

Company B Presents



Photograph: Alex Craig

The Seed

Written by Kate Mulvany
Directed by Iain Sinclair
Companion Director Neil Armfield

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*, *The Small Poppies*, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Underpants*, *Gulpilil*, *The Sapphires* and *Stuff Happens* 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.

Belvoir St Theatre has recently undergone a major renovation to provide Company B with a state of the art home for the future whilst retaining the charm of the original building.

For more information visit www.belvoir.com.au

Company B
Presents

The Seed

Written By Kate Mulvany
Directed by Iain Sinclair
Companion Director Neil Armfield

With

DANNY ADCOCK
KATE MULVANY
MARTIN VAUGHAN

Danny Maloney
Rose Maloney
Brian Maloney

MICKA AGOSTA
MATT COX
STEVE TOULMIN
KYLIE MASCORD
NELL RANNEY

Set and Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Composer and Sound Designer
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager

Companion Artists
DALE FERGUSON
DAMIEN COOPER
SOUND

Set and Costumes
Lighting
Paul Charlier

*The Company B production of **The Seed** opened at Belvoir St Theatre
on 20 February 2008.*

*The original B Sharp production of **The Seed** premiered at Belvoir St Downstairs
Theatre on 20 July 2007, produced by Sam Hawker*

Setting the Scene

The Seed is set in a council flat in Nottingham, England on the 5th November sometime during the 1990s.

Three generations of the same family have come together to celebrate their collective birthday. It's Brian Maloney's 80th birthday and today his son, Danny Maloney, (also born on 5th November) and his granddaughter Rose Maloney (who turns 30 on the 5th November) have travelled from Geraldton, Western Australia to visit him.

Rose Maloney is a writer, trying to write her father's story. She has asked her father to travel to Nottingham for this reunion, hoping that by meeting her grandfather she will learn more about her father and his story.

Danny Maloney (Rose's father) was a 'ten-pound pom' who emigrated to Australia when he was a nineteen. He was conscripted to fight for Australia in the Vietnam War at the age of twenty.

Brian Maloney (Danny's father, Rose's grandfather) was once a bomb-maker for the IRA (the Irish Republican Army).

He came to England on a mission and fell in love and married an English woman, Maisie. Brian and Maisie had five sons: Colm, Trevor, Malachy, Danny and Paddy.

Maisie had now passed away and Brian now lives alone in his council flat in Nottingham, England. Colm, Trevor, Malachy and Paddy still live in Nottingham too. It is only Danny who emigrated and started a new life in Australia.

The Playwright: Kate Mulvany

“Dad, I need to write a play. Can I ask you a few questions?”

That’s how the writing process for *The Seed* began. A Sunday phone call from a slightly nervous daughter to her Vietnam Veteran father. I’d been commissioned by B Sharp to write the story of his life. A ten-pound-pom conscripted to fight for Australia in Vietnam.

My entire family found this commission quite bemusing. Within our own confines, we’ve always had a very close relationship, but some things have always been kept quiet. Not because we didn’t want to talk about them. We did. But the set-up of our rural existence in Western Australia, the tough exteriors and ‘just get on with it’ attitudes required for our little town, not to mention government after government’s failure to encourage us to ‘debrief’, so to speak, meant that burning questions remained unasked. Unanswered. By the time I made my phone call that day, the questions I had were long-hidden under a big dusty political and social carpet. And now a theatre company in Sydney wanted to peer under it and see what had festered there after all this time? You can see why I was nervous.

“Dad, tell me about Granddad. What was he like?”

“Tell me about being a ten-pound pom.”

“How did you and Mum meet?”

“Tell me about being a Vietnam conscript.”

“How did it feel for you when I got cancer?”

“When you got *poorly*,” said Dad. He doesn’t ever use the C-word. Not that one, anyway...

Over the next few years, these phone calls were repeated. To dad. Mum. My sister. Other Vietnam veterans, their wives, their children. And pretty soon the nervousness dissipated and a very strong sense of horror and heartbreak set in. These people had been sitting in silence for too long. The spirit of that ANZAC legend had warped and that stiff-upper-lip had instead been sewn shut by the hand of politics.

Because I was a Veteran’s daughter, I was blessedly excused for my nosiness and finally they spoke, many for the first time. To my shock, I heard the same stories over and over again, not just from the men, but from their entire family – wives, brothers, mothers, sons, in-laws, grandkids. Stories about what it is to be a returned Australian soldier after a lost war. How this affects his wife. The diseases it spreads, unchecked, to his children and grandchildren. The whiteouts, the post-traumatic stress disorder, the suicides, the bitter humour and horror of it all. The answers I couldn’t get from one, I got from another. Many would talk about each other’s lives, but never about themselves. Stoic and humble and selectively silent. It was a neverending circle of research, a jigsaw puzzle of choices and ramifications, political insensitivity and familial fallout. These were the stories behind these ‘ordinary blokes’ and their families.

But thankfully, the stories did come out.

Suddenly I was a 30-year-old child, sitting at the feet of my various storytellers with eyes wide, mouth agape, listening to tales and emotions and histories never before shared.

Only problem was, in order to tell their stories, I had to tell mine. At the age of 27, when I started writing *The Seed*, that was not necessarily an easy task. I, too, have always been told there was no point in bringing it all up. I, too, had my own demons from the domino effect of political decisions. Was I ready to find my voice on this? For the first time as a playwright, I couldn't escape to the imaginary world of 'What ifs?' Instead, I had to explore my own very real world of 'What is.'

At times, it wasn't a particularly pleasant place to go.

Other times, it provided me with the answers and epiphanies I'd always searched for. Knots unravelled within me as puzzling facts that I thought were family quirks turned out to be widespread symptoms and illnesses within the Vietnam Veteran community – symptoms and illnesses that have too-long been treated with ignorance and insolence by the powers-that-be. I found new allies through my research. I loved and respected my family even more. And when we premiered at B Sharp last year, I was overjoyed to find that people did indeed care, and they listened and listened and laughed and cried and shared their own stories and *listened*. And as a country currently at war, it was all the more important to do so.

One of the best things said to me after a performance of *The Seed* last year was; "It made me get in a car and drive down south to hug my parents." One of the best things I saw from the stage was fifteen of my Dad's own field troop smiling proudly at him during the bow and embracing him afterwards in the foyer. And one of the best things about the whole process, starting from that first nervous phone call to Dad, is that we get to explore it all again on a bigger stage with a brilliant team and with even more people to watch and listen. After all, we're still at war. Let's not make the same mistakes.

Thanks to Lyn Wallis, Sam Hawker, Mark Priestley, Eamon Flack, Anthony Weigh, Anthony Blair at Cameron Cresswell and all at Meissner Management.

This play is not just based on my family, but it borrows heavily from the lives and stories of many other war veterans and their families. I'm eternally grateful for their bravery and honesty, as well as Martin, Danny, Iain and Neil and the entire *Seed* team for telling the story of these flawed heroes.

Most of all, thanks to Danny, Glenys and Tegan Mulvany – the seeds from which this story sprouted.

And thank you for opening your ears, hearts and minds.

Enjoy.

Kate Mulvany

Reading About *The Seed*

Read the enclosed article about *The Seed* which appeared online on StageNoise with Diana Simmonds on 20th February, 2008.

After reading the article, answer the following questions.

<http://www.stagenoise.com/featuresdisplay.php?id=63>

What challenges do you think a director and their design team might face in transferring a show from an 80-seat theatre to a 350-seat theatre? What challenges might the actors face?

Explain in your own words what you think Kate Mulvany means when she says, "But I still go home with the same fears ... Right now they're writer fears. It's so much more frightening having your words out there – because they're straight from your heart, your brain."

What challenges do you think an actor might face in portraying a character based on themselves?

After reading this article, what do you expect *The Seed* to be about?



Kate Mulvany

Photo: Heidrun Löhner

Rehearsing *The Seed*

The Seed rehearsed for 3 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 fourth week was spent in technical production rehearsals, on stage in the Upstairs Theatre at Belvoir St Theatre. *The Seed* is a professional theatre production and the actors, director and crew are paid for the rehearsal period.

Company B productions usually rehearse for 5 weeks. *The Seed* has a shorter rehearsal period because the show had a season last year in the Downstairs Theatre as part of our B Sharp season.

Below are some photos taken during the rehearsals for *The Seed*. Look at the photos and answer the following questions.

Photo A



Neil Armfield, Iain Sinclair, Nell Ranney, Kylie Mascord, Kate Mulvany, Gloria (work experience), Danny Adcock and Martin Vaughan. Photo :Heidrun Löh

1. Describe what you see in the photo above. What clues can you see to indicate this is a rehearsal space? Can you identify:
 - i. The model box
 - ii. The rehearsal satge
 - iii. The props table
 - iv. The script

Rehearsing *The Seed*

Photo B



Photo: Heidrun Löhner

1. Describe what you see in the photo above. What clues can you see to indicate that this is a rehearsal set rather than the final set in the theatre?
2. Given what you can see in this photo, where might this play be set? What might be in the cardboard boxes?
3. Why do actors need to rehearse in a space marked out to the same dimensions of the stage they will be performing on?

Rehearsing *The Seed*

Photo C



Model box: Micka Agosta

Photo: Heidrun Löhner

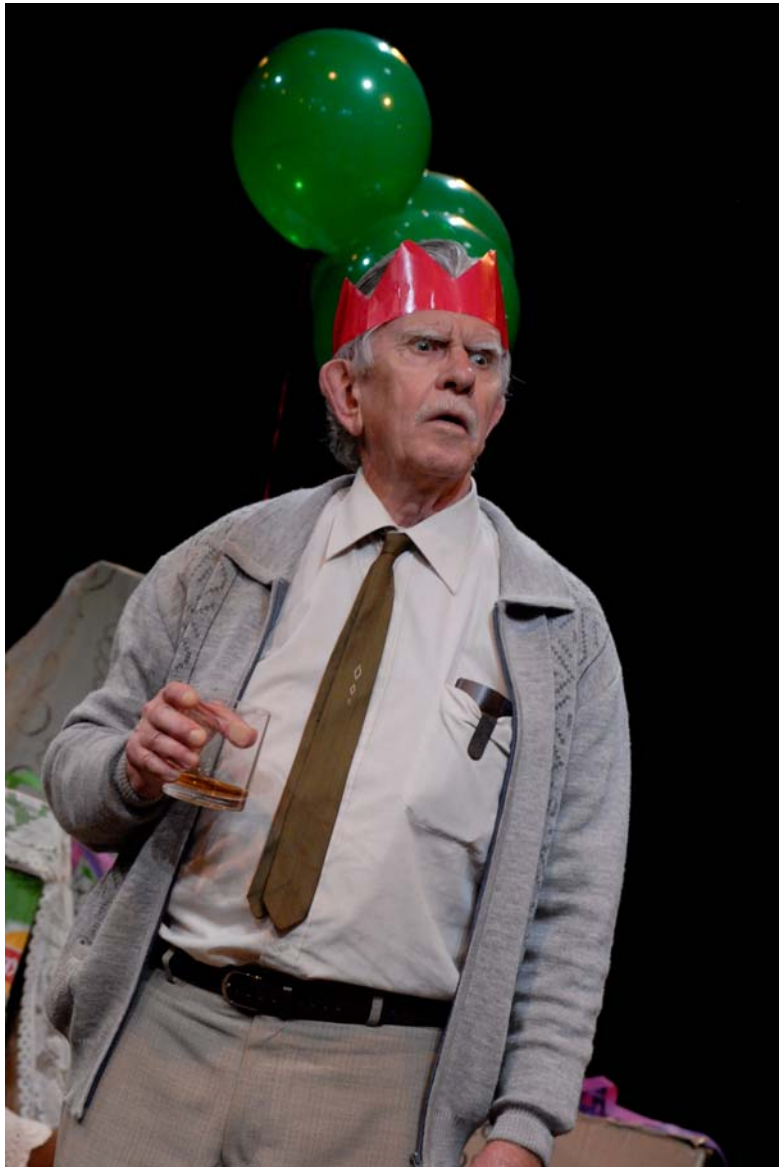
1. Describe what you see in the photo above. What is the purpose of a model box?
2. What colour strikes you most strongly in this design? What does this colour suggest to you?
3. Describe the costumes worn by scale models of the characters. What does each costume suggest to you about each character?
4. Why might it be important to have scale model figures feature in a model box?

Performing *The Seed*

The following production photos of *The Seed* were taken during the dress rehearsal on the stage of the Upstairs Theatre at Belvoir St Theatre.

Look at the photos and answer the following questions.

Photo A



Martin Vaughan

1. Describe what you see in the photo above. How would you describe the expression on the actor's face?
2. What might be happening at this moment in the play? Who might this character be? Write or improvise a monologue for this character.

Photo B



1. Describe what you see in the photo above. Look carefully at the props in the background.
2. Describe the expression on each actor's face. What might be happening at this moment in the play?
3. Describe the costume worn by each actor. What do you think the costumes indicate about each character?
4. In pairs, re-create this moment in a frozen tableau. Improvise a scene with this moment as the starting point. What characters develop in your scene?

Photo C



Kate Mulvany, Martin Vaughan and Danny Adcock

photo: Heidrun Löh

1. Describe what you see in the photo above. Can you identify each of the props?
2. Describe the expression on each actor's face. What might be happening at this moment in the play?
3. Look carefully at the body language of each character in this moment. What does the physical attitude of each character suggest to you?
4. In groups of three, re-create this moment in a frozen tableau. Improvise a scene with this moment as the starting point. What relationship develops between the characters in your scene?

Thinking About the Context of the Play

The Seed is set in Nottingham, England in the 1990s. Two of the characters, Danny and Rose, have travelled from Western Australia to visit Danny's father, Brian, an Irish man living in England.

To better understand each character's 'context' consider the following:

NB you may not wish to reveal all this information about the characters to your students before seeing the play.

- Brian claims to be an ex-member of the IRA
- Brian is an Irish Catholic living in Protestant England
- Danny is a Vietnam Veteran, an Englishman who fought for Australia in the Vietnam War and who has suffered the horrific side-effect of exposure to Agent Orange ever since.
- Rose is a journalist and writer who has also suffered horrific side-effects from her father's exposure to Agent Orange.

Ask your students to research the following:

What is Agent Orange?

What are some of the side-effects of exposure to Agent Orange?

How were Australians conscripted to fight in the Vietnam War?

How were Vietnam Veterans treated when they returned to Australia after the war?

What are some of the other effects of the war on Vietnam Veterans?

Do Vietnam Veterans receive any sort of compensation for the health issues they suffer as a result of their service?

What is the Irish Republican Army (IRA)?

Who was Guy Fawkes and how is Guy Fawkes Day celebrated?

Preparing to See the Play

Read the first and second scene of *The Seed* (script extract included at the end of these notes) and answer the following questions.

NB These scenes contain coarse language

Where does each scene take place?

Who are the characters in each scene?

What do you learn about each of them?

Who is chasing Danny in the opening scene?

What signs are there in Scene Two that indicate Danny is not used to travelling?

Where do you think Danny and Rose are in Scene Two?

Who do you think Danny and Rose might be meeting?

Why might Rose be using a dictaphone and asking questions?

Imagine you were directing this scene for performance

How might you stage the opening scene where Rose is narrating the action?

How might you show Danny hanging from a barbed wire fence?

What impression do you want to leave on the audience at the end of the opening scene?

How might you show (physically – not through sound effects) that Rose and Danny are in an airport in Scene Two?

What impression do you want the audience to have about the relationship between Rose and Danny at the end of Scene Two?

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think that Danny agrees to visit his father after all this time? What clues are there to suggest that Danny feels out of place travelling and, in particular, returning to Nottingham to visit his family?
2. How is Brian described by the other characters before we meet him? Describe your first impressions of Brian. Did your first impression turn out to be accurate? Was this a deliberate choice by the writer and director?
3. What is the significance of Rose's comments about Robin Hood at the beginning of the play:

ROSE: What happened when the poor became richer than the rich? Did he swap back over? Must've been hard to keep track.

DANNY: It was a noble act.

ROSE: A thief is a thief is a thief, Dad. Such is life.

4. Why do you think Brian corrects Rose when she calls him Granddad rather than Grandda?
5. The play raises questions quite early on about Rose's health and Danny's relationship with his father and brothers. Did the play's narrative keep you engaged? Did it ever surprise you? Why or why not?
6. How does the playwright use the character of Brian to create tension? How did you, as an audience member, respond to Brian as a character? Did you like him? Dislike him? Did his words and actions surprise you?
7. How does the following exchange between Danny and his father capture some of the ideas explored in the play? Consider the relationship between Brian and Danny, Brian's view of his other sons (and the reality of this), Irish Brian's view of England and English Protestants and the purpose of Rose's journey to Nottingham.

BRIAN: Jesus, Danny, was it the store on the left of the store on the right?

Beat

Left or right?

Beat

BRIAN: Left or right left or right or right left or right?

DANNY: The one next to the lace market, Da! That one! The Evan's store, Da!

BRIAN: The Protestant store, son?

Danny nods.

BRIAN: The one run by English?

DANNY: Well, we are in Nottingham, Da.

BRIAN: You went into that store, Danny?

DANNY: yes!

BRIAN: And you stole some cigarettes?

DANNY: I did, Da.

BRIAN: Just like your brothers.

DANNY: Aye, Da.

BRIAN: Only they never got caught.

A beat.

BRIAN: And that's how he got that scar, Rosy. My Dannyboy. Chased by a pig over a barbed wire fence. All for some cigarettes. If that didn't make him quit, nothing will. You should put that in your story. At the beginning. It's a nice violent image. Draws people in.

ROSE: It's not quite the story I'm after, Grandda, but I guess it's start

8. What has the audience learned about each of the characters by the end of the play that they did not know at the beginning?
9. What aspects of this story are particularly 'Australian'? Consider, in particular, Danny's story.
10. What is the significance of setting the play on 5th November, Guy Fawkes Day? Consider that Guy Fawkes' plot was called 'gunpowder treason' and that the day is celebrated with bonfires and fireworks.

11. Do you remember the last moments of the play? How would you describe Rose and Danny's relationship now, as compared to the beginning of the play? What has each come to realize about each other?
12. Consider the following excerpts from both Danny and Rose's monologues at the end of the play:

DANNY: ...Then you came along. Another conscript. My little girl cut open and ripped apart and stitched back up and told it's no-one's fault, be brave, shut up. So I obeyed my orders. Like a good soldier, I shut up. I don't speak about my story. People *know* my story. They do. They just choose to ignore it.

But your story's new, Rose. I know that. I do, my daughter. And so I will help you. But not here. Not like this.

Rose nods, stunned.

ROSE: ...As I help him to shore, I feel his own old scar against my new one. I squeeze his hand hard, and try to get it to go away. Squash his scar worm. Flatten it into skin, my own blood oozing through our fingers with the force.

...

But no matter how hard I try, no matter how hard I fight, I just can't seem to squish the little bastard scar. But that's OK. Because it just makes us hold on tighter.

Rose calls out to her father Danny.

Time to come home hey, Dannyboy?

She holds out her hands and he takes it.

They exit together.

Black Out.

End.

How do these excerpts capture Danny and Rose's respective journeys?

Writing About *The Seed*

Look carefully at the photo below.

1. Who are the characters in the photo?
2. What is the actor Martin Vaughan holding in his hand?
3. Do you remember this moment in the play?
4. Write one or two paragraphs about how this moment captures some of the ideas of the play. Consider the characters in the photo, their relationship to one another, the object actor Martin Vaughan is holding in his hand, what you can see behind him and the expression on actors Martin Vaughan's face.



Danny Adcock and Martin Vaughan

photo: Heidrun Löh

What the Critics Say

Read the following review of *The Seed* which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on Friday 22nd February, 2008.

After reading the review, answer the following questions.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts-reviews/the-seed/2008/02/22/1203467328586.html>

Why do you think the playwright chose to have the three characters born on November 5th? What is the significance of this date? Is it believable to have characters from three generations born on the same date? Did this affect your response to the play?

Do you agree that the "... transitions between states (airport, house, occasional Vietnam-caused white-out and Rose's memory monologue of crayfishing with Danny) ..." were seamless? Why or why not? What other ways might a director solve the problem of having a set which suggests a clearly defined location for a play in which there are some scenes set in quite different locations?

What does the word 'chicanery' mean? How does this apply to the character of Brian?

What do you think the reviewer, Stephen Dunne, means when he writes, "...Mulvany allows more shade in her character, especially in terms of her attraction to Brian's chicanery."?

Do you agree that the play works 'emotionally and thematically'? Describe in your own words what this means. Do you think *The Seed* has universal themes? What are they?



Danny Adcock and Kate Mulvany

Photo: Heidrun Löhner

The Seed

Act One Scene One.

The soundscape suggests a boy running for his life, leaping over fences, in front of cars, over rubbish bins. All the time, the panting getting harder and faster and more frightened...

The clatter of a metal fence...

Danny's young English voice calls out...

DANNY - F*** off pig!

Rose, lit, speaks to the audience...

ROSE – Nottingham. November. 1957.

Another clatter...

DANNY– F***!

Heavier footsteps continue running, slowing down steadily...

ROSE – Danny is hanging.

Lights up on Danny, hanging in agony from the barbed wire, his hand entangled the mesh.

ROSE – The wire has weaved a violent gash through his hand and around his fingers, that have just pinched some cigarettes from the store on Smith Street.

The running feet of his accoster slow to a heavy stop. A cop.

The footsteps stop.

DANNY – Let me down, you fat bastard.

ROSE – Perhaps not the best choice of words...

DANNY – Come on! I'm f*****n hangin here!

ROSE – The blood trickles from Danny’s ripped palm and down his arm. The gravel below his dangling feet getting more speckled every time he wriggles.

Danny wretches, terrified.

DANNY – Oh, Jesus...

ROSE – The cop treads his heavy way to Danny and places his hands on the boy’s waist.

DANNY – Took your f*****n time, you bastard.

ROSE - But the cop just puts his hand in Danny’s pocket and fishes out the stolen cigarettes. He lights one, and indulges in long, luxurious inhalations as Danny twists to see the policeman behind him.

DANNY – You bastard...you f*****n piece of shite pig...Those were for me mam and da!

Get me down, f*** you, get me the f*** DOWN!

ROSE – Danny catches sight of the silvery prongs noosed around and through his mangled hand. Waves of nausea weaken him and he begins to act more like the little boy he is...

DANNY – *(sobbing)* Please sir let me down. I’m sorry. I’m tru-truly sorry, I won’t do it again. They were for me mam, sir, me Da, not me. Please sir it hurts. The wire sir it’s...it’s clear through me hand...

ROSE - The policeman slowly moves to the hanging Danny. Once again he puts his hands on Danny’s waist, but this time suddenly twists him around, the boy now face to face with the leering policeman. The cop exhales the last of his cigarette into Danny’s face and smiles with English eyes.

A man’s voice speaks. It is Brian, entering his Nottingham apartment...

BRIAN - “Time to go home, hey, Danny Boy?”

Danny screams.

ROSE - And he tears the boy from the fence.

Act One Scene Two

A young woman, Rose and her father Danny stand side by side in an airport.

DANNY – Where are they?

ROSE – Dad, we only landed half an hour ago.

DANNY – I could do it faster.

Beat.

DANNY – Jesus, where are they?

ROSE – Go and sit down. I'll get the baggage.

DANNY – They're too heavy for you.

Beat.

DANNY – F*** me dead. Where the f*** are they? F***.

ROSE – Go and call mum. Tell her we've arrived safe and sound. She'll be worried.

DANNY – Alright.

A beat. She hands him a phone card.

DANNY – What's this?

ROSE – It's an international phone card.

DANNY – When did they invent them?

ROSE - Around the same week as the wheel.

A beat.

DANNY – We'll call her when we get to your Grandda's.

Beat.

DANNY – Where are they?

ROSE - Go and get yourself a sandwich. You didn't eat on the plane.

DANNY – F*****n spaghetti.

ROSE – Noodles, actually.

DANNY – Wasn't hungry.

ROSE – Are you hungry now?

DANNY – Maybe a bucket of chips.

ROSE – Here. (*She gives him some Australian money*) You'll have to go and get it exchanged. 38p to the dollar. Don't let them trick you.

Beat.

DANNY – I'm not hungry.

Beat. Rose takes the money back.

DANNY – Where are they? We're going to miss the train to Notts.

ROSE – We'll be fine, Dad. I checked all the schedules. Plenty of time.

DANNY – Takes two hours to get there, you know.

ROSE – I know.

DANNY – On the train.

ROSE – Yes.

DANNY – To Nottingham.

A beat.

DANNY – Where are they?!

A beat

Never took this long before. Service standards have dropped. So busy looking out for terrorists they've forgotten about the simple things. Like giving people their f*****g bags back at the end of a f*****g flight.

Rose gets out her Dictaphone.

ROSE – What are your other memories of the last time you were here, Dad?
At Heathrow.

DANNY – What?

ROSE – Expectation, perhaps? Anxiety? Hope.

DANNY – Rose...

ROSE – Is that what you're feeling again now? Now you're back?

A beat.

Or maybe you're tapping into something more deep seeded. Maybe something long forgotten. Maybe...

DANNY - Maybe a cigarette.

ROSE – Maybe some food, Dad.

DANNY – A cigarette. Definitely.

Beat.

The lights fade as he leaves. He stops. Looks around.

DANNY - F****n' tourists.

Rose watches him leave and switches off the Dictaphone.

© Kate Mulvany

This script extract is for education use in the classroom only

The Brilliant Seed

By Diana Simmonds - February 20th, 2008

(source: <http://www.stagenoise.com/featuresdisplay.php?id=63>)

Kate Mulvany talks to Diana Simmonds

When Kate Mulvany's laptop was stolen years ago, with it went all her work on a novel about her family. In most instances this would have been a blessing: the average person who says "I have a book in me" should be encouraged to make no effort whatsoever to bring it out.

Mulvany is not your average person however. For one thing, she is one of the most talented actor-writers around, and for another, her family story is riveting and important. The lost 100 pages somehow made that more obvious to her, in a painful way.

"I learned two things," she says now. "Always make a back-up copy and, that I hardly dared go back to the story for a long time, so I knew I had to do it,"

Eventually, Mulvany turned the scraps of notes she had left into a work-in-progress that won the 2004 Philip Parsons Young Playwrights' Award. She used the \$10,000 prize to buy some time to fashion that script into *The Seed*. It became one of the successes of B Sharp's 2007 season, winning the Sydney Theatre Award for Best Independent Production.

By then Company B artistic director Neil Armfield had already decided *The Seed* could go further and invited Mulvany and her play upstairs into the 2008 mainstage season. So what's the difference?

Mulvany chuckles. "A budget for a start," she says. "A budget is always good. A wage is always good."

There were other factors too: a play that works comfortably in an 80-seat room is unlikely to transfer to a 350-seat auditorium without some rethinking. It was a new challenge for Mulvany and a luxury that few playwrights experience.

"It was a luxury," she says. "Working with Neil; and of course, there are a lot more people involved and they were looking at it with fresh eyes."

As was the writer: she came to it afresh and started out with the same spirit that enabled her to write the play in the first place. It tells of a Vietnam veteran who returns to Australia unaware of what he is bringing with him. Exposed to Agent Orange while on active service, he suffers recurring and multiple illnesses and side effects. Then there is the nightmare of his infant daughter's chemical legacy of cancer. The play's three generations of Maloneys also have another toxic inheritance: in a reuniting visit to the grandfather in England what surfaces is the myths and true lies of his lifelong support of the IRA. It's a powerful mix - which may well have changed somewhat from the first production.

Being able to change the bits I always knew were sticky is something I didn't ever expect to be able to do," says Mulvany. "As a writer I've thought - oh, the actors will fix that. Now I have to have some sympathy for the actors!"

Reworking the play has made her "a little bit adult" with the work, she says. "It's like putting it through rehab. I couldn't have envisaged the value of that. It's the danger of doing a play so closely related to yourself. Now I've been able to stand back and say - am I having a whinge? Am I being cruel?"

The Geraldton-born, Curtin University-educated Mulvany is a sought-after actress who has appeared on the stages of all the major companies. At the same time, her reputation as a writer is rapidly rising.

"But I still go home with the same fears," she says. "Right now they're writer fears. It's so much more frightening having your words out there - because they're straight from your heart, your brain."

Appearing in her own play is a curious experience too, Mulvany has found. "I think - how did my character make that choice? What is this about? What was the damn writer thinking of giving me lines like this?!"

And while *The Seed* has been in the re-working, re-rehearsal process at Belvoir St, yet another play, *The Danger Age*, is being rehearsed at La Boite in Brisbane.

"It's been a funny experience," says Mulvany. "I'm here but my head's up there. Luckily the director has rung me every day so I feel some sort of connection to it, I sort of know what's going on. It's weird not being there. I hope it'll come south. It's funny and beautiful - well, that's my intention."

Meanwhile, Mulvany is writing two more plays in her spare time ("they're cooking away and they're quite yummy, I think") while grappling once again with the role of Rose Maloney.

"She's actually the most made up character in the play," says Mulvany. "And the more I fictionalised her, the more personal she became. That was weird, but I didn't write the role for myself. Four other actresses were approached and couldn't do it for reasons including pregnancy. I was actually fifth choice!"