visited several building sites.

The various stages of building are very important. The script sets out that by such and such a time the framework is up, the roof is on etc... Some of these were rigid, but some were not. I broke the script up into divisions, and tried to plan the building of the house to take place within these divisions.

I discussed these with the director, Kim Durban, and we pinned these divisions down roughly, before rehearsals started. The roof had to go on before interval, as it was too cumbersome a piece for Ailsa (playing CHRISTINE) to put on.

I then did a technical drawing that showed the possible eight steps (see diagrams included in these notes) that it took to construct GARY'S house. Kim could then take this as a guide to use during rehearsal.

The set was sent to rehearsal within the second week so that the actors could use it and get used to it, particularly Shane (GARY) and Ailsa (CHRISTINE).

* Do any properties used as functional items also take on symbolic meaning?

There is so much in the play that is both functional and symbolic. The whole house and the building of it symbolises GARY'S need to have something stable in his life, especially as he now has SUE-ANNE and she is about to have his baby. GARY says to DAVE that the house, SUE-ANNE and the baby are his last chance to "make a go of things". His haphazard building of the house symbolises this last chance.

Debra (Oswald) spoke very early in the dialogue between ourselves and the director of the need for the house to be real and not just a metaphor. She also spoke of the worth of such manual work.

One part of the set which is symbolic rather than functional is the house model.

During the play we only see a part of the actual house being built by the characters. This small corner is there to represent the whole house. The floor plan traced out on the floor represents what is intended, the verandah, pergola etc that GARY talks about.

The building of the house model mirrors the building of the actual house, but here we get to see the house evolving in its entirety. The model, then, represents the house as GARY and SUE-ANNE envisage it, their idea of their own "Home Sweet Home". So, the house model, in effect, symbolises the ideal.

With a tight budget we were looking for ways to cut costs, and it was suggested that we could do without the house model. But I insisted on keeping it - I think it is a very important part of the set.

* For the costume design, what colours/styles/fabrics/textures did you find were most appropriate for the various characters?

The script was not final when we went into rehearsal, therefore the characters were not complete, or locked in. During the next few weeks, scenes were cut and added and the actors had much input. The costumes could not be set at the beginning of this process.

The costumes had to be fairly fluid. The play is set in the present, so this was relatively easy. The budget, however, was quite tight.

I got a lot of T-shirts and tracksuits from the stock at the Q Theatre (where the production was first staged before coming to Melbourne) and shopped, often with the particular actor, for the rest.

* Did you participate at all in the rehearsal process?
If so, in what ways?

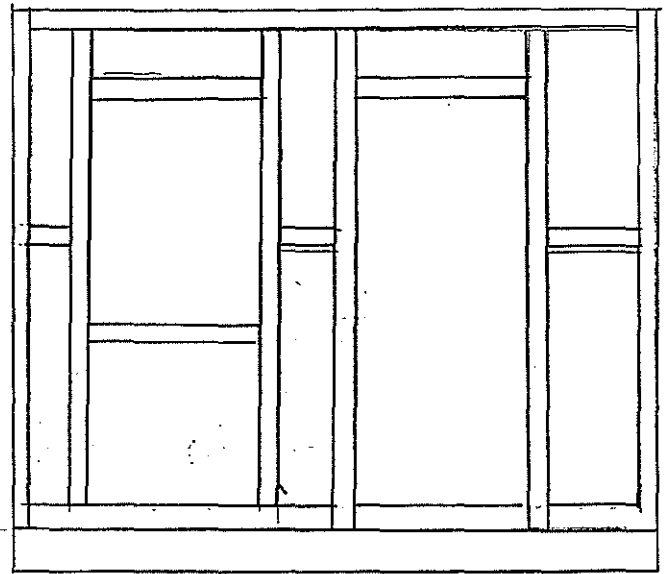
The design of the play plays a big role in shaping the flow of movement in the play.

I came to several rehearsals, but for the majority of this time I was collecting props, shopping for wardrobe and supervising the construction and painting of the set. I also did a bit of the house model's construction.

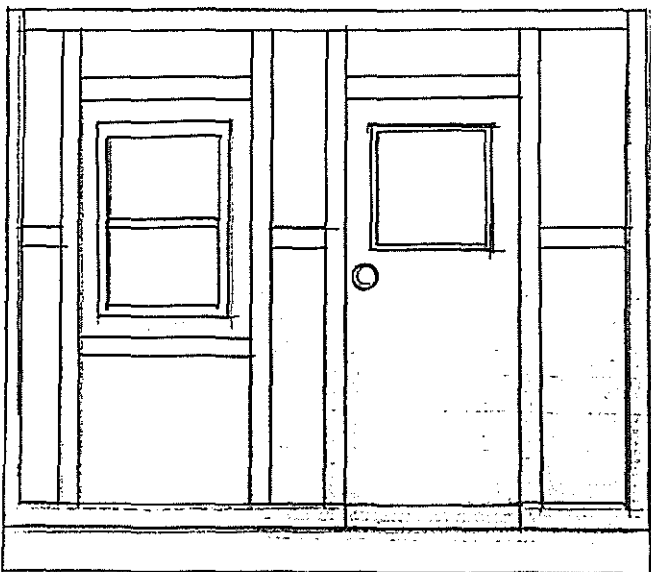
STEP-BY-STEP SET CONSTRUCTION



1. FOOTINGS ARE IN PLACE.
GARY CEMENTS D.S. FOOTINGS.
* STEP.

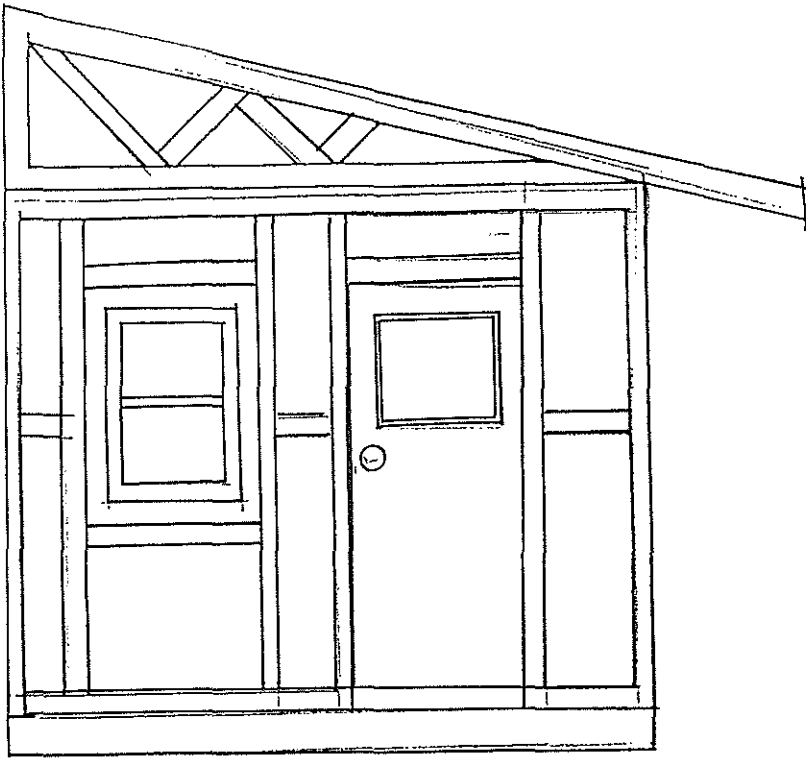


2. 4x FRAMEWORKS GO UP
AFTER FLOOR IS IN
PLACE.

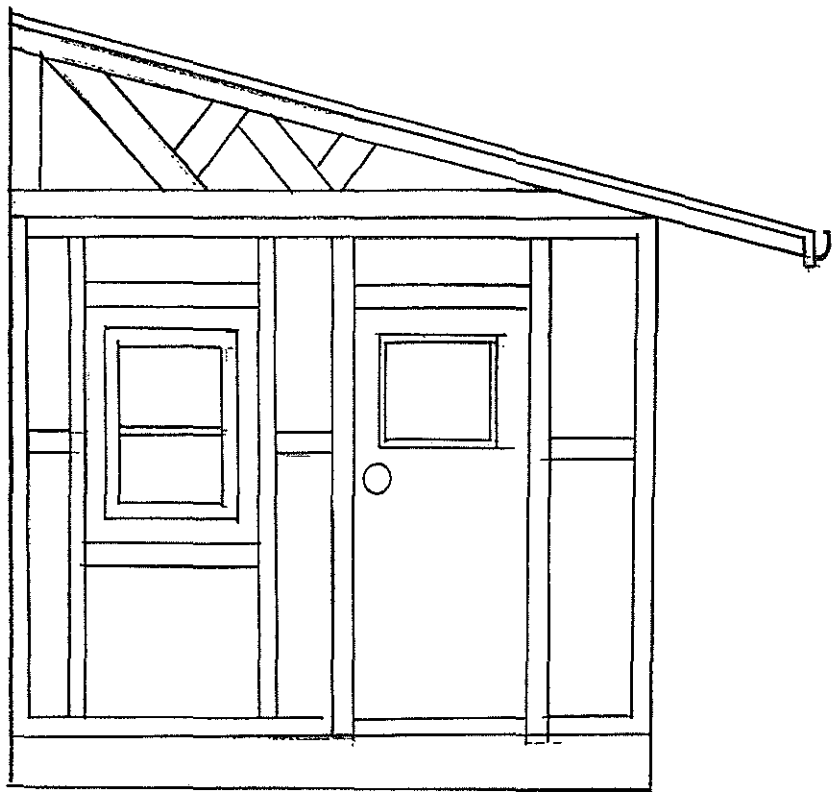


3. WINDOWS + DOOR IN
FRAMES.

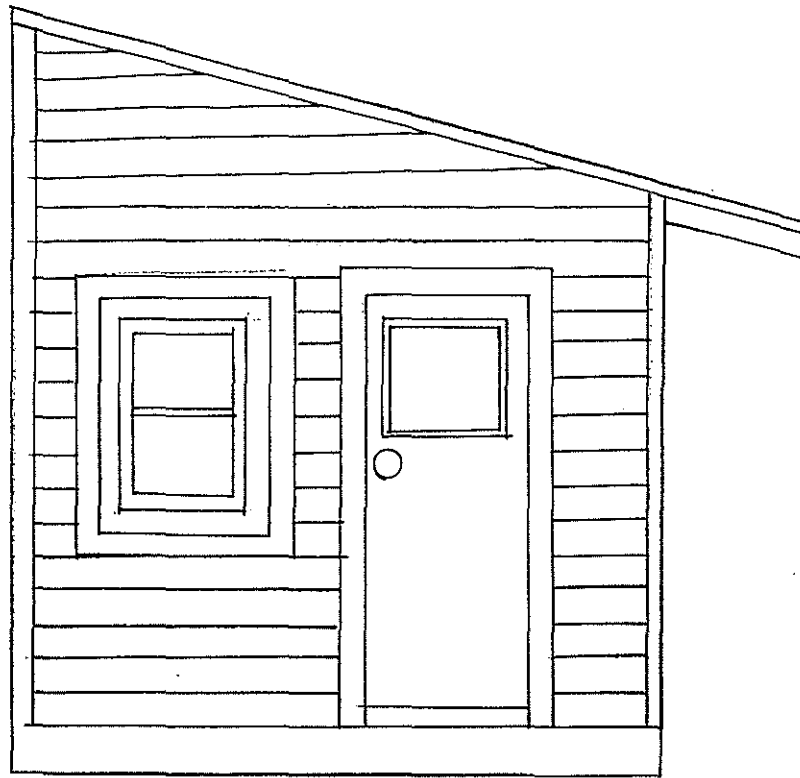
**GARY'S
HOUSE**



4. TRUSS 1 + 3 HINGED FORWARD INTO POSITION.
GARY UP A LADDER.



5. INTERVAL - ROOF GOES ON
THIS IS THE MOST COMPLICATED
SCENIC ELEMENT TO CONSTRUCT
∴ MUST HAPPEN IN INTERVAL.



6. CLADDING X2 GOES ON.

7. OPTIONAL: DOWNPIPE
GOES ON.

INSIDE FRAMEWORKS HAVE
REMOVEABLE GYPROCK PANELS.
- THIS IS CLARIFIED AFTER
REHEARSALS BEGIN
ONE OF THESE PANELS
NEEDS TO BE DESTROYED
EACH PERFORMANCE.

8. LOOK OF
COMPLETION
BARBEQUE ET.C
PATIO FURNITURE!

QUESTIONS: GARY'S HOUSE

- * Why is Gary so obsessed with building a house?
- * Director Kim Durban states that " like all good plays, it (GARY'S HOUSE) is about love".
 - Do you think that the characters in GARY'S HOUSE know how to love?
 - Why is this emotion difficult for some of the characters in the play?
 - Do they learn how to love through the course of the play?
 - How does this come about?
- * How does the presence of the baby affect the different characters in GARY'S HOUSE?
- * SUE-ANNE (to CHRISTINE): "If you never come and poured shit on Gary, he'd be here to look after me and Clint."
 - Is this a fair statement, or was there a sense of inevitability in GARY'S decision to commit suicide?
 - How does his decision affect each of the other characters?
- * Director, Kim Durban, talks in her interview about asking her actors to draw "emotional maps" of their characters' journeys through the play.
 - What do you think she means by this?
 - Do you think this exercise would have been helpful for the actors in their preparation for this particular play? If so, how?
 - What do you think each character's "map" would look like?
- * Do you think that the director has been successful in her aim to balance the dark and the comic aspects of the play?
- * How significant is the choice of setting in conveying the meaning of the play, and how effective is it?
- * Writer Debra Oswald stressed to the designer that she wanted the building of the house in the play to be real as well as metaphorical.
 - How successful do you think the set design is on these two different levels?
 - Can you think of other ways the set for this play could have been designed?

- * Was the set flexible?
How effective was it in handling the changes of location in the play?
- * Designer Judith Hoddinot describes the costumes in GARY'S HOUSE as simply "of the present".
 - How effective are the costumes in conveying the characters' personalities and lifestyles?
 - Do you think a more conscious "costume design" incorporating symbolic use of colour/texture etc would have been appropriate for this play?
- * How important is the lighting design in enhancing the mood of the play?

WRITING A REVIEW

The following questions may assist you in formulating a critical response for writing your review:

- Did I enjoy the experience?
- Would I recommend it to others?
- Did the play have a message and was it clear, muddled or hidden?
- What questions were asked and what answers offered?
- Was the piece designed to inform, entertain or both?
- Was there a major theme or series of themes?
- Were there unexpected twists in the plot?
- What was the mood of the piece?
- Was the use of language economic or extensive?
- Were the cast organised as a strong ensemble or was individualism in evidence?
- Did characters show evidence of research or consideration of fine detail?
- How strong was your empathy with particular characters - how strongly did you care for or about them and what happened to them?
- Did all actors make a strong offering to the audience and to other actors?
- Did the designer achieve the plays intentions?
- How practical were the sets and costumes?
- Was lighting and sound integrated or intrusive?
- Could everything be clearly seen and heard?
- Was there evidence of successful designer/director/technical collaboration?

The Playbox Education Program is generously sponsored by DIABETES AUSTRALIA - VICTORIA and the VICTORIAN HEALTH PROMOTION FOUNDATION.

Cover photograph by Jeff Beatty.

