

# LAZARUS

By David Bowie + Enda Walsh

## TEACHING RESOURCES

*Australian Premiere Season presented by The Production Company at Arts Centre Melbourne*



## Teachers' Resources

### Written and prepared by Katy Warner

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Arts Centre Melbourne's Schools Program is dedicated to fostering the arts by giving schools the opportunity to see a diverse range of excellent theatre in fully produced form.

These education resources have been created for students in Years 9 - 12.

The content is designed so teachers can adapt and develop the discussion and activities according to their students' learning needs, existing programs and school contexts.

The resources have been developed with a view to addressing the following:

Learning Areas	Capabilities
The Arts	Critical and Creative Thinking
English	Personal and Social
Technologies	
<b>VCE</b>	
Drama, Theatre Studies, Dance, Visual Communication and Design, Extended Investigation, Music	

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## About the show

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*Lazarus* was a dream come true for David Bowie, for decades he had spoken about writing a show, and when it was announced off-Broadway in 2015 the entire season sold out in a few hours. When I read the script I found it incredibly moving, especially knowing that it was one of his final projects. And seeing songs like *Heroes* and *Changes* come out of the story was just spine tingling. It's rare to find a musical like *Lazarus*.

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Rachel D Taylor, Executive Director

## LAZARUS

BY DAVID BOWIE AND ENDA WALSH

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION DIRECTION IVO VAN HOVE

INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL *THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH* BY WALTER TEVIS

Inspired by the book, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, *Lazarus* focuses on Thomas Newton, as he remains still on Earth - a 'man' unable to die, his head soaked in cheap gin and haunted by a past love. We follow Newton during the course of a few days where the arrival of another lost soul - might set him finally free.

*Lazarus* premiered at the [New York Theatre Workshop](#) from 18 November 2015 until 20 January 2016 and sold out in record time. The show then played a limited sell-out season at the purpose built King's Cross Theatre in London from 25 October 2016 – 22 January 2017.

## THE PRODUCTION COMPANY | AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE

**DIRECTOR**  
Michael Kantor

**MUSICAL DIRECTOR**  
Jethro Woodward

**CHOREOGRAPHER**  
Stephanie Lake

**COSTUME & SET**  
Anna Cordingley

**LIGHTING**  
Paul Jackson

**FILM DIRECTION**  
Natasha Pincus

**CAST**  
**NEWTON**  
Chris Ryan

**VALENTINE**  
iOTA

**GIRL**  
Emily Milledge

**ELLY**  
Phoebe Panaretos

**MICHAEL**  
Mike McLeish

### COMPANY

Baylie Carson, Josh Gates, Kaori Maeda-Judge, Jessie Monk, Jessica Vellucci, Mat Verevis

### UNDERSTUDIES

Kaya Byrne, Andrew Cook, Mackenzie Dunn



Enda Walsh. 2016. Irish Examiner.

### **ENDA WALSH TALKS WITH NICK HERN BOOKS ABOUT HIS COLLABORATION WITH DAVID BOWIE ON *LAZARUS*.**

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David Bowie had passed me a four-page document to read so we could begin our discussions on writing a new story with his songs – and based upon the character of Thomas Newton from the Walter Tevis novel *The Man Who Fell to Earth* – which David had famously played in the Nicolas Roeg film. In the room was the theatre and film producer Robert Fox and David’s right hand, Coco Schwab. As I started to read those four pages, the room was very quiet. Earlier, I had been feeling very calm and detached as I walked towards David’s building with Robert – as we stood in the elevator, as that ridiculously wide office door opened, and Mr David Bowie was standing there. He hugged me and the first thing he said to me was ‘You’ve been in my head for three weeks.’ We sat and we chatted about my work (he had read everything) and why I was writing the way I was – and what themes kept returning into my plays like a

nasty itch. I spent that whole morning and now this first hour of our first meeting in a state of serene self-confidence.

It was only at the moment when he said, ‘This is where I’d like to start’, when he pushed those four pages towards me, that I was hit with the realisation that I was sitting opposite this cultural icon – this man who had created so much and influenced so many. This bloody genius [...] I felt like a child – and at that point of silently ‘reading’ – a child who had once the ability to read words but had forgotten how to read. I scanned the first page and all I heard was interference – my own insecurities screaming at me. I stopped reading, took a deep breath and read from the first line again.

David had written three new characters around Thomas Newton (the stranded alien, seemingly immortal and definitely stuck). There was a Girl who may or may not be real; a ‘mass murderer’ called Valentine; and a character of a woman who thought she might be Emma Lazarus (the American poet whose poem ‘The New Colossus’ is engraved on the base of the Statue of Liberty) – a woman in this case who would help and fall in love with this most travelled of immigrants – Thomas Newton.

At the centre of these four pages was a simple, powerful image: Thomas Newton would build a rocket from debris. His mind, having further deteriorated, would torture and tease him with the dream of escape; and in his imprisonment – in his room in this big tower – Newton would try one last time to leave. So this is where we started.

We talked around the characters and the themes of the book. On isolation and madness and drug abuse and alcoholism and the torment of immortality. And there was a lot of talk about the beauty of unconditional love and goodness. We talked about characters finding themselves out of control – about the story sliding into a murky sadness and quick violence – about characters having drab conversations about television snacks – the everyday bending quickly and becoming Greek tragedy.

For the first few meetings Coco stayed silent and listened to us (until she couldn't listen to us any more maybe!), and then she asked, 'Yeah, but what happens?' It was a fair question and one that we would return to – but we weren't there yet. We needed to get a sense of the themes of it and its atmosphere and its world. The narrative trajectory of a man wanting to leave Earth and being helped by some and stopped by others – this was there in David's four pages and would remain in our story, but the events of the story would emerge later.

And then there were the songs.

David handed me a folder of lyrics and CDs he had put together. 'Some of these you'll know.' It was a bloody funny thing to say. We would hammer out the story together, but initially he wanted me to choose the songs we would use. I guess he had lived with some of them for years and there must have been unshakable associations – maybe it would be easier for me to listen to them coldly from a purely narrative perspective.

His lyrics often arrive cut-up and opaque – so it was rarely about listening to the words and sticking it into the story. It was about the emotion, rhythm and atmosphere of those songs – and having the characters riding that wave and accessing their souls, where they could lyrically go to those strange places.

We talked about the form – the shape of the story arriving broken and a little shattered. We talked about a person dying and the moments before death and what might happen in their mind and how that would be constructed on stage. We started talking about escape, but we ended up talking about a person trying to find rest. About dying in an easier way. Newton would spend his last moments trying to stop a bullying mind that kept him living. Physically it didn't matter to us whether he was on Earth or in the stars at the very end. We wanted Newton – in his terms – to feel at rest.

No matter how plays come out, you always end up talking about yourself. David was certainly the most superb shapeshifter – one of the greatest ever

collaborators too – someone who could walk his colleagues in directions they'd yet seen. But for me he remained personal in his work and spoke about where he was at that moment in really truthful terms.

*Lazarus* arrived at both of us with its own swagger and shape and emotion. It's a strange, difficult and sometimes sad dream Newton must live through – but in its conclusion, he wins his peace.

**From the Introduction to *Lazarus: The Complete Book and Lyrics* by David Bowie and Enda Walsh, [Nick Hern Books](#).**

## CONSIDER

- If you could choose any artist to write a musical with who would it be and why?
- What do you think are the keys to a good collaboration? What skills are required? What are the positives of collaboration?



David Bowie (centre) and Enda Walsh (far right) with the cast on the opening night of *Lazarus* in New York, December 2015.

In his interview with The Irish Times, Enda Walsh says:

*We [Walsh and David Bowie] had to read the rhythm of the piece and we knew what we were creating was this fever dream. It wasn't a straight narrative. It was sort of hallucinogenic weirdness, you know? And we were very, very happy with that.*

## **DISCUSS**

- What is narrative?
  
- Have you seen any shows, films or television programs which don't follow a 'straight narrative'? What were they and how did they work?
  
- What would you expect from a performance described as a 'fever dream'? After you see the show, consider this description. Do you agree with Walsh? Why / why not? How would you describe it?
  
- Many playwrights read their work out loud as they write – why do you think this is particularly important for writers of plays or musicals?



## In The Rehearsal Room

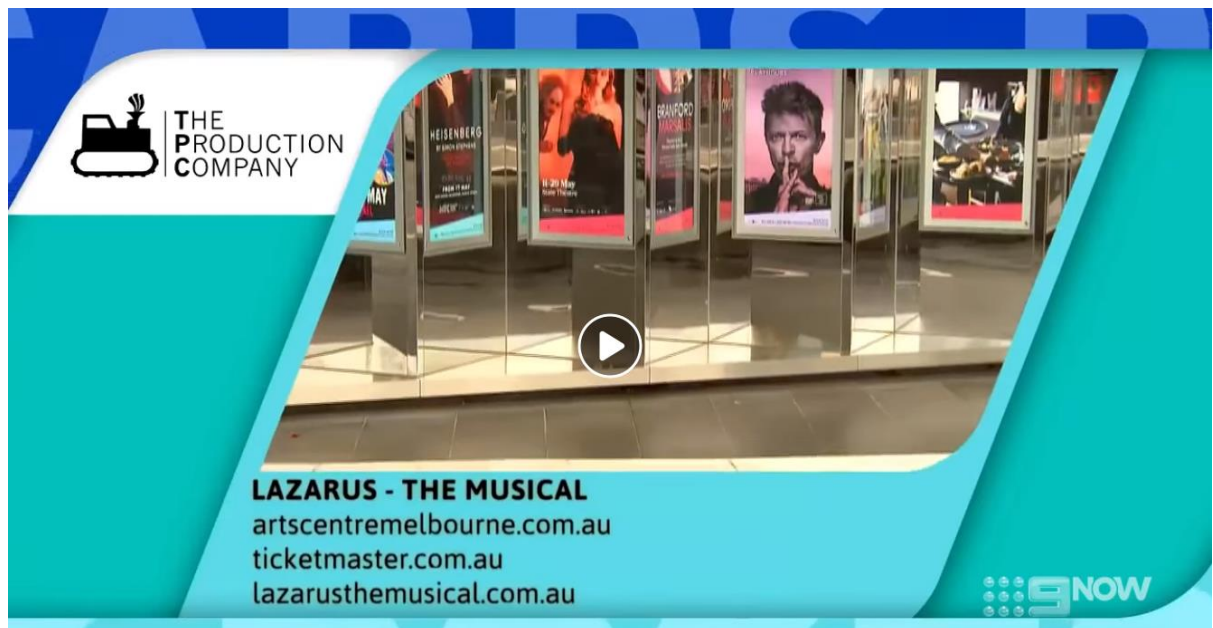
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WATCH Channel Nine's Postcards segment on the The Production Company's Australian Premiere of **Lazarus**

Available on The Production Company's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/theprodco/videos/333941360639149/>



### ACTING

- Lead actor, Chris Ryan, explains that while there is a 'ton of pressure' in taking on the role of Thomas Newton it also a 'huge honour'. Consider why Ryan would feel that way? How would you, as an actor, prepare for a role like that?
- Consider Chris Ryan's comment about the role:

*I'm certainly not trying to emulate what Bowie did or who Bowie is because I'm not sure anyone is that cool. I think it's in the spirit of the piece, anyway. I mean, Bowie was a great collaborator so we're all trying to bring ourselves to the piece.*

- What do you think could be the challenges in playing a role made famous by such an iconic figure?
  - How do actors bring themselves to a role? How would you approach it?
- The interview asks actor Phoebe Panaretos how she transforms night after night. Consider Phoebe's response:

*I think it's a combination of costumes and lights and make-up but really the foundation is made when you're in the rehearsal room – that's where you start to compile who the character is and how you interject as an artist and a person into that.*

- What is meant by transformation in acting terms?
- How do you think the elements Phoebe mentions (costumes, lights, make-up) help actors transform into characters onstage? What else could help an actor transform and how?
- When Phoebe talks about making the 'foundation' in rehearsal what do you think she is referring to? Think about your own rehearsal process and character preparation. What techniques do you find useful? How? Why?

## **DIRECTION**

- Director, Michael Kantor, speaks a little of his process:

*I always start any new work just with the script. We're building our own, new and Australian production. There's a great arty, wild sense of experimentation as it should be with David Bowie looking over our shoulder at all time.*

- What makes a production 'Australian'?
- Why do you think Kantor would start 'just with the script'? What do you think he is looking for in the script? How does the script inform directorial decisions?

- After you see the production, consider Kantor's comment about the work having a 'wild sense of experimentation.' Did you see elements of this in the direction of the work?
- What skills do you think a musical theatre director needs?

## **COSTUMES**

- Costume designer, Anna Cordingley, explains how David Bowie inspired her designs:

*He [the character of Valentino] has a smattering of costumes from across David Bowie's history of outlandish outfits.*

- Research the history of Bowie's 'outlandish outfits' – make a timeline of his costumes and changes in style.
- If you had to choose one Bowie style or era to design a costume for the villainous character of Valentino, what would you choose and why? Use this as the starting point or inspiration for your own costume design.
- Why do you think Cordingley only used a 'smattering' of Bowie inspired costumes?
- After you see the show, discuss the use of costume - how did it present character? Themes? What did you notice about Cordingley's choices?

## **CHOREOGRAPHY**

- Stephanie Lake is best-known for her contemporary dance practice, however in her choreography for this production she tells the interviewer she has used

*... quite a mash up of different styles, from hip-hop to club, there's a bit of cheerleading, there's some Sailor-Moon-Japanese-aesthetic and then, of course, there's a bit of the David Bowie physicality as well.*

- What is the role of a choreographer in a musical theatre production?

- What reasons do you think Lake has used a 'mash up' of dance styles? Have you ever seen a production which mashes up such different styles? What was the effect?
- While you watch the production, take note of the different dance styles you see. How were they used? What was the effect of each style?
- Would the production have been served through the use of only one dance style (e.g. contemporary)? What did the 'mash up' add to the production?



Still from video created by Natasha Pincus for *Lazarus*



**WATCH** these short videos which give a sense of the work Pincus has created for the production. The Production Company shared these videos on their [Facebook Page](#) and [Instagram](#)

*Lazarus* Film Director, Natasha Pincus, has said:

*Bowie's music, and the man himself, are hard to adequately describe with words. It's best to use images.*

### **Discuss**

- What do you think Pincus means when she says Bowie is better described with images than words? What can images do that words cannot?

- How do these example videos use cohesion, motion, contrast? What effect do they create? What messages or themes or moods do you notice?
- Once you have seen the production, discuss how the film worked with the other elements of staging. What did it add to the production? How did it work in overall composition of the production?
- What theatre technologies do you think were used in the production of the video? Pincus also shared some great photographs of her process on her company's [Facebook Page \(Stark Raving Productions\)](#) – take a look at these images, and consider the planning, preparation and production required to create something like this.



**Read** this [article Sydney Morning Herald](#) which provides more insight into the director and design decisions made for the Australian premiere of *Lazarus*.

## **Create**

Ask students to choose a song and, instead of words, consider the images that help build the meaning, understanding or mood of the song. They will produce their own version of a collage video.

- Create a mood board, full of images and video that may be used in the development of their own video collage. These websites provide links / ideas to free online mood board templates:

<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/mood-board-apps-with-free-template/>

<https://www.creativebloq.com/graphic-design/16-great-tools-creating-mood-boards-91412793>

or with Adobe Spark <https://spark.adobe.com/make/mood-board-maker/>

- This lesson plan on creating REMIX Videos is a great resource, which could be useful in working with students in the development of their own collage (or remix) video. (Please note, this resource is from the US)  
[https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/lesson-plans/lesson\\_remixing\\_media.pdf](https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/lesson-plans/lesson_remixing_media.pdf)

## The Music and The Man

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Watch The Production Company's promo video about the music of *Lazarus*

<https://www.facebook.com/theprodco/videos/695860167537432/>

Musical Director, Jethro Woodward, has said about Bowie:

*He creates a whole universe out of the songs.*

### **Listen**

If students are not familiar with Bowie's work, listen to some of his songs as a class and consider Woodward's statement above.

### **Teaching about David Bowie**

The Guardian scoured the web to find interesting links, resources and lessons for teachers wanting to teach their students about David Bowie.

Have a look: <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/jan/13/teaching-about-david-bowie-links-lessons-and-inspiration>



## Reviews and Further Reading

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### ARTICLES

‘Beautiful’: Playwright recalls working with David Bowie on Lazarus

By Stephanie Bunbury, Sydney Morning Herald, May 10 2019

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/musicals/beautiful-playwright-recalls-working-with-david-bowie-on-lazarus-20190508-p51172.html>

Lazarus writer Enda Walsh on Bowie: ‘He had more to write’

By Vincent Dowd, BBC News, 5 November 2016

<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-37871935>

After David Bowie’s Death, ‘Lazarus’ Holds New Meaning for Fans

By Michael Paulson, New York Times, 13 January 2016

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/14/theater/after-david-bowie-death-lazarus-holds-new-meaning-for-fans.html>

### REVIEWS

Lazarus review, The Guardian, 8 December 2015

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/dec/08/lazarus-review-david-bowie-jukebox-musical-off-broadway-new-york>

Review: David Bowie Songs and a Familiar Alien in ‘Lazarus’

By Ben Brantley, New York Times, 7 December 2015

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/08/theater/review-david-bowie-songs-and-a-familiar-alien-in-lazarus.html>

Album of the Week: Lazarus – original cast recording to the musical

Irish Times, 21 October 2016

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/album-reviews/album-of-the-week-lazarus-original-cast-recording-to-the-musical-by-david-bowie-and-enda-walsh-1.2833015>

INTERVIEW – with original cast member

Michael C Hall on playing Bowie on stage and why death stalks him

The Guardian, 17 January 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/jan/17/michael-c-hall-on-playing-bowie-on-stage-and-why-death-stalks-him>

INTERVIEW – with original production’s director

Ivo van Hove: ‘I give it all as Bowie gave it all – in a masked way’

The Guardian, 6 November 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/06/ivo-van-hove-i-give-it-all-like-bowie-gave-it-all-in-a-masked-way-lazarus-interview>

Lazarus the musical - official website <http://lazarusthemusical.com.au/>

The Production Company website <https://www.theproductioncompany.com.au/>