AN ORDINARY LIFE IS THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF ALL

NATALIE WEIR’S
EVERYDAY
REQUIEM

Featuring an original acapella vocal score performed live by THE AUSTRALIAN VOICES composed by GORDON HAMILTON

With senior community dancers from WaW DANCE

TEACHER’S NOTES
These notes have been designed for secondary school dance teachers and based on Expression Dance Company’s 2018 performance of *Everyday Requiem* (premiere season 12 - 20 October 2018, Cremorne Theatre QPAC). The notes draw on key components from the Year 7-10 Dance Australian Curriculum, the QCAA Dance Senior Syllabus from 2015 and QCAA Dance 2019 General Senior Syllabus. Activities have been designed for teachers to use either in their entirety or take elements and use as inspiration for planning classroom content and assessment.

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**Feedback:** We are highly interested in the continual improvement of our Teacher Resource Packs, and would love to hear your feedback. Please contact Expressions Dance Company at admin@expressionsdancecompany.org.au or on 07 3257 4222.

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*Isabella Hood and Jake McLarnon. Photo by Fiona Cullen*
Everyday Requiem is a story about family and about life. The work is viewed through the eyes of an aging man. We meet him at the end of his 70th birthday celebration.

70 is certainly not old in this day and age, but the work considers what a person holds most dear as they move into the later part of their life. The man, portrayed with great sensitivity by Brian Lucas, begins to reflect on his life and those moments that he remembers as the most significant. I like the idea that this man is ordinary. He is not a movie star or a celebrity. He could be any of us and certainly his memories relate to many of us. But we celebrate him, an ordinary man.

The old man reflects on his life through many ages and this is an important part of the work. Three male dancers portray him, through birth and childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, to maturity.

I pondered those moments and the people that we remember most vividly in our later life. The relationship with his mother is unforgettable. We see his relationship with his brother, from early sibling rivalry through to the unspoken pain of an adult fracture in the family.

He will never forget his first love and memories of his wedding day will linger forever. The birth of his daughter while he is away at war is something he will never come to terms with.

The man is born in 1948 and takes us through time to the present, 2018. So much has happened through this era.

I will not give the whole story away. That is for you, the audience to experience in the moment. I have tried to approach this work with a sense of nostalgia for the past, but even more, with a sense of what is important in moving forward for a 70 year old man.

Forgiveness, acceptance, love and family – surely that is what is important. The small things are not important towards the end of life. It is family, connection and celebration of the age you are in. You can’t change the past. You can come to terms with accepting it, finding resolution, celebrating it and looking forward to the greatest years yet to come.

Aging is inevitable, but it is not an end of things or something to be afraid of. It’s the celebration of a wisdom that is incomparable.

My thanks to all involved in the creation of this work, but especially to the EDC dancers whose input with the movement, the character development, the story and the overall creation of the work has been extraordinary. I have been so touched by their commitment, enthusiasm and trust in me.

I would like to show respect for the recent passing of my father-in-law, Douglas Marshall, a man of grace, strength and dignity. Funny how art imitates life sometimes.

I hope Everyday Requiem resonates with you.

CHOREOGRAPHER NOTE: NATALIE WEIR

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF EXPRESSIONS DANCE COMPANY
CHOREOGRAPHER, EVERYDAY REQUIEM

Forgiveness, acceptance, love and family – surely that is what is important. The small things are not important towards the end of life. It is family, connection and celebration of the age you are in. You can’t change the past. You can come to terms with accepting it, finding resolution, celebrating it and looking forward to the greatest years yet to come.
ABOUT EVERYDAY REQUIEM

An ordinary life is the most extraordinary story of all

Be swept into a poignant and uplifting story of life, told through the captivating contemporary dance theatre of Queensland’s Expressions Dance Company (EDC), alongside astounding acapella vocals by The Australian Voices.

Set against the backdrop of Australian history from the 1950s to today, Everyday Requiem is a powerful story of one ordinary man (played by acclaimed Brisbane performer Brian Lucas) as he revisits the memories that have created the remarkable and relatable tale of his life – and ours.

Touching moments from our daily lives are interpreted through the breathtaking physicality of the EDC dancers, choreographed by EDC’s Helpmann Award-winning Artistic Director, Natalie Weir. The Australian Voices join EDC on stage, performing an exquisite original score by Gordon Hamilton, using only the human voice. The cast also features special guests, senior dancers from WaW Dance, in this inspiring celebration of the tragedies and triumphs we all share, everyday.

Everyday Requiem is Natalie Weir’s final work for the Company as Artistic Director. Following critically acclaimed productions such as When Time Stops, The Red Shoes, Behind Closed Doors and the recent highly acclaimed, 4Seasons.

“I believe (audiences) will enjoy the most subtle and simple movement to the most complex choreography and partnering... the nature of this narrative and how it is told will encourage audience members to reflect and look upon their life, their history and especially the foundations that their relationships are based on. I believe audiences will enjoy how the work allows them to do this.”

- Scott Ewen, Company Dancer
PROMINENT THEMES

- Life stages and ageing
- Family and relationships
- Time and memory
- Celebration and tragedy
- Beauty in the everyday human experience

“Everyday Requiem is a work with heart. It speaks to everyone in different ways. It’s about life and the everyday normal things that happen... it has been so special to develop this storyline with the dancers and reminisce our own lives and events. It’s always an inspiring time when you get to create amongst incredible makers.”
- Company dancer Richard Causer.

- Reunions and departures (including grief)
- Representations of Australian history
- Collaboration (music and dance)

“Having these extra voices and inputs into the process has been a new and welcomed challenge... Their presence in the room brings the creation to a whole new level.”
- Company dancer Richard Causer

MEET THE CHARACTERS (In order of appearance)

Brian Lucas: “I play the role of the main character aged 70, looking back at the journey of my life thus far.”

Jag Popham: “I play the main character from birth to age 12. He initially struggles with finding his feet but when he does, becomes a bouncy little boy who is eager for life, often squabbling with his brother and causing his mother grief.”

Scott Ewen: “I play the role of the brother. In this role I share a competitive relationship with my brother and portray mischievous, intolerant and selfish characteristics”

Jake McLarnon: “I play the role of the main character from his adolescence and young adulthood. He experiences young love, sibling rivalry and being forced to leave a loved one due to the Vietnam War.

Isabella Hood: “I play the role of the young love interest who finds herself in a love triangle between the main character and the brother.”

Richard Causer: “I play the main character through his 30s to 50s. He has returned from war and trying to settle back into his life with his wife and daughter. Additionally, a conflict is still going on with his brother”

Elise May: “I play the role of the Wife - You see my character and the main character fall in love and get married. When he goes to war, I’m distraught and have to raise our daughter alone. I eventually fall ill and pass away.”

Alana Sargent: “I play the role of the daughter. I grew up without my father as he was at war for my birth and throughout my childhood. Therefore, my relationship with him is quite distant at first. I lose my mother to illness, and I am soon overwhelmed with grief. This strengthens my relationship with my father as all we have left is each other.”
What was the inspiration for creating the work 'Everyday Requiem'? 

The initial concept began through a desire for EDC to collaborate with The Australian Voices (TAV). I met with TAV Artistic Director Gordon Hamilton to discuss how the two companies could work together, with the music and dance blending together. We decided a Requiem would be a good musical starting point for the work, and developed the idea that we would explore the everyday moments in life that are important, and could relate to the audience’s own lives.

We liked the idea that we would celebrate an ordinary person’s life - not a movie star or celebrity, but an ordinary man, and rather than Requiem being about death, it would be about life.

We wanted to seamlessly blend two art forms, song and contemporary dance, and the idea was that the performance aims to take the audience on a moving and poignant narrative journey from birth through to old age. This is the story of moments of our lives - the celebrations, the tragedies and everything in between.

What is the work about?

The work is a narrative. The central character is an elderly man, looking back on his life. We see the narrative through his eyes, he takes the audience on a journey through his memories. The work starts at the end of the man’s 70th Birthday party. He begins to reflect on his life - his birth, his strong relationship with his mother, the tender and beautiful memories. He reflects on his damaged relationship with his brother, right from when they were small children, through to adulthood where he regrets that he had difficulty making peace with his brother. He remembers his first love, a bittersweet memory, his wedding day, his confronting time at the Vietnam war, his daughter, all moments that made him the man he is.

Dancers and singers become children, mothers, fathers, and siblings as everyday moments are remembered - a child’s first steps, holding hands, dinnertime, a kiss goodbye. Fleeting instants are amplified into poetic scenes and memories are woven together to create an uplifting and touching tapestry that reminds us that the cycle of life is inevitable and even the little things are worth celebrating. We see a mother, singing a lullaby to her child as she dresses him. We hear the sounds of children’s play, a simple clapping game. We see people at the dinner table, making music with their plates and knives and forks, singing softly. At each end of the table are two people, having their evening meal, as they have for many days, and many days to come. Lots of memories are explored.

What choreographic processes did you use when creating and developing this work?

The process of making a work starts long before you enter the studio with the dancers. Discussion with the composer, the stage designer and lighting designer begins early, with the concept being developed into a storyboard. Then discussion with the dancers begins, talking through the storyboard and development of the characters.

Once in the studio, there is a lot of discussion with the dancers about the story and their characters. It is from the story that the movement is found.

I set tasks for the dancers, based on their characters. They then make up some movement, and then I look at the movement and work with the dancers to develop it further.

How long does it take for a work of this size to go from conception to completion?

This work has been in the making for nearly 2 years. We had 2 creative developments of it at the end of 2016, and in 2017. This set the groundwork for the creative team and the dancers to find ideas and be on the same page about how the work would develop. Working with the TAV singers and the EDC dancers was a big part of this early process, to find a language that helped us work together.

The composition begins very early, and the design concept is developed. The lighting designer is also part of these early times, so that he is connected to the work and what is being said. When we finally get into the studio to actually create the work, there is a 6 week rehearsal period. During this time all parts of the work have to come together.

What do you enjoy most about working with the dancers in the company?

I love working with the dancers - they are so involved in the process and are not afraid to share ideas. They are also such lovely people, and they inspire me enormously. Some of the dancers I have worked with for many years, and this helps in creating new work, as those dancers have a shared history with me, and move in a way that has developed over time working with me. The dancers are the heart of the work, and they bring so many ideas and thoughts - I bounce of these ideas and together we create the work, it is a conversation back and forward together.
What do you think the audience will enjoy most about this work?

There is a lot to enjoy in this work. The music is gorgeous, sung live by TAV. The story will connect with the audience- it is about real people, and some may even relate some of the characters to people in their own lives.

Six artists from TAV, an ensemble of six dancers from Expressions Dance Company (EDC), and twelve senior community members from W@W unite to profoundly connect with our fundamental instrument, the human voice, coupling it with the organic humanity of dance. The chorus of singers in the tradition of a Greek chorus lends a soaring collective voice not only to the pivotal moments of life, but also to the small, everyday moments that are no less a part of being human. The defining moments and the seemingly mundane moments have their own special flow and rhythm that are communicated through a stirring integration of voice and body, the dancers taking on the emotion of the music.

It is a very emotional work, I think the audience will go on quite a rollercoaster of a ride watching it.
How do you prepare for your role as this character?

At the beginning of the creative process I was given the character by Natalie Weir and she explained how she imagined the role, the general feel of the scenes that I would perform and how I would support other characters. She then provided us with specific tasks; solos, duets, trios and group work ideas to work on and gave us time in isolation to develop these ideas. She would then shape them into scenes and give them an order according to her overall scheme for the work. In preparing for a character it is important for me to ask questions to myself about the character; Answering these questions helps me to drill down a little deeper into the motivations and the subconscious emotional qualities of each character that I play.

I find that searching for mannerisms or small movement gestures that identify the character is also important. If you were to watch people in the street closely, you would see that every person has a unique but subtle way of holding their body or performing everyday tasks and movements.

What have you enjoyed most about the creation process of this work?

I have loved having the luxury of working on this piece for three different short creative development periods over the past 2 years. This has been wonderful because it has allowed us to try things and then let them sit (while we work on other projects) and then return to them after time has passed. This gives a new fresh perspective on the ideas and themes.

It feels like the time in between each development phase has allowed ideas to mature and also for new ideas to emerge, contributing to a complexity or richness with multiple layers of meaning.

Was it difficult creating movement for your character?

I like to create a personal internal monologue (in my mind) that helps me to generate movement that I feel is being true to the character at that point in time. This helps the audience to ‘read’ the scene, when each character is aligned around a common purpose.

What have you enjoyed most about the choreographic process of the work?

I have loved watching all of the dancers come up with very unique individual movement to embody their characters and I love seeing the way everyone interprets information differently with their body. I really enjoy work that is driven from a narrative idea or theme, so seeing this manifest into a really tangible narrative has been a joy to watch. I’ve also enjoyed being able to have so much input into the movement that I perform. I feel that because the movement has come from my body, it feels natural and it allows me to feel ‘ownership’ of my performance.

I find that is important for a dancer to feel completely comfortable with their work, knowing that it has their own personal imprint or signature.

I love that this work makes a big deal about the everyday moments. Through this beautiful journey of the man through the memories of his life I think that there will be moments from the show that will resonate with audiences relating to friendship, family, love, loss, war and ageing. These are things that we all experience on a daily basis and I think it will be very touching for audiences and will give them opportunity to reflect on the precious moments, past and present, in their own lives.

FOR TEACHERS: Teachers may like to work with this paragraph as a stimulus for Unit 4: Moving my way, from the QCAA Dance 2019 General Senior Syllabus, as a method of encouraging and provoking students to explore and develop their own movement and choreographic style.
**ACTIVITY: QUESTION YOUR CHARACTER**

Elise uses series of questions to explore her character. Complete the table below to create a character for a short solo piece or for the character you are currently working on for an upcoming performance.

In the first column, formulate a list of character questions. Questions may include: What age is my character? Where are they from? What drives them? What makes them happy/sad? If alone, what would they do? In the second column write your answer.

In the third column, write way in which your movement could reflect that answer.

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**ACTIVITY: INTERNAL MONOLOGUE**

Elise creates a monologue to generate movement. Write a short monologue for your character in the box below. Alternatively you could make a voice recording.
INTERVIEW: DANCER, RICHARD CAUSER

How do you prepare for your role as this character?

My character is an exciting challenge to prepare for as he is played by 4 dancers. Therefore, there is a lot of sharing amongst us about who we are and the characteristics we might embody that can be followed through to each of us. There is a lot of depth to the character and so many possibilities.

I start to create a backstory of all the events that haven’t been seen in the show, and use these impacts on his life to create this character. Having layers of personality for the character to draw from helps me develop the movement and execute it in a believable way.

Was it difficult creating movement for your character?

Our tasks were extremely broad, and the characters’ journeys could go in any direction. Once I was on a roll though, movement started to flood me. I worked mostly off emotions, and moods rather than literal narrative.

So the challenge for me was to try and understand what and why I am creating this movement and how does it fit into the character’s entire story and the whole work.

What do you think audiences will enjoy most about this work?

I think audiences will relate to certain scenes in their own way. It’s a work that is easy to understand but deep and complex in the back story. They will enjoy the partnering work. It’s beautiful and powerful.

FOR TEACHERS: Teachers may like to provide small groups of students with the same choreographic stimulus. Through a free inquiry approach, students work independently from this stimulus and later share their works with one another. From here, discussion about the range of interpretations, similarities and differences between finished works from the same starting point can be explored.

INTERVIEW: DANCER, JAKE MCLARNON

What have you enjoyed most about the creation process of this work?

This creation period has been an extremely collaborative process right from the start. The dancers have all been provided with the opportunity to produce ideas on not only the movement, but the storyline and transitions between each character and scene also.

Activity: Students may like to form professional teams and take on roles to learn hands on, practical collaborative skills. With a variety of students in charge of the production elements of a performance or choreographic work, as well as directing, choreographing and performing. Students will not only gain a variety of production and performance skills through this process, but also learn time-management, problem solving and professional creative skills.

Was it difficult creating movement for your character?

I struggled in particular with the war scene as I had a hard time trying to create movement that didn’t literally depict the horror scenes commonly portrayed in battles, but rather use the dynamic qualities to generate the same feeling whilst dancing.

What do you think audiences will enjoy most about this work?

This show contains a lot of emotional life events that I think are very relatable. Either the experience has happened to you or a loved one, causing a sympathetic
INTERVIEW: DANCER, ISABELLA HOOD

How do you prepare for your role as this character?
To prepare for the role of the young love interest, I drew inspiration from what I have learnt from my own past experiences, as well as from what I have seen in films, TV shows and read in books. This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the laws of attraction and the complexities of a relationship. In particular, how quickly emotions can shift and exchange, and the nuanced ways in which they can be influenced by others.

Within the work, being clear about how I connect with each movement emotionally and how this then relates to my dance partners, either by thinking through sensation, spatial relationships, the movement’s energy trajectory, my focus and movement quality etc. Knowing exactly what I am feeling in each moment also really aids in the clarity and structure of the phrase, and connects with the emotional journey and audience experience.

Was it difficult creating movement for your character?
In a way, achieving the appropriate personality of my character, whether she was at moments playful, cheeky, tender, considerate, flirty, or all of the above, deemed it difficult to find the best way to execute certain movements.

I had to play with the speed and the quality, and decide where each movement was initiated from to help create a phrase of movement that effectively defined my characters mood and identity.

What do you think audiences will enjoy most about this work?
I think the audience will have no choice but to be overwhelmed with emotion and raw wonderment through the way Natalie and the creatives have poignantly constructed the flow from scene to scene, the characters’ interweaving stories and the athletic beauty manifested by the dancers’ physicality.

ACTIVITY: CREATE MOVEMENT PHRASES VISUALLY USING CARDS

In this group activity, you will use individual sheets of paper or card to map out sections of your choreography visually.

Write out the steps on each sheet of paper/card.

Place your cards in a sequence. Try 3 different sequences. What sequence do you think works best, and why?
Discuss within the group.

Add choreographic devices and manipulations in order to enhance the intention of your work.

STORYBOARDING

An important development aspect of the work Everyday Requiem was the storyboard devised by Natalie Weir. This details a timeline of Brian Lucas’ character’s life and work from 1928 to 2018, and features not only character names, important dates in their lives and potential scene ideas, but also key cultural, political, historical and social events that occurred throughout this period of time. These important dates aid in the dancers’ ability to convey the expressive movement signature to Expressions Dance Company.

“This particular show has required a lot of research about the time period in which it takes place. In particular, objects used throughout the show, cultural and social attitudes as well as interactions between characters.”
- Company Dancer Jake McLarnon

DISCUSSION:
What are the benefits of using a storyboard or mood board (or perhaps even an app like Pinterest) to assist you with the development and clarity of your choreographic intention and movement?
“The dancers input to the final product is enormous. Each scene is important to telling the story, and the dancers have to completely understand their characters and their place in the work.”
- Artistic Director Natalie Weir

Known for her incredibly physical partner work, organic movement style and touching insight into human nature, Natalie Weir’s choreographic approaches are highly unique and well renowned for successfully conveying raw human emotion. Weir describes the most important choreographic process during the development of Everyday Requiem as the decision to use three male dancers to portray the one character at different stages of his life – a young child, a teenager and a mature adult. She states that this device is very important to the work as audiences need to believe that three individual dancers are the same character at the same time.

“Due to the fact that we are playing characters, our intent and purpose through our bodies needs to be clear so that the story can be conveyed clearly. I’ve really enjoyed creating material in a way that expresses the nature of my character and the actions of my character... I enjoy the trial and error of choreographic processes.”
- Company dancer Scott Ewen

**ACTIVITY: USING STIMULUS**

Natalie Weir creates movement by taking influence from the same stimulus.

Your teacher will show the class a form of stimulus such as a photo, object, word/quote or mood board.

Develop and then perform some movement motifs based on this stimulus.

Following your presentation, explain your interpretation of the stimulus.

As each student presents, discuss the varying range of interpretations of the same stimulus, and compare and contrast the differences between the movement generated. To frame your discussion, identify how elements of dance, spatial elements, dynamic elements and choreographic devices were used.
YEARS 7 - 10 MAKING ACTIVITIES

Working in groups, students can improvise freeze frame scenes of both celebration and tragedy – two important themes in the work *Everyday Requiem*. Students can then begin to add movement to these freeze frames and turn them into living scenes of emotional intent. This activity can be taken further again with students combining their scenes, interacting and responding to one another through improvisation or planned choreography. This could be achieved through a range of individual dance genres, styles and fusions of more than one.

Students can learn to develop and enhance their personal style of choreography by looking at the prominent theme of everyday moments in life from *Everyday Requiem*, particularly those that have been touched by celebration or tragedy. Students may begin by listing gestures or nuances, then creating motifs of everyday moments, actions, rituals and traditions that occur in their lives. Students can build on these motifs through the implementation of the elements of dance, while using manipulation through choreographic devices. After brainstorming, discussing, creating storyboards and mood boards for these moments touched by celebration or tragedy, students can build on their expressive skills while exploring choreographic processes similar to those of Weir’s.

YEARS 7 - 10 RESPONDING ACTIVITIES

Students can explore the quote “An ordinary life is the most extraordinary story of all” as a choreographic stimulus through:

- Pairing up and defining in their own words how this quote resonates with them.
- Researching an influential person in the history of dance who reflects this phrase.
- Students can present a stimulus poster for movement phrases to their peers with a variety of images, videos, sounds, descriptive works, both movement and non-movement components such as production elements that evoke the essence of an influential person in dance history. Teachers may also like to focus students’ research on an influential Indigenous Australian or Asian person in the history of dance, in order to expand their Cross-Curriculum Priority knowledge and understanding.

In order to support students’ understanding of the work *Everyday Requiem*, a research task in which the important moments in Australia’s dance history from the 1950s to the present could be facilitated. Students may like to pick a time period to research in pairs or small groups, or topics could be selected at random. Students can then present their found information to the rest of the class through a presentation that may include movement and non-movement components such as production elements, and even teaching their peers a dance move from this era. Students can focus on the key historical, social, cultural and political events that have shaped Dance in Australia as did Natalie Weir when choreographing *Everyday Requiem*. 
Unit 3: Moving statements: How is dance used to communicate viewpoints?

In this unit of work, students are required to investigate how choreographers use dance to communicate various viewpoints to a range of audiences. Through the creation and performance of their own dance works, students will communicate meaning by examining Australian and International choreographers and their dance works. The life experiences of these choreographers and how this influences the subject matter of their work, as well as the choreographic processes conducted will be explored. Students can engage in this inquiry by:

• Participating in additional research, students can map out the life of the main character from the 1950s onwards, as represented in Every Day Requiem through the form of a storyboard.
• Students can combine this storyboard or timeline with the life experiences and choreographic processes of Natalie Weir and build a portfolio of stimulus ideas to inform their future work.

Unit 4: Moving my way: How does dance communicate meaning for me?

In this unit of work, students are required to explore how dance communicates meaning for them through the investigation of how a choreographer’s movement style and dances reflect their personal experiences and geographical, historical and socio-cultural contexts. As these influences impact the viewpoints conveyed by choreographers in the creation and performance of their work, students will explore Natalie Weir’s approach to meaning making in her work Everyday Requiem.

After researching Natalie Weir’s background and choreographic influences as a class, in small groups or individually, students can compare how these are reflected in their own work. Students may like to go further by beginning to integrate elements of her choreographic approach into their current choreographic portfolios. This could be achieved by students through:

• The development of a concept map that details their current choreographic processes and styles. Students can then make links of similarity and difference to Weir’s choreographic approaches and evaluate how these resonate with their own individual style.
• After completing in depth research on Weir’s choreographic processes, students may like to experiment with her signature physical partner work or expressive movement that details raw human emotions, in their current choreography, through both planned and improvised movement.
• A subject matter to explore could be the fusion of contemporary dance with music and song in the work Everyday Requiem, and how students can utilise the combination of these two mediums to enhance their choreographic style and intention.
• Students may also evaluate, through analysis and interpretation, the effectiveness of sound and dance combined, to enhance the intention of their own and realisation in others choreography.