

Company B
presents

RUBEN GUTHRIE



Photo: Alex Craig

Written by **Brendan Cowell**

Directed by **Wayne Blair**

Teacher's Notes

Freehills

EDUCATION PARTNER

Company B



Company B sprang into being out of the unique action taken to save the Nimrod Theatre building from demolition in 1984. Rather than lose a performance space in inner city Sydney, more than 600 arts, entertainment and media professionals as well as ardent theatre lovers, formed a syndicate to buy the building. The syndicate included nearly every successful person in Australian show business.

Company B is one of Australia's most celebrated theatre companies. Under the artistic leadership of Neil Armfield, the company performs at its home at Belvoir St Theatre in Surry Hills, Sydney and from there tours to major arts centres and festivals both nationally and internationally. Company B engages Australia's most prominent and promising playwrights, directors, actors and designers to present an annual artistic program that is razor-sharp, popular and challenging.

Belvoir St Theatre's greatly loved Upstairs and Downstairs stages have been the artistic watering holes of many of Australia's great performing artists such as Geoffrey Rush, Cate Blanchett, Jacqueline McKenzie, Noah Taylor, Richard Roxburgh, Max Cullen, Bille Brown, David Wenham, Deborah Mailman and Catherine McClements.

Sellout productions like *Cloudstreet*, *The Judas Kiss*, *The Alchemist*, *Hamlet*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Gulpilil*, *The Sapphires*, *Stuff Happens*, *Keating!*, *Parramatta Girls*, *Exit the King* and *Toy Symphony* have consolidated Company B's position as one of Australia's most innovative and acclaimed theatre companies. Company B also supports outstanding independent theatre companies through its annual B Sharp season.

For more information visit www.belvoir.com.au

COMING UP IN THE UPSTAIRS THEATRE: -

Company B presents

THE PROMISE

Written by **Alexei Arbuzov**
Directed by **Simon Stone**

SEASON DATES: 16 July – 23 Aug

SCHOOLS PERFORMANCES

11.30am on:

Wednesday 29 July
Thursday 6 August
Wednesday 12 August



Chris Ryan, Alison Bell & Ewan Leslie

Each schools performance is followed by a Q&A session with the cast

Company B presents:

RUBEN GUTHRIE

Written by **BRENDAN COWELL**

Directed by **WAYNE BLAIR**

Set & Costume Designer **JACOB NASH**
Lighting Designer **LUIZ PAMPOLHA**
Composer & Sound Designer **STEVE FRANCIS**
Assistant Director **SAM STRONG**
Stage Manager **NELL RANNEY**
Assistant Stage Manager **LYDIA SARKS**

ROY BILLING Ray
MEGAN DRURY Virginia
GEOFF MORRELL Peter
TORQUIL NEILSON Damian
ADRIENNE PICKERING Zoya
TONI SCANLAN Mum
TOBY SCHMITZ Ruben Guthrie

The Company B production of Ruben Guthrie opened at Belvoir St Theatre on 27 May 2009

The original murri fella films production of Ruben Guthrie premiered at Belvoir St Downstairs Theatre on 18 April 2008 as part of the B Sharp Season with the following cast: Megan Drury, Tracy Mann, Lex Marinos, Torquil Neilson, Sam Reed, Toby Schmitz and Christopher Stollery

RUBEN GUTHRIE: Characters

RUBEN GUTHRIE, late 20's, handsome

ZOYA, 19 or 20, and thin

RAY, 50 or 60

PETER, late 50's, early 60's

VIRGINIA, late 20's, or even mid-late 30's

MUM, mid-late 50's

DAMIAN, late 20's, early 30's, and fit



Adrienne Pickering (Zoya) & Toby Schmitz (Ruben)

ACT 1:SCENE 2

Photo: Heidrun Löhr

Ruben Guthrie Synopsis

ACT I

Ruben introduces himself. Clearly, he's at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. He is wearing a sling and begins to explain how he broke his arm but goes off on tangents about his success as 'Creative Director of Subliminal' an advertising agency that prides itself on its edgy campaigns. While celebrating a win for one of these, flooded with alcohol and other substances, he took it into his head to jump off the hotel roof. Ending up first in a children's wading pool, then in hospital – his fiancé Zoya and his mum insisted on bringing him to this meeting to get him to admit – what? Ruben doesn't admit anything, he just reiterates to his loser-like listeners that he is Ruben Guthrie and he is in Advertising.

As he tries to ply her with champers, Zoya, Ruben's Czech model fiancé tells Ruben she is off to a Munich shoot, and after that heading home to Prague to study. Ruben doesn't get it; how can she be leaving him - they're engaged? He threatens, pleads, taunts & reminds her that he supported her through her eating disorder. This is a low blow. Despite his best efforts to keep her with him by reference to desserts and how beautiful she is, Zoya sticks to her guns and goes. Ruben shouts abuse after her; that she can't last without him.

Ruben is back at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, talking about his last bender – an illuminating tale of going off the deep end after client drinks at Cargo Bar, involving warehouse party in Darlington, the Ivy bar, a film actor's penthouse suite, and a lesbian gangster's fibro shack out West. Due to meet Zoya for her 19th birthday dinner; when he finally checks his phone it's next week.

Ray, Ruben's boss saunters in to work with four coffees, two for each of them. He wants to get cracking on the Xtra Light Wheat Beer ad but Ruben wants a heart-to-heart about the difficulties of breaking the drinking habit. Ray is unsympathetic and refuses to be drawn on his own battle with the booze. He rants against the touchy feely ways of metrosexuals, plonks a bottle of vodka in front of Ruben, telling him he's losing his touch and that he should do whatever he needs to do to get his inspiration back. Ruben says he'll drink it if Ray drinks it with him. Ray won't budge; he threatens to call the Board and get Ruben sidelined. Prodded into it, Ruben pitches the ad campaign Ray has been dreaming of – an emotional breakup featuring a hot girl who slams down the Xtra Light Wheat Beer. Ray glories in Ruben's genius, singing the Toohey's jingle to celebrate.

Ruben is telling his AA group about his school days. At a boarding school that he still doesn't get why his parents sent him to, he didn't have that crash hot a time. Much more interested in fashion than in alcohol or in talking about chicks, Ruben had his life made hell by the other guys. That is, until Corey turned up. Corey was tough and for whatever reason he chose Ruben as his friend and made it all stop. They were close. School ended. Corey had to repeat Year 12 and then he got kicked out and stuck in a dead end job bending corrugated iron in a factory, he got into dodgy drugs. One night, Ruben was at uni, Corey called him, upset and saying he needed a friend, that he was sick of everything. Ruben was on his way to a party where his and Damian's lip sync band were playing, he couldn't really give Corey much of his attention. Chill out Corey, he said; I'll call you tomorrow. Then laughed and hung up. They found Corey's body in his dad's boat in the garage. From then on, Ruben tells the meeting, he started to like drinks a lot. If Corey was gone, he thought he'd just drink.

Peter, Ruben's dad, is trying to get Ruben a drink of anything alcoholic, wine, ice cold beer, but Ruben only wants water – mineral or tap. They're out the back of Sun Ye's place, she's the woman Peter has moved in with since he left his wife, Ruben's mum. Ruben tells his dad a few lies about how desperate Zoya is for him to come out and join her. Peter asks Ruben how his wife is and Ruben tells him to call her. He tries to force a glass of wine on Ruben and Ruben shoves it away, spilling it over Peter's shirt, making him mad. Ruben admits that Zoya left him, because of his problem with alcohol. Nothing he

says gets through to his Dad who suggests father/son bonding activities in the Barossa valley. Ruben invites his Dad to the meetings and Peter tells him to get out.

ACT 2

Ruben & Virginia, an ex-addict are standing on the street outside the hall where the meetings are. She asks him if he smokes (she wants a lighter) and provokes a mini-speech on his history of smoking. She tells him he seems tense, that he should come swimming with her, that it does something complex to the electricity in your body, letting you sleep better at nights. Virginia asks him if he wants to get coffee? He says he's not doing that much either. She tells him it doesn't do to be too pure all of a sudden. She's been clean from speed for 6 years. He doesn't get it – he's doing all this not to die, so why smoke? She says go easy for a while, lets slip that she's not with anyone. He latches onto that, says – let's get coffee. But she refuses, says he makes her want to Use, that it's a compliment.

Ruben is calling Zoya in Prague, we sense not for the first time. He blathers on her voicemail – sentimentally longing to see her in a puffy jacket, much to his mum's disgust. Ruben's mum has brought his washing over and she's lamenting her current situation. She asks Ruben if she can move in with him, but he's pondering the origins of his alcoholism - is it a genetic disease or is it generations of pain and sadness that he's inherited? She leaves, comes back to tell him it's the alcohol itself that's to blame. Ruben alone, begins to sing Martika's 'Toy Soldiers'.

Damien, his friend from uni comes in with the next verse. He is bearing much duty free alcohol, back unexpectedly from New York where he went 2 months since to start a new job. He asks Ruben can he stay for a bit? Ruben hesitates, says yes. The next step, according to Damien is to start drinking all the untaxed booze he's brought back. Ruben explains he isn't drinking at all. Damien insists on it – it's what they know best and a sign of true affection to get hammered together. He pressures Ruben and Ruben ends up threatening to put the glass he wants Ruben to drink into Damian's face. He also abusively calls him a faggot, which hurts Damian a lot. Ruben apologises but something between them is a bit broken. Damian tells him how he comes to be here – describes getting fired from his job after developing a brilliant but dangerous idea of the whole office (440 people) being on group messenger chat simultaneously, then accidentally using it to describe to another gay man what he'd like to do sexually to various people in the office, including the Managing Director.

Ray comes into the Subliminal Agency singing Iconic Australian jingles like 'my dad picks the fruit that goes to Cottees' and Ruben joins in what is evidently a practised medley of 90's advertising triumphs. Ray then launches into their next pitch, a pre-mixed vodka drink for young girls designed to encourage maximum consumption, therefore profits. Ruben isn't listening, he wants to talk seriously to Ray about his decision to leave. Ray offers him 2 months off, paid. But Ruben insists that he wanted to be a writer and he's hiding from it in the glossy world of advertising. Ruben urges Ray to find his son, Ray tells Ruben to get out of his sight for his own safety.

Virginia & Ruben are in the middle of sex, talking to each other, trying to synchronise their climaxing. Ruben has an orgasm, Virginia misses out. He's worried but she consoles him that in the future he'll give her loads. This freaks him out slightly and she begins to analyse his reactions and her own intensity, prompting her to freak out and to begin to pace. She tells him bits of her own sexual history, how sex is inextricably linked with alcohol and drugs and her body kind of craves all three parts to be there. Virginia grabs a t-shirt of Zoya's and despite Ruben's half-hearted protests, puts it on. This spurs a conversation about Zoya, in which Virginia tries to make Ruben say that his relationship with Zoya wasn't as sexually satisfying as theirs. She senses she's gone too far, gets up to go, he mends it by saying how he appreciates her wanting to know all the darkest bits of him. Virginia tells him her flat is being knocked down and turned into a Dan Murphy Liquor Warehouse. Ruben asks her to stay

there. She resists because of Damian and as she is his sponsor within AA, but it's clear that she'll cave and move in.

A scene of uneasy domesticity – Damian is cooking sausages and singing George Michael's *Faith* while Virginia prompts Ruben to say something they've evidently agreed on. Eventually she starts but Damian goads her as she tries to deliver her ultimatum and Virginia goes off to have a shower – a habitual response with her. Damian tells Ruben that both he and Virginia are working off their sober frustrations on each other, that he can hear it through the walls every night. Ruben begins to muse longingly on zinfandel, which Damian has been offering him. They get nostalgic about their lip-sync band, especially the time they performed 'Summer of 69' at the end of second year. He tells Damian to pour him a glass of the zinfandel and Damian does, with gusto. As Ruben holds it in his hand he begins to say what Virginia had been urging him to say, that Damian being in the house is putting him in deadly peril – that they've decided he can stay in the house and not drink, or leave the house and continue imbibing. Damian tells Ruben he's been Thirteenth Stepped; that he depends on Virginia now like he does on the other 12 steps. Ruben tells Damian to leave, that they are not the same. Virginia comes out from the shower to console Ruben. Damien departs, taking the Zinfandel with him.

ACT 3

Dog Share Saturday in Centennial Park, the audience becomes the AA group, out in the world by Ruben's inspiration with their canine companions. He speaks to them all, acknowledging that Virginia has validated his pain, said yes to his trauma and yes to his idea of getting a dog and calling it 'Pellegrino' - that he is going to marry her, that she'll be his whole life.

Ruben & his dad Peter are once again out on the back deck, Ruben has some mineral water and his dad has a wine. Peter is nostalgic for the old drunken Dad & son days and Ruben is frustrated that his Dad won't respect his decisions. He keeps invoking AA as if it was a religion, which angers his father. Peter begs Ruben to stay on account of him being stressed – what with having chronic pancreatitis. Ruben asks if pancreatitis is related to drinking but Peter claims it's all about trauma. Sun Ye is not being turned on by his condition though – he asks Ruben to tell his wife he said hello but Ruben refuses.

Once again Ruben is leaving a message on Zoya's mobile message bank. He hasn't heard from her but his mum has had an email saying she's doing a course. He sent her some flowers on her birthday but no response from Czechoslovakia. Ruben says he wants to make amends, and not just because it's part of his (AA) homework. He tells her his dad is badly ill but then, saying he doesn't want to share that with her, starts to throw everything he did for her during their relationship in her face and shout down the phone that she ran away when things got messy. His rage wears out - he tells her he's lost & alone.

Virginia comes home to Ruben's with the news that the two of them have been asked to organise 'Annual Conference'. Ruben doesn't have a clue - Virginia tells him it's when Home Groups from one local area get together and Share & Talk. He seems a bit preoccupied – tells her he's been thinking of writing a book lately, a novel about his experiences over the past few months. Virginia says he's not ready, at all. Ruben finds this flat refusal disconcerting and asks her if she doesn't want him to write? She suggests sitting on the book for 6-8 to 18 months and then reconsidering. She returns to the whole co-hosting Conference question, expecting him to give way easily and heads off for another shower.

Ruben starts singing a line from Toy Soldiers and is stunned when Zoya comes in and sings the last word with him. His voice messages brought her; she says she'd never heard the same tone in his voice as when he told her about his Dad's disease, the heaviness. She tells him a bit about how she's

been getting on without him (great) and a bit about what she's been thinking (that he's brave to stop drinking, that he treated her badly). It seems like it might be on again between them – until the sound of Virginia in the shower is heard. Ruben makes a last-ditch attempt to get Zoya to run out the door with him to a restaurant but too late, Virginia enters in a towel. A tense conversation between the two women, each demanding an explanation of the other's presence, ensues. Virginia leaves to put some clothes on and returns wearing Zoya's t-shirt and underwear. Virginia instructs her to communicate using the language of 'I feel' but Zoya says she feels she'll start with whatever she feels like starting with. While Ruben covers the two of them have it out – Zoya mocks Ruben & Virginia's relationship while Virginia twists things she manipulated Ruben into saying, repeating them to Zoya, declaring her relationship to Ruben as far more intimate and sexually connected than any he'd had previously. Ruben doesn't intervene. Zoya leaves the two of them there. Virginia attempts to paper over the cracks but Ruben finally speaks up, distancing himself, saying alcohol isn't pathological for him. Virginia recites part of some AA literature to prove that he's using what just happened to get permission to start drinking again. She won't let him Enable from this, she says. He's lured back to her way of seeing things.

ACT 4

Ruben is reading a really bad & long poem that he's written to his Mum at her place. She cuts him off with half-hearted praise, urging him to go back to work. She pours him a glass of Riesling and tells him to drink it. He doesn't get it, why she's making it possible for him to go off the rails but she's got all kinds of reasons, she wants him to look at a glass of wine and see only that. She's fed up with Virginia and with the meetings, so is Ruben's dad, who's (incidentally) moved back in. Ruben insists that he's an alcoholic; that it's inherited – her own father drank himself into oblivion. She tells him he's different and also tells him generically that women don't like poetry. Before she leaves she pours wine into his mouth. He holds it there until she's left and then spits it out.

It's snowing and Ruben clammers exhaustedly through a window in Prague and clunks onto the floor of Zoya's apartment. She's getting ready to go out and tells him to leave but he begs for ten minutes, five minutes, two minutes. She gives him one minute. Eventually he spits out what he wanted to say – there's no other her in the world. Zoya laughs and tells him to cultivate irony. He tries to talk about documentaries, as that's what she's studying and lands on *The March of the Penguins*, a film he saw on the plane. He makes a speech about the domestic relationships of the penguins and how moving this one part is, where the female penguin comes home to her partner and knows him by his squeaking. Then he trails off, things are left inconclusive between them.

Ruben takes an icy beer and drinks it down. When he's done he begins to sing 'Walking in Memphis'. Damian comes in, carrying a mirror full of drugs which he sets down as he sings the rest of the song. They are completely smashed and intending to get more so. They rant about ideas and the world and their extraordinary affection for each other. Damian tries to kiss Ruben but Ruben pushes him off. He begins stuffing drugs up his nose and all over his face, commanding Damian to get more when Damian protests that he's wasting it. Damian leaves to get cigarettes and Ruben drinks vodka and babbles to himself until he starts seeing everyone. Virginia turns up to get her stuff and make one last ditch offer, Mum is trying to get into the apartment, Zoya is phoning to say she's sad to hear and Peter is also trying to get through to him. Ray turns up to tell him he saw his son, and Zoya asks him to phone her, even to yell. Everything they say gets steadily more mushed up and mental and Ruben starts talking to Corey until Damian comes back in. Damian admits that the whole Instant Messenger New York thing was a lie. Ruben says he knew. He tells Damian to go over by the bench, suggesting that he's going to finally give him the sexual experience he's been craving, tells him to bend over and while Damian obeys, Ruben gathers up a whole lot of sleeping pills and swallows them, chasing them with vodka. He collapses.

ACT 5

In a church hall, Ruben's mum is speaking to some kind of support group about her experience as the wife of an Alcoholic and daughter of an Alcoholic. She describes seeing her son's body wheeled past her in hospital. Peter comes in, wheeling a drip along. He ends up crying but she doesn't respond. Ruben comes in, trailing a drip with him too. He overdosed on the sleeping pills and has a chronic liver condition. Pancreatitis. Which is treatable unless he keeps drinking. Mum goes to speak to the doctors and Ruben is left with his dad, who offers him a flask of spirits. Peter has some and leaves the flask for Ruben. Why do you do this? Ruben asks him. It's all he knows, Peter answers. Ruben pushes the bottle away then brings it closer, hesitates with the lid off and it near him. Ruben doesn't drink or decide not to.

THE END

***RUBEN GUTHRIE*: Scene breakdown**

Act One: Scene 1 – A Hall

Act 1: Scene 2 - Kitchen

Act 1: Scene 3 - A Hall

Act 1: Scene 4 – Subliminal Agency

Act 1: Scene 5 – A Hall

Act 1: Scene 6 – Back Deck of Peter's place

Act Two: Scene 1 – Street outside hall

Act Two: Scene 2 – Kitchen

Act Two: Scene 3 – Subliminal Agency

Act Two: Scene 4 – Zoya & Ruben's place

Act Two: Scene 5 – Zoya & Ruben's place

Act Three: Scene 1 - Centennial Park

Act Three: Scene 2 – Back deck of Peter's place

Act Three: Scene 3 - nowhere specific

Act Three: Scene 4 – Ruben & Zoya's place

Act Four: Scene 1 – Ruben's mum's house

Act Four: Scene 2 – Zoya's apartment (in Prague)

Act Four: Scene 3 - A kitchen

Act Five: Scene 1 – A church hall/ visitors area

The Playwright: Brendan Cowell

Brendan is a writer, actor and director. *Ruben Guthrie* was originally commissioned when Brendan won the 2005 Philip Parsons Young Playwrights' Award and was first produced in 2008 by murri fulla films in association with B Sharp. Brendan's other plays include *Men, Happy New* (Tamarama Rock Surfers); *ATM* (2002 Sydney Festival); *Already Elsewhere* (Force Majeure/2004 Sydney Festival) and *Rabbit* (Griffin Award – Griffin Theatre Company, Frantic Assembly UK tour). For Wharf2 Blueprints, Brendan wrote *Morph*, an adaptation of Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Bed* (Patrick White Playwrights' Award) which he directed along with *Self Esteem* at Wharf 2 Loud, the program he was Director of in 2006–2007. Brendan made his mainstage directorial debut with Nina Raine's play *Rabbit* at Sydney Theatre Company late last year. Brendan co-wrote the feature film *Ten Empty* and wrote the screenplay *Save Your Legs!* – shooting in India this October. He wrote several episodes of the acclaimed series *Love My Way* and an episode of the new ABC series *My Place*. Brendan is currently writing a novel. As an actor, Brendan's played a variety of stage and screen roles including *Hamlet* (Bell Shakespeare); Tom in *Love My Way* and the lead role in the feature film *Noise*. He was nominated for a Silver Logie for *Love My Way* and an AFI Award for *Noise*. Brendan won the 2008 Film Critics' Circle of Australia Award for *Noise*.



WRITER'S NOTE

As you may or may not know I wrote this play after a year of self-imposed sobriety. The decision to stop came after a series of ugly BENDERS where I behaved in a manner of which my mother was not proud. "Perhaps a career in rugby league beckons?" she kindly mused.

The 12 months off grog were not easy. The initial difficulty was NOT DRINKING GROG. After a hard day's work there is nothing sweeter than a cleansing ale. Sydney makes it look so good too, with those burnt orange sunsets and attractive people on balconies sipping Asian pilseners. But what prevailed as the greatest challenge had very little to do with will power. I realised, very quickly, that my life was based around alcohol (especially in my industry of choice), and that making such a drastic shift in this lifestyle would make more waves than I could have imagined.

After the initial (and often TERRIFYING) struggle of not sucking piss when out on the town, I found socialising to be quite fun when sober (I certainly remembered more the next day). Standing in the foyer, or at the bar, or on the sidelines watching the Cronulla Sharks, I became more than happy to sip on my Pellegrino whilst my friends imbibed on my old diet of beer-wine-vodka-beer-bourbon-beer-Jägermeister. The problem was that many of them were not. 'Just have one' is a very common suggestion. 'Get some new friends' I hear you say and you're probably right. The Program certainly would not argue. Like Kafka's Gregor Samsa I was happy in my new form, but those around me could not accept the change. It was as if I had crossed the floor, switched churches or perhaps simply turned into a human mirror. Why does this singular substance mean so much to us?

I would very much like to thank Siobhan Robertson (Publicity Machine), and Kevin Rudd (PM) for his timely anti-binge drinking campaign. My family and Rose for the LOVE, Jean Mostyn, my mate and Director Wayne Blair for responding so big-heartedly to this script, Sam Hawker and ALL involved with the B Sharp production, Neil and everyone at Company B, especially Mr Sam Strong whose inspired dramaturgy helped this play about a lost little boy called Ruben Guthrie find its way.

Brendan Cowell

The Director: Wayne Blair

Wayne has worked across theatre, film and television as an actor, writer and director. With Company B he performed in *Stuff Happens*, *The Sapphires*, *Run Rabbit Run*, *Conversations with the Dead* and *Cloudstreet*. His other acting credits include *Othello* (Bell Shakespeare); *Inheritance* (Melbourne Theatre Company) and *Skin* (Bangarra Dance Theatre). For B Sharp/murri fulla films he directed and performed in *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* as well as directing *Ruben Guthrie*. His other directing credits for theatre include *Romeo and Juliet*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, *Stolen* (Sydney Theatre Company's Education); *Unspoken* (Performing Lines) and *Njunjul the Sun* (Kooemba Djarra) for which he also wrote the stage adaptation. His credits as a filmmaker include a number of award-winning shorts, *Jubulj*, *Black Talk* and *The Djarn Djarns*, which he wrote and directed, the latter winning the Crystal Bear Award in the Kinderfilmfest competition at the 2005 Berlin Film Festival. His third short film, *Black Talk* won Best Short Film at the 2003 Sydney Film Festival's Dendy Awards. For television Wayne has written one episode for the next series of SBS show *The Circuit* and his directing credits include *Double Trouble* and *Lockie Leonard* for the Nine Network. Wayne is currently an Associate Artist for Company B.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I became an Associate Artist of Company B in January 2008. The first play that came across my desk was *Ruben Guthrie* and I was immediately captured by it – the penetrating language, the incisive comedy and the unadulterated characters, especially the main man Ruben himself.

I asked Brendan if I could take ownership of the story for a minute and direct it in the Downstairs Theatre. Twelve months later here we are... up the well-trodden Belvoir St Theatre stairs.

Ruben Guthrie is reminiscent of so many people I know – and everybody knows one or two like him. Talented, charming and successful, achieving everything they strive for. Delve a little more deeply however and you find a lonely soul – loved by all, except number one. This is what I saw on the page, and this is what I felt from my heart.

We all want to love and be loved, and Ruben's no different. Unfortunately for him, like so many Australians, he turns his abundance of love towards the closest bottle. Booze doesn't ask questions or judge or argue. It is there for us 24/7 in sparkling, dry, warm, mixed, shaken, stirred, straight up and icy cold!

It takes us to another place where we can hospital-pass our responsibilities, where the pressure of work and life ease with the crack of your first can or the pop of a fresh champagne. It's an artificial freedom, where you can escape from the truth for just a little while... until you become sober again.

Ruben finds himself in this cycle every day, until one defining bender when he flies high, falls over and ends up with nothing except accountability. He must make a decision. And that is something we will all witness together.

Please enjoy our production. Straight up.

Wayne Blair

Background to the Play: *Alcoholics Anonymous*

The Three Legacies of AA are: recovery, unity and service.

- The suggestions for recovery are the Twelve Steps;
- the suggestions for achieving unity are the [Twelve Traditions](#);
- the suggestions for service are described in [Twelve Concepts](#) for World Service, The AA Service Manual and Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age.

The relative success of the AA program seems to be due to the fact that an alcoholic who no longer drinks has an exceptional faculty for "reaching" and helping an uncontrolled drinker.

In simplest form, the AA program operates when a recovered alcoholic passes along the story of his or her own problem drinking, describes the sobriety he or she has found in AA, and invites people who are new to AA to join the informal Fellowship.

The 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

SOURCE: <http://www.aa.org.au/members/twelve-steps.php>

*The AA Quiz that Virginia suggests Damian do to determine whether he is an alcoholic or not can be found at <http://www.aa.org.au/new-to-aa/is-aa-for-you.php>

More information about Alcoholics Anonymous can be found at <http://www.aa.org.au/>

RUBEN GUTHRIE: Alcoholics Anonymous References in the play

Phrase used	by	in
'sitting in the circle – having a 'share'	RUBEN	Act 1:Sc 1
'in meetings'	RUBEN	Act 1:Sc 2
'Opening the Big Black Door Meeting'	RUBEN	Act 1:Sc 4
'Personal Nourishment' meetings	RAY	Act 1:Sc 4
'One day at a time'	VIRGINIA & RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 1
'go to meetings, work through the steps; face the demons. Self-loathing, make amends, embrace the pain'	RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 1
'don't think you've got to be Mr Pure just because you're Dry and Sharing'	VIRGINIA	Act 2:Sc 1
'I'm only meant to think about getting through <i>today</i> '	RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 2
'Touching Yesterday's Pain'	RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 2
'step, stroke meeting'	RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 2
'don't tell me you're sitting in a circle!'	DAMIAN	Act 2:Sc 2
'To do this, to face all this, I have admitted that there is a power greater than me.'	RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 3
'they prey on guys like you – they turn your love of the booze into a love of talking about yourself and pretty soon you're spouting empty mantras like 'power greater than me'	RAY	Act 2:Sc 3
'the movement is not a trick'	RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 3
' <i>Sobriety First</i> '	RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 3
'If the Program find out we're living together!'	VIRGINIA	Act 2:Sc 4
'I went to an NA meeting once, and if it wasn't for the terminology, oh and Step Two, I probably would have returned.'	DAMIAN	Act 2:Sc 5
'She's Thirteenth Stepped you Ruben. She's made you need her like a Step, like you need all the other Steps.'	DAMIAN	Act 2:Sc 5
'I'm working on strengthening my Alone Self!'	RUBEN	Act 2:Sc 5
'My sponsor at the Movement'	RUBEN	Act 3:Sc 2
'Love, Hate and Other Feelings' Group	RUBEN	Act 3:Sc 3
'I would like to make amends with you and not just because it's part of my homework.'	RUBEN	Act 3:Sc 3
'Annual Conference is when all Home Groups from the local area get together and Share and Talk and usually there's some music'	VIRGINIA	Act 3:Sc 4
'You're not ready to write about your experiences. You're only a fifth of the way through the fourth part of a twelve-step process.'	VIRGINIA	Act 3:Sc 4
'The 'I feel' language helps to establish an ease and neutrality to the communication'	VIRGINIA	Act 3:Sc 4
'All Alcoholics use traumatic experiences to deem themselves powerless to Alcohol'	VIRGINIA	Act 3:Sc 4
'I'm not going to let you Enable from this.'	VIRGINIA	Act 3:Sc 4

ACTIVITY BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY: Give your students the list of lines from the play and ask them to highlight or underline everything the characters say that sounds like a quote from the Alcoholics Anonymous website, or from Alcoholics Anonymous literature.

- Discuss the concept of **jargon**: ask students to think & list different groups of people who use a lot of distinctive language – what is the effect of this language on outsiders?

Younger brains 'tricked' by alcohol

ACTIVITY TO GET STUDENTS THINKING BEFORE SEEING *RUBEN GUTHRIE*

Give your students this article to read and ask them to answer the following: -

- i. If teenagers drink heavily what can they start to connect with pleasure?
- ii. Why could this happen?
- iii. Explain what in our brains is released by alcohol.
- iv. How does the connection between pleasure and good experiences 'trick' our brain?
- v. Why does our brain work to try to ensure that we repeat pleasurable experiences?
- vi. What does research show is the result of heavy alcohol use among adolescents?
- vii. List some of the main reasons why young people drink.
- viii. Do young people listen to warnings about suggested alcohol intake?
- ix. What factors have the biggest influence on young people's restriction of their own drinking?

Discuss as a class or in small groups:

- Why do you think people aged 14-24 drink?
- Would changing legal drinking ages to 21, as in the US, work in Australia?
- Do you think that "It's OK for people to be seen vomiting, it's OK to be seen fighting"? Are young people desensitised to the effects of alcohol?
- If you were a politician, what measures would you introduce around young people's alcohol and drinking?

Ask students to ask each other -

- How do you react to this article?
- What in it do you agree or disagree with?

Catharine Munro

TEENAGERS who drink heavily can associate bad experiences such as vomiting and car accidents with pleasure, according to a US expert on alcohol abuse.

Aaron White, a health administrator with the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, said neurological processes, that were originally designed to ensure human survival, were put off course by alcohol.

Dr White, a psychologist, was speaking yesterday at a conference organised by Drinkwise, a research group funded by the Australian Government and the liquor industry.

Alcohol, along with other drugs, induced the release of the neuro-transmitter dopamine. The younger the consumer of alcohol, the more likely the habit of drinking would become entrenched, he said.

Experiences while drinking, such as vomiting and car accidents, can be associated with the pleasurable feeling that dopamine induced. "The brain is tricked into thinking those things are positive because it felt good ... Pleasure increases the odds that this rewarded behaviour will be repeated."

Dr White said a review of research at the University of California, San Diego, had found heavy alcohol use among adolescents led to a decrease in the size of the frontal lobes, the part of the brain associated with planning, inhibition and emotion regulation.

Statistics showed that in the US, President Ronald Reagan's decision in 1984 to raise the legal drinking age to 21 had reduced the number of alcohol-related fatalities.

However, Dr White said such a measure would not necessarily

work in Australia. "It's an experiment that has to be done but in America, we got lucky," he said.

In Australia, bad behaviour was also becoming part of the scenery for adolescents, a Griffith University criminology lecturer, Gillian McIlwain, told the conference. She is halfway through a nationwide study aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm.

"It's OK for people to be seen vomiting, it's OK to be seen fighting. In fact they are becoming desensitised to it."

New research by Monash University had also found that the key driver to drinking for adolescents were friends, followed by easy access to alcohol and cheap drinks.

In a paper on why people aged 14 to 24 drink, the sociologist Jo Lindsay said adolescents believed that health warnings against drinking more than two serves of alcohol a day did not apply to them.

The study, which involved in-depth interviews with young people, found that the biggest deterrent for under-age drinking was parental influence. Drink-driving laws were also considered important. However, laws against under-age drinking "were seen as largely ineffective."

"Young people drink for pleasure and to enhance their social life," Ms Lindsay told the conference.

Contrary to social stereotypes, adolescents did exercise control over their consumption because of demands enforced by study, their parents and holding a job.

"Young people have many responsibilities in their lives, including study and work," she said. "[They] are not naive about the role of alcohol in their life. They are actually trying to manage it and its place in their life and find a way to young adulthood."

RUBEN GUTHRIE: CULTURAL BACKGROUND

ICONIC 80's & early 90's SONGS SUNG OR REFERRED TO IN THE PLAY

- 'Graceland' Paul Simon (1986) <http://www.last.fm/music/Paul+Simon/+Graceland>
- 'Toy Soldiers' Martika (1989) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpJy46o_7b0
- 'Faith' George Michael (1987) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viPWb3ieH6o>
- 'Summer of 69' Bryan Adams (1984) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f06QZCVUHg>
- 'Walking in Memphis' Marc Cohen (1991) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMv9E9F6zwl>
- 'Papa don't Preach' Madonna (1986) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5nE1J0IKpY>
- 'Eternal Flame' The Bangles (1988) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwajTekSAcM>
- 'Sunglasses at Night' Corey Hart (1983) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXw4qqQqTrY>

BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY: -

Students could listen to and watch the iconic 80's songs which feature in *Ruben Guthrie*.

[This will allow them to recognise some of the tunes which are sung in several scenes and which in the context of the plot are used symbolically to indicate the attachment of a particular generation to the songs they grew up with.]

ICONIC AUSTRALIAN JINGLES REFERRED TO IN THE PLAY

- ❖ Ovaltinies jingle – *'We are the itsy-bitsy teenie-weenie chockie malted Ovaltinies, made from Ovaltine and ready to crunch!'*
- ❖ Tooheys Beer ad – *'I feel like a Toohey's!'*
- ❖ Cottees cordial song – *'My Dad picks the fruit that goes to Cottees! To make the Cordial that I like best!'*
- ❖ Weet-bix cereal – *'Aussie kids are Weet-Bix kids, Aussie kids are Weet-Bix-kids!'*
- ❖ So Good Soy drink – *'So Good on your cakes and your biscuits. So Good in your puddings and pies. So Good on your cereal.. So Good as a drink... So good is the reason why... So Good is so good! No cholesterol. No lactose. That's another reason to try... Sanitarium So Gooooooodd!'*
- ❖ Tip Top Bread – *'Good on ya mum! Tip top's the one. Good on ya mum!'*
- ❖ VB Beer ad – *'You can get it milking a cow, matter of fact – I got it now'*

YOU TUBE RESEARCH: Students can track down these original jingles and watch/listen to them and the ads on the web so they recognise the shared background of Australian advertising in the 90's and 80's which Ray and Ruben Guthrie refer to in the scenes set in 'Subliminal Agency' – their workplace.

Rehearsing *RUBEN GUTHRIE*

Ruben Guthrie rehearsed for 5 weeks in the rehearsal room at Company B's Administration and Production Warehouse at 18 Belvoir Street in Surry Hills. Rehearsals took place from 10am to 6pm Monday to Friday. A sixth week was spent in technical production rehearsals, on stage in the Upstairs Theatre at Belvoir St Theatre. *Ruben Guthrie* is a professional theatre production and the actors, director and crew are paid for the rehearsal period.

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHY: Heidrun Löhrr



Toby Schmitz & Geoff Morrell

Photo: Heidrun Löhrr

During rehearsals, the exact measurements of the stage are taped out on the Rehearsal room floor including all the exits so that the actors become accustomed to the distinctive dimensions of the Upstairs Belvoir St stage during the rehearsal process.

The Rehearsal room is fitted with approximations to any essential aspects of the final set – as you can see in this picture, there's a shelf with bottles and glasses, as well as a taped marking showing the height of the shelf. Actors wear their own clothes during rehearsals but sometimes choose to wear outfits that approximate to something they feel a character might wear.

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

Set Design in *RUBEN GUTHRIE*

Show your students the picture below of the finished set for *Ruben Guthrie* – it features hundreds of real bottles which the Production team have been collecting since before Christmas, from family, friends and local pubs. These are attached to the shelves with an adhesive. The floor is made of polished wooden floorboards, the main item of furniture is a big armchair which is used in numerous ways during the production.



Set Design for RUBEN GUTHRIE: Jacob Nash

Before they see the play ask students to look at this picture of the Ruben Guthrie set –

- What sort of style do they expect the whole production to have?
- What in this design suggests that?
- What is the atmosphere of this set?
- What does it tell you about the world of the play?
- Who do you imagine lives in this room?
- What period is it from?
- How is it different from the sets of other plays you've seen?

THINKING ABOUT THE PROCESS OF SET DESIGN



Model box for RUBEN GUTHRIE: Jacob Nash

Show your students this picture of the model box provided by the set designer to Company B's Production department prior to the set construction. It is constructed completely to scale; most model boxes are built on a scale of 1:25, so everything in the model box will be actual size if dimensions are multiplied by 25. The accuracy of these measurements is crucial in constructing the set.

Ask your students: -

- Is it identical to the finished set?
- What are the main differences between it and the set in the picture above?
- How would you go about starting to create this set?
- What information has the designer provided to the production team about the materials and props that the final set should feature?

Discuss how effective the final set was as a basis for the action of Ruben Guthrie.

- Could the play be staged differently?
- How would you do it?
- What would be better about staging the play on your imagined set?

Exploring *RUBEN GUTHRIE* Further: -

Books to read:

Luke Davies *Candy* Allen & Unwin, 2006 [Fiction about addiction, based on the author's former heroin addiction]

Films to watch:

Rachel Getting Married 2008 directed Jonathan Demme. 113mins. rated M [extraordinary film about addiction, shows some AA meetings which would be useful for students who don't grasp that background to the play]

Candy 2006 directed Neil Armfield. 116mins. rated MA [film of Luke Davies' novel about addiction set in Sydney]

Websites to visit:

Alcoholics Anonymous Australia - <http://www.aa.org.au/>

Anonymity in AA - <http://www.aa.org.au/members/anonymity.php>

Twelve traditions of AA - <http://www.aa.org.au/members/twelve-traditions.php>

AA Quiz - <http://www.aa.org.au/new-to-aa/is-aa-for-you.php>

References in the play

James Frey, *A Million Tiny Pieces* – a fictionalised memoir of addiction
article about <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/0104061jamesfrey1.html>

Plays that share similar themes with *Ruben Guthrie*

Alan Seymour - *The One Day of the Year*, Angus & Robertson, 1960 rpr. 1976

Brendan Cowell

Links to Brendan Cowell articles

<http://www.geocities.com/sydneyactorwriter/Articles.html>

His reaction to the 2008 election

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,22987873-28737,00.html>

Ruben Guthrie

RUBEN GUTHRIE nominated in the 2009 Premier's Literary Awards

<http://www.pla.nsw.gov.au/awards-shortlists/play-award/74?task=view>

Online articles about the previous B sharp production of *Ruben Guthrie*:

<http://www.threedworld.com.au/lifestyle/arts/2008/ARTS--Lights-Drinks-Action--Brendan-Cowell-Interview/>

<http://www.australianstage.com.au/features/sydney-interview/wayne-blair-1375.html>

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23506183-16947,00.html>

<http://www.stagenoise.com/reviewsdisplay.php?id=212>

<http://www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/sydney/ruben-guthrie--murri-fulla-films--b-sharp-1382.html>

<http://www.timeoutsydney.com.au/theatre/ruben-guthrie.aspx>

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts-reviews/ruben-guthrie/2008/04/03/1206851088555.html>

Wayne Blair

Interview about his film *The Djarn Djarns*

http://www.afc.gov.au/newsandevents/afcnews/converse/wayne_blair/newspage_198.aspx

VIDEO Wayne Blair speaking at the Archibald Prize

http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/events/multimedia/wayne_blair

Web resources:

Interview with Wayne about his 2009 production of *The Removalists* for the STC

<http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/downloads/Wayne%20Blair%20Interview-Shifting%20the%20Power.pdf>

After the Show: MAKING THE MOST OF THE Q & A

After each school matinee performance at Company B there is a Q & A session with the actors. In order to make the most of this experience, you might like to think about the *sorts* of questions you might ask before seeing the show.

School Matinee Q & A sessions: A Guide

- Ask questions about the production you have just seen, rather than other plays, film or television programs in which you have seen the same actors.
- Think of the Q & A session as an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the production you have just seen, rather than just an opportunity to learn about the actors' careers or the profession of acting.

Class Activity

Use a play you have seen recently when composing questions for this activity, or think of some general questions which can acquire more detail once you have seen the play.

1. Students list 3 questions that an actor might be asked by a student audience after a performance.
2. Students rank these questions from most (1) to least (3) according to:
 - Level of sophistication
 - Interest to the student
 - Cliché or what an actor would always be asked
3. Students then share their best questions with the class – most sophisticated, of most interest and the one they won't ask because it is very clichéd.
4. Ask students to reflect on the idea that the Q & A session is an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the production
5. List the areas in which students could deepen their understanding of the production such as: themes and ideas, message, the setting, costume and set design, characters, acting style.
6. Choose a play the whole class has seen.

In pairs, students are to select 2 areas of the production they would have liked to have known more about and compose 2 specific questions for each one.

7. One pair swaps their questions with another pair and composes answers for their questions.
8. Share question and answers with the class.