

# Australian live theatre analysis assignment

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Written by Nikeisha Avio Live Theatre Analysis Year 12 Drama Term 2 “ The quality of live theatre in Brisbane is all but dead. The growth of urban cinema complexes, video rental and now cable, have left little room in the entertainment practices of most Brisbanites. ” It is a truth that in such a technologically savvy and dependant generation as today’s, venturing to the theatre is slowly becoming a rarity. This is due to the strong, extensive domination of film, television and new media, clearly eminent in the present entertainment industry.

Live theatre in Brisbane is constantly competing with the comfort and affordability of staying in and enjoying a pre-recorded television show or watching a 3D movie in one’s own home. There is next to no motivation for people in today’s general public to attend a theatrical performance leading to the classification of live theatre as passe and dated. However this does not in any way signify that the quality of theatre has degraded.

For those who enjoy the emotive and interactive experience of attending live theatre, Brisbane has an array of diverse shows that are perfect indicators of the level of high quality theatre that is available to the community. In fact through the thorough analysis of three different levels of productions: Wicked, Summer and Smoke and Lying Cheating Bastard this essay will attempt to prove that through the manipulation of the elements of tension and relationships within each of these plays, dramatic meaning is created and the quality of theatre is heightened.

The world-acknowledged, professional production of Wicked the Musical, is indeed a piece of quality theatre. With theatre goers attending the show

expecting to be blown away with the glorious sets and costumes, it is not usually a play that is put under the analytical microscope. What theatre goers often miss from the whole show is the amount of deep dramatic meaning there is at it's core. Wicked is essentially about the hard decisions and choices in human relationships, and found in human relationships is dramatic tension. According to Brad Haseman and John O'Toole, " tension is the force which drives our drama... it is the most important element and no drama exists without it ??? it must be created and can be easily lost" (Haseman and O'Toole 1986, p18) Tension is apparent as a vital element of drama in all of the relationships between the characters in Wicked. The relationship that allows for prime analysis is the friendship between Elphaba and Glinda. Throughout the entirety of the play Elphaba faces hardships in all of her relationships. She encounters difficulties in being accepted by her peers, parents and wider community.

She stands out not only due to her difference in appearance, but beliefs. The only relationship that Elphaba encountered to be real and worth fighting for was her relationship with Glinda, however even this relationship was hampered by conflict and dilemma. When it comes to the types of tension " human relationships are the central components of dramatic situations" (Haseman and O'Toole, 1996 pg22) Consequently the tension of relationships permits the audience to be suspended into a state of disbelief as the reality of the relationship on stage is a mirror to relationships outside of the theatre.

The tension in the relationship between Glinda and Elphaba is palpable to the audience in the scene of " Defying Gravity". This scene is a crucial

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moment between them as Elphaba is forced to make a decision between Glinda's friendship or her own beliefs. The stage is lit very dimly with spotlights illuminating Elphaba and Glinda drawing focus to what dialogue is being exchanged between the two. There is additional tension as the audience knows the clock is racing against time.

When Elphaba asks Glinda to join her in standing up for the wrong that is happening in Oz the audience is sent into a tense and anxious moment in time, what will Glinda choose? When Glinda rejects Elphaba's offer, there is a sense of sadness spread across the stage that is shown in the subtle change of the musical score and lighting. Even the moment when Glinda places the cloak around Elphaba, the cloak is symbolic of a passing on gift, a gesture of love and care. With this symbolism comes the tension of relationships in ceremony, there is something almost ritual like in this moment. It is important to create shared ritual moments in drama, which, of course, also help to slow down or fasten the dramatic action" (Haseman & O'Toole, 1996, pg24) The audience then sees Elphaba holding a broom by herself, clearly portraying the separation between her and Glinda. This moment is truly tense and grieving, the audience is left with a sense of abandonment from Glinda, the audience takes on the persona of Elphaba for just a moment, and in that moment there is quality theatre, where the audience has wholly engaged and become a part of the show.

Focus is then deterred suddenly as guards barge through the doors. This instantly shatters the emotions but the tension is still there, only in a new form, that of the tension of relationship conflict. The guards are trying to capture Elphaba but are distracted by Glinda, the music changes along with <https://assignbuster.com/australian-live-theatre-analysis-assignment/>

the change in mood to a much more thrilling score. Focus is immediately on Elphaba as she is elevating her broomstick and mounting it.

The lighting then suddenly bursts into an aura of green surrounding Elphaba. She is the centre of all attention as she begins to belt out the empowering notes of “ Defying Gravity”. The music is powerful and the lights and smoke perfectly add to the moment creating a great mood ultimately enhancing the dramatic meaning. The song is very enchanting, it was barely noticeable that there were other characters on the stage carrying pitchforks and nooses. Focus is solely on Elphaba as she is in the sky.

Through this investigation it is clear to see that there is in fact great depth to what is going on underneath all the glitz and glam of the production, though it was a professional production and the use of music and special effects were effective and aided in the engagement of the audience the true quality moments were those found in the smallest of gestures like the placing of the cloak. The manipulation of tension in the relationship of Elphaba and Glinda allowed for dramatic meaning to be constructed, in accordance great quality theatre was witnessed.

Summer and smoke was an amateur performance featuring 3rd year acting students. The play was written by famous playwright Tennessee Williams, the story revolves around two characters Alma and John. When comparing Wicked with Summer and Smoke it is clear to say that Summer and Smoke most definitively worked on a deeper level of tension in acting. However a play that is deeply affecting, Summer and Smoke is a simple love story of a somewhat prudish Southern girl and a discontented, wild young doctor.

Each is basically attracted to the other but because of their divergent attitudes towards life, love and sex, each over the course of years is driven away from the other. Not until the end does John realise that Alma's high respect for spirituality in relationships is ultimately right, and while she is still in love with him, it turns out that neither time nor circumstances will allow the two to come together. By reiterating the point that tension drives all drama, the main element tangible in this production of *Summer and Smoke* was tension in the form of relationships.

The actors allowed for great chemistry to be formed and the audience was really able to engage with the reality of their on-stage romance. This created tension all throughout the play, but it is in the scene where Alma confesses her willingness to have sex with John and John is no longer willing; that there is tension of relationship in misunderstanding. " Misunderstandings and the consequences which flow from them, provide the source of much dramatic tension. " (Haseman & O'Toole, 1996, pg32) Alma is left with a broken heart when she rapidly discovers that John is engaged to another woman, Nellie; who was Alma's student once.

This scene is pivotal to the entire story, as this is the scene where the raw emotion of the actors allowed for complete connection with the audience and showcased a truly engaging performance. There was a great amount of focus on Alma and John, Nellie who was also on stage was not as noticeable as the two main characters. The dramatic meaning found in the mere acting and tension between the tragic relationship of Alma and John in this play was well executed only reinforcing the fact that quality theatre is not dead in Brisbane.

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In complete contrast to *Wicked* and *Summer and Smoke*, *Lying Cheating Bastard* was a one-man semi-professional show. Regardless of the lack of actors the story brilliantly told the tale of how a young man, Jimmy “the Cricket” Garcia was drawn into the decrepit underbelly of Sydney, and became the most successful conman in Australia by the time he was 27. The show was executed with minimal props and the focus was on the actor the entire time. The stage was set like the inside of a sleek upper-class apartment. Interwoven through the story were a series of tricks and demonstrations with cards.

The fourth wall was broken many times when the actor asked people to donate money to a trick demonstration. Despite the fourth wall being broken there was still a high level of engagement on the audience’s behalf. There were many tense moments throughout the story however the most intense and crucial was that of the end. The end scene revolved around the Cricket being caught out of a scam at a well-known Sydney casino, being left with nothing, beaten and still owing money to his mentor; a man that betrayed him.

The relationship with his mentor was showcased through an over head voice. This relationship was torn when the Cricket learned that he was solely being used as a prodigy to help win his mentor large profits. This vital moment in time was filled with tension as their relationship was broken. The two of them had shared the secret lives of being con-artists together. According to Brad Haseman and John O’Toole “the pivotal moment when someone confides in you, there is a degree of tension ??? this is because a secret bonds people together ??? it is an act of trust. Their trust was broken, therefore ending  
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their relationship. As the scene ended there was complete focus was on the actor as he silently fidgeted with his poker chip. A chip that had stayed with him from the very beginning of the play. This gestus was a perfect indication to how much tension there was in the scene because it became clear to the audience that every time something went wrong, the Cricket would use this gestus as a form of stress-relief. Consequently when he smashed the chip on the ground it was indeed the end of his “ conning career”.

The silence, the single spotlight and the soft sound of his sobbing resonated throughout the theatre. The audience was still, not a murmur and there was a connection on a deeper level as everyone realised the morality of the play, creating an absolute moment of dramatic meaning. In conclusion with thorough analytical dissection of each production it is apparent that theatre is not dead in Brisbane, in fact it is quite the opposite. Each of the productions, regardless of their professionalism were of high calibre and generated dramatic meaning through the effective use of two vital elements of drama, tension and relationships. The manipulation of the sets, the lighting, music and special effects in Wicked enhanced the quality in professional productions. Summer and Smoke was a perfect example how the chemistry between the actors on stage is a vital part to live performances. Lying Cheating Bastard showcased that there is no need for extravagance, just great moments of acting. Every single production encompassed a pivotal moment in time where dramatic meaning predominated.

It was in these moments, these single, sparse moments where it was clearly visible, regardless of society's overall assumption, that live theatre in <https://assignbuster.com/australian-live-theatre-analysis-assignment/>



Brisbane is very much alive and prospering. Bibliography -Haseman, Brad, and John O'Toole. *Dramawise: an Introduction to the Elements of Drama*. Richmond, Vic. : Heinemann Educational Australia, 1988. Print. - (Background reading on Theatre) Burton, Bruce. *Living Drama*. South Melbourne: Pearson Education Australia, 2001. Print -“ Lying Cheating Bastard REVIEW | Theatre Australia. ” Theatre Australia | Your Portal for Australian Theatre. Web. 5 May 2011. ; [http://www.theatre.asn.au/theatre\\_reviews/lying\\_cheating\\_bastard\\_review;](http://www.theatre.asn.au/theatre_reviews/lying_cheating_bastard_review;). -“ Review Of Wicked At The Lyric Theatre QPAC In Brisbane. ” Brisbane Times - Brisbane News, Queensland News ; World News. Web. 05 May 2011. ; <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/entertainment/wicked-20110211-1apgs.html>; -“ Summer and Smoke’: Tennessee Williams Steamy Slice of America - Features, Theatre & Dance - The Independent. ” The Independent | News | UK and Worldwide News | Newspaper. Web. 05 May 2011. ; <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/feature>