

Company B Presents



Toy Symphony

Written by Michael Gow
Directed by 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

Toy Symphony

Written by Michael Gow
Directed by Neil Armfield

With

Justine Clarke
Russell Dykstra

Nina/Julie Pearson/Miss Beverly/Lynette
Lawyer/Headmaster/Dr Maybloom/Steve
Gooding/Mr Devlin/Tom

Guy Edmonds
Monica Maughan
Richard Roxburgh

Nick/Daniel
Mrs Walkham/Nurse/Crazy Woman
Roland Henning

Ralph Myers
Tess Schofield
Damien Cooper
Paul Charlier
Michael Toisuta
Matthew Lutton
Kylie Mascord
Joshua Sherrin
Gay McAuley

Set Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Composer & Sound Designer
Assistant Sound Designer
Assistant Director
Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Project Observer

*The Company B production of **Toy Symphony** opened at Belvoir St Theatre
on 14 November 2007.*

Cover image: Richard Roxburgh, photo: Alex Craig

The Play: *Toy Symphony*

Roland Henning is a famous playwright. He has reluctantly come to see a psychologist because he has writer's block. When he refuses to co-operate with the psychologist she confronts him with his history of drug addiction and he opens up a bit. He explains to her that the writer's block began when legal action was brought against his last play for theft of material. His response was to scour his work for signs of its originality and since then he's been unable to write. The psychologist asks him to think about a time in his life when he was imaginatively free.

We cut to his childhood in Como in the 1960s. One day during class he is told off by the headmaster for not paying attention. Young Roland explains that he was thinking about Alexander the Great. The headmaster tells him to stop daydreaming and at that moment Alexander the Great enters the classroom and forces the headmaster to kneel and apologize.

Roland goes on to tell the psychologist about other events in his childhood revolving around this remarkable gift of being able to summon people from his imagination and cause them to appear in real life. We see him relive encounters with a series of adult authority figures who train him to STOP using his imagination. His class teacher, Mrs Walkham, however, secretly encourages him by giving him a notebook to write his imaginings down in. We cut forward to high school and see the story of Young Roland writing a play called 'Toy Symphony' to get his best friend out of hospital for the day. However, Roland has used his gift of making people appear to seduce the captain of the football team, and when the headmaster finds out, Roland's play is banned and all copies are destroyed. The friend dies before Roland sees him again and young Roland is left bereft. The act ends with Roland telling the psychologist he'll never write again and that he won't be coming back for further treatment.

Act Two begins several years later. Roland still hasn't written anything. Massive bush fires have destroyed his childhood home and school. He is lost and adrift. He meets a drama school student and angrily tries to seduce him. The student is upset and flees. Roland's parents both die in the space of a few months. We see him tell a friend of his loss of faith in life and the world. He goes back to his old dealer and forces him to sell him drugs. Roland is at rock bottom and his old teacher Mrs Walkham appears to him and suggests he open an old suitcase that his mother left him. Inside, Roland finds a copy of 'Toy Symphony'. Mrs Walkham tells him she saved a copy from being destroyed and sent it to Roland's mother.

In the last scene we see Roland and the drama school student having a beer. The student explains that Roland's behaviour has made him much more honest with his life and work and mentions his desire to act in a Chekhov play. Roland apologizes to the student and confesses that he's lost his faith in life but that he still sees a way ahead. He gives the student the lost copy of 'Toy Symphony', and says he's been feeling a bit like writing again lately. The play ends with Anton Chekhov appearing in the pub and we realize Roland's creative gift is back.

Toy Symphony moves between the present day and flashbacks to Roland Henning's childhood in the Sutherland Shire in the 1960s.

The Playwright: Michael Gow

Some of Michael Gow's other plays

The Kid was Michael's first mainstage play. It premiered on the Belvoir St stage in 1983, produced by Nimrod. It tells the story of four desperate teenagers making their way to Sydney to collect a compensation payment after one of them was hit by a bus. Throughout the play, raging summer temperatures set the characters on edge, the promethean music of Wagner fights against a tinny portable stereo, and the city is ringed in an apocalyptic conflagration of bushfire.

Away is one of the most performed Australian plays. Its first production was at the Stables in 1986. Three families in the 1960s head off on Christmas holidays, their frustrations and losses follow them, but when their paths cross they find a kind of ease in a beachside pageant. At the centre of the story is Tom, teenaged and sick with cancer. The play closes with a schoolkid reading King Lear's line, 'Whilst we, unburdened, crawl towards death.'

Furious premiered at Playbox, Melbourne, in 1991. It's the story of a playwright cloyed by the pitfalls of his life and work – awards ceremonies, seminars to young hopefuls, his love for a schoolboy and the mysterious legacy of a deceased fan. The writer's name in the play is Roland Henning.

Sweet Phoebe had its first production at Sydney Theatre Company in 1994 with Michael directing Colin Moody and Cate Blanchett as an aspirational young couple entrusted with the care of a friend's dog. When the dog goes missing, their desperate search to find her nearly wrecks their lives.



Michael Gow

photo: Heidrun Löhner

Reading About the Play

Read the following article (a hard copy is included at the end of these notes) which appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald (*Spectrum*) on Saturday, 3rd November, 2007.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/work-rest-play/2007/11/02/1193619119433.html>

Questions for Discussion

What, according to the article, is the subject matter of Michael Gow's play *Furious*?

What do you understand the term 'writer's block' to mean?

Have you ever experienced a 'block' about doing something you have done for years? (i.e. creative writing, horse-riding, surfing, entering a race or competition, dancing, singing, playing a musical instrument)

What do you think caused this block? How did you overcome it?

Why did Michael Gow call this play *Toy Symphony*?

After reading the article, do you expect the play to be autobiographical? Why or why not?

What do you think Michael Gow might mean when he says, "...Roland plays with some of the characters and others play with him."?

After seeing the production, consider these words again. Do you agree that Roland 'plays with some of the characters...'? What do you understand this to mean now that you have seen the production? How does Roland '...play with some of the characters...'? Do others '...play with him...'?

Read the following article (a hard copy is included at the end of these notes) which appeared in the Sun Herald on Sunday 4th November, 2007 and answer the following questions.

Clever Dick Lifts the Intensity, The Sun-Herald, 4th November, 2007

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/clever-dick-lifts-the-intensity/2007/11/04/1194117867663.html>

Now read the following article (a hard copy is included at the end of these notes) which appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald on Friday, 8th November, 2007 and answer the following questions.

Back, in a torrent of words, The Sydney Morning Herald, 8th November, 2007

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/back-in-a-torrent-of-words/2007/11/08/1194329414127.html>

What character does Richard Roxburgh play in *Toy Symphony*? What dilemma is his character facing?

What does the following paragraph suggest about the character of Roland:

'While Roxburgh has admitted to apprehension about his return to the stage, his main issue has been learning his lines. And no wonder. Roland doesn't suffer from verbal block, delivering a torrent of words that swing from the profound to the profane.'

After reading this article what do you expect *Toy Symphony* to be about?

After seeing the production, consider the following paragraph:

‘...it’s very funny, which we noted in the first workshop read-through a few months ago. There are some very dark passages in it – it is, after all, about a person who is at various points really unraveling in a way or winding down into a very bad place – but all of those fun things were really encouraging.’

Do you agree that the play is both funny and dark? Which scenes and/or characters made you laugh? At what point in the play did you think Roland was ‘most unravelled’? How does Roland find his way back from this place?

Haydn’s Toy Symphony

The origin of the musical work known as ‘*Haydn’s Toy Symphony*’ is unclear as no original manuscript has survived. It now seems likely that this popular work (known in Germany as *Kindersinfonie* – *Children’s Symphony* and in France as *Sinfonie Burlesque*) was falsely or creatively attributed to Haydn by an enterprising publisher. Throughout the 19th Century it was variously attributed to Joseph Hadyn, Michael Hadyn, or simply ‘Signor Haydn’. It is also likely that the *Cassation in G Toy Symphony* attributed to Leopold Mozart (discovered in the 1950s) which includes transposed versions of the three original *Toy Symphony* movements may be a pastiche based on an earlier version put together by someone unknown. (A ‘cassation’ is an instrumental composition usually for outdoor performance.)

The earliest existing manuscript dates from 1770 and was discovered in the Cistercian Monastery at Stams in the Austrian Tyrol. It is titled *Berchtoldsgaden Musik* and was either composed or prepared by the Benedictine monk Edmundo Angerer.

The *Toy Symphony* is arranged for strings and a variety of children’s toys. The actual effects used vary between versions and usually depend on what is available locally or at the time. Miniature toy and mechanical musical instruments were extremely popular at the time the *Toy Symphony* became famous. The Berchtoldsgaden/Tyrol region was in fact a centre of toy production. A version has also been uncovered to be played on an organ producing the sound effects. These organs were developed in the 17th Century and reached their peak during the silent film era. Recent performances tend to use instruments found within the orchestral percussion section.

The Australian musicologist Robert Illing, from whose extensive research into the history of the *Toy Symphony* much of what is written here has come, has described the work as “fair game for extensive tinkering.”

The edited (or compacted) version of the *Toy Symphony* in this production uses the original Angerer score but has been arranged to be played solely by a collection of children’s toys, miniature and mechanical instruments, drums and sampled sound effects. The original string parts are played by toy piano, glockenspiel and music box.

Paul Charlier, Composer and Sound Designer, Toy Symphony

Rehearsing the production

Toy Symphony 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. *Toy Symphony* is a professional theatre production and the actors, director and crew are paid for the rehearsal period.

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

Photo A



Russell Dykstra and Richard Roxburgh

photo: Heidrun Löhr

- Describe what you see in the photo above. How would you describe the expression on each actor's face?
- What might be happening at this moment in the play? What might happen next?
- Who has the higher status in this moment? Why?
- What might be the relationship between these two characters?

Photo B



Russell Dykstra, Richard Roxburgh and Justine Clarke

photo: Heidrun Löhner

- Describe what you see in the photo above? How would you describe the expression on each actor's face?
- What might be happening in this scene?
- What is the focal point of this moment? How is this achieved?
- What clues are there in the photo to indicate this is a rehearsal and not a performance?

Photo C



Guy Edmonds

photo: Heidrun Löhr

- Describe what you see in the photo above. How would you describe the expression on the actor's face?
- Where do you think this scene is taking place? What clues are there to indicate this might be the case?
- Look carefully at the photo. What can you see in the background? What do you think this is?
- Writing activity: write a 'stream of consciousness' for this character. What is he thinking at this moment? Where is he? What is his attitude to his surroundings? Is this anybody else in the room with him? If so, what is he thinking about them?

Thinking About the Ideas of the Play

Following are some of the ideas or 'themes' explored in *Toy Symphony*. Students could start thinking about some of their associations with these ideas before they see the play.

Writers

Creativity

Inspiration

Psychology

Addiction

Denial

Loss

Childhood

Integrity

- Collect images and media which represent or deal with one or more of these ideas.
- Make a list of books, films or plays you have studied that explore one or more of these ideas.

Several well-known writers are mentioned in the play. What do you know about the following writers:

Eugene O'Neill

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Samuel Coleridge

August Strindberg

Anton Chekhov

Homer

D.H. Lawrence

Toy Symphony has a very gentle dig at some of the clichés associated with writers, psychoanalysts and drama students. What is a 'stereotypical' image of each of these?

Preparing to See the Play

Read the opening scene of *Toy Symphony* (script extract included at the end of these notes) and answer the following questions.

Where does this scene take place?

Who are the characters in this scene?

What do you learn about each of them?

Why is Roland here?

Write down five words that describe Roland's state of mind in this scene. Find lines in the scene which give reason for your choice of words.

What dynamic exists between Roland and Nina during this scene?

Imagine you were directing this scene for performance.

How might you show physically that Roland and Nina are in a therapist's room?

What impression do you want to leave with the audience at the end of this scene? What do you think is the most important thing for this scene to communicate to the audience?

How might the various characters' attitudes towards each other be communicated spatially on the stage? Consider the non-verbal ways in which their initial impressions of each other might be revealed?

Consider the long monologue spoken by the Roland in this scene. How do you imagine this being performed on the stage? What tone of voice do you imagine being used? What point is Roland making in this monologue?

Consider how you, as an audience member, might respond to longer monologues spoken by characters on stage.

Some practical ways to explore Scene One

1. Read Roland's monologue around the room changing reader at each punctuation
2. Read the monologue around the room line at a time
3. Cut the monologue up into short blocks of text (or sentences). Mix the blocks or sentences up. Read each one out loud and try to place them in sequence.
4. Identify where you think the pace might quicken and where the pace slows down in the monologue.
5. Allocate one student as the Narrator who reads the lines of the monologue while the other group members act out what is described.
6. Students are given an object that symbolizes the experience of having an idea of feeling inspired such as fabric, a ball, a shoe. The teacher provides the following description for the life of the idea:
(while the teacher describe the life of the idea the students illustrate this through their objects)
 - The idea begins – shown through tiny signs of life through movement
 - The idea develops – shown through bigger movements that last a few seconds then stop
 - The idea builds – shown through longer movements
 - The idea floods out – shown through unstoppable movement

More ways to start thinking about the ideas of the play

Improvisation Activity

- Divide class into pairs A and B
- Each person has one line of dialogue, an objective and a time limit in which to achieve his/her objective (1 minute)

A You're in denial
(Objective: *to break B*)

B No I'm not
(Objective: *to not break*)

Aim

To achieve your objective in the given time limit
To observe the body language used by your partner

Rules

A and B can only say the line given, otherwise they lose
A and B can use any action in an attempt to achieve his/her objective except physical contact (amuse, beg, threaten, persuade, convince, pressure, seduce)
At the end of 1 minute the teacher calls time and asks who achieved his/her objective

Debrief

What did you experience emotionally?
What did you do with your body and eye contact?
What did your partner do physically?
What happened to the tension in the scene as it got closer to the end?
Who was the most successful and why?
Person A - What did you believe B was denying?
Person B – Did you feel you were denying something? What was that thing?

Optional Extension

Students watch the improvisation of one pair in the class and observe:

1. the actions each actor tries in an attempt to achieve his/her objective
2. the body language each actor employs
3. the build up of tension in the scene in relation to the pressure of time

Further Discussion

What were the common gestures, actions and body language of those in denial?
Why is hard to get people to admit to their problems?
What are some common things people are reluctant to admit to? Why do you think that is?

More Improvisation

Think of an incident from your childhood that you remember vividly. Why do you remember this incident so clearly? Do you remember this incident affecting the way you see the world/ your perception of the world?

In pairs, describe the incident to your partner in as much detail as you can. Choose one 'scene' from the memory to improvise in class. How many people feature in the scene? Choose members of your class to act in the scene. Describe the scene in detail to your classmates. Have them improvise a version. Direct them to change things according to your memory. Then try the scene using different 'styles'.

Questions for English Students: Imaginative Journeys

After seeing the production, write down what you remember about the 'visits' from the following characters. What was happening just before each one appeared?

Alexander the Great
The Hooded Man
Captain Oates
Miss Beverly
Lynette
Mrs Walkham (in Act Two)
Anton Chekhov

Why do you think these characters appear to Roland at the moment they do?

What do you think Roland gains from the appearance of each of these characters?

When does Roland regain the ability to make characters appear? Why do you think this happens?

Consider the following sequence of scene at the end of the play:

- Roland's visit to his ex-dealer
- Mrs Walkham visiting Roland when he is sorting through his mother's papers and using drugs
- Roland having a drink with Daniel, the drama student.

Write a summary of each scene as you remember it. What does Roland learn in each scene? How do the events of each scene lead to the next?

At the end of the play do you consider that Roland has broken his cycle of dependency and his writer's block?

What effect do the 'visits' have on Roland in each of these scenes?

How do the other characters in the play respond to the people who 'visit'?

Consider the responses of the Headmaster, Mrs Walkham, Dr Maybloom (the specialist Roland sees as child) Steve Gooding, Nick and Daniel.

Who has the most positive response? Why do you think this is the case? Do the characters 'believe' the people are real? Why or why not?

How would you describe the performance style of the character from Roland's imagination? Are they played in a naturalistic or non-naturalistic manner? Discuss how these characters appeared on stage. Do you remember any particular lighting effects, music or other effects when the characters appeared? Create a list of ways in which the production distinguishes these characters from the 'real life' characters

Explain in your own words what Albert Einstein means in the following quote:

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand." Albert Einstein

What comments does the play *Toy Symphony* make about the nature and power of the imagination?

Questions for English Students: Inner Journeys

How would you describe Roland's emotional and mental state in the first scene of the play? How would you describe Roland's emotional and mental state in the last scene of the play?

What has changed for Roland?

What event/s lead Roland to feel the following:

ROLAND: I became... self-conscious. Of my own voice, style, instincts, impulses. Yes. So self aware that now I can't do anything without questioning it. And when you question your basic instincts that closely, they seize up. Paralysis.

Describe in your own words the significance of this following moment in Roland's childhood:

MRS WALKHAM: Roland, what's wrong? Why are you staring at the ground like that, with your jaw clenched and your fists clenched?

ROLAND: The doctor said I mustn't let them come any more. It's bad for me, it's bad for everyone, it's upsetting the other kids, even though they like what I do. I don't understand that. And my mother and father work so hard so I'll be happy and normal... So I said yes I'd try to stop it happening. And now nobody likes me, no one talks to me. But sometimes I think I won't be able to stop it happening, no matter how hard I try. This morning when we were learning about Ludwig Leichhardt I kept thinking about him lost in the desert and he was almost here. I only just stopped him dying of thirst in front of every one.

MRS WALKHAM: This is terrible. Roland, what can I do to help?

ROLAND: I wish it would stop.

MRS WALKHAM: In my bag I have a notebook and pencil. Perhaps, if whenever you feel they want to come, your special visitors, you could write it down. Here, try to use the pencil and paper to empty your mind.

Consider Roland's friendship with Nick. How do they meet? How does Nick respond when Roland tells him of his 'special ability'? What affect does his friendship with Nick have on Roland? What changes for him after he meets Nick? What happens to Nick? What does Roland promise him? Does he fulfill his promise? Why? What affect does Nick's death have on Roland?

What impact do the bushfires in Como have on the adult Roland? Explain in your own words what Roland means when he says to Nina, his therapist, "And I felt nothing. That's when I thought, that's when I realised: time to let go. I'm not here to get it back, the writing, the whatever. I'm here to...closure, that's a word you use."

Do other characters in the play go on an inner journey? Consider the character of Daniel, the drama student. What is the context of Daniel's first meeting with Roland? What happens?

What do you understand Daniel, the drama student, to mean when he says in the final scene, "...you said that I didn't know what was driving me, you said I didn't know my own, what my motivation was... You see what you said, it's true, I was, I still I'm in this kind of fog, you see, a lot of time, I kind of go through the motions, I go along with things. I do things. But I don't do them from in here, the core..."

Why do you think Daniel's encounter with Roland makes him realize this?

After the Show: Questions for Discussion

How would you describe Roland's emotional state at the beginning of the play? What does he discover during the course of the play?

Which characters in the play force Roland to extend himself? How does he change as a result of their influence?

What point does Roland's lawyer make early in Act One about copyright on life experiences?

What do you think is the significance of the scene in which Mrs Walkham presents a series of overhead slides about the history of the Sutherland Shire? Why do you think the playwright, Michael Gow, included this scene in the play?

What is the effect of adult actors played children in *Toy Symphony*? Were the portrayals convincing? Why or why not?

How would you describe the performance style of the characters from Roland's imagination? Are they played in a naturalistic or a non-naturalistic manner? What might be the reason for this choice?

Consider the use of the haze effect in this production. Do you remember seeing it in use? How does the haze affect the mood of a scene?

Do you remember the scene in which Roland speaks to his friend, Jake, on a mobile phone? How was the scene staged? Describe in your own words the point Roland makes when he says, "My parents dream, right, was a suburban paradise where life was just supposed to get better and better without end but it ended in hospitals and pain and despair and panic and fear." How would you describe Roland's emotional and mental state at this point in the story? Do you remember what happens in the scene immediately following this telephone conversation? (*Roland visits his dealer to score drugs*)

How does Roland discover the only remaining copy of his play *Toy Symphony*?

Why is it significant that Mrs Walkham leads him to the copy of the play?

How would you describe the tone and style of the performance of *Roland's* play *Toy Symphony*? Did it make you laugh? Why or why not?

How is the story of Roland's *Toy Symphony* similar to Michael Gow's *Toy Symphony*? What parallels are there between the two stories?

How would you describe the mood of the final scene of the play? How is Roland's interaction with Daniel different in this final scene to his interaction with Daniel the first time they meet?

Why do you think Roland gives Daniel his copy of *Toy Symphony*?

Do you have empathy for the character of Roland? Did your feelings towards him change at different points in the story? If so, why?

Do you remember what you were thinking as you left the theatre at the end of the play?

In the days following the production, what images from the play stayed most strongly in your mind?

More Questions About the Production

How does each of the following photos of Company B's production of *Toy Symphony* capture the tone and style of the production?

What is happening at each of these moments in the play?

Explain how each moment is significant in Roland's journey?



Richard Roxburgh, Justine Clarke

photo: Heidrun Löhner



Richard Roxburgh, Monica Maughan

photo: Heidrun Löhr



Guy Edmond, Richard Roxburgh, Justine Clarke, Russell Dykstra

photo: Heidrun Löhr

Script Extract: Toy Symphony

ACT ONE

The writer Roland Henning finds himself in the consulting room of a therapist, Nina.

NINA What I'm interested in is clarity, in a better understanding of whatever we're afraid of-

ROLAND Yes, uh-huh-

NINA -what it is that's stopping us doing what it is we want to do-

ROLAND Uh-huh, yes.

NINA -identifying thinking or behaviour that is clearly negative, destructive-

ROLAND Uh-huh, right, clarity, yes.

NINA So that we know it better, the fear, the pressure-

ROLAND Okay look, I can't write. Save a lot of time, straight to it, can't write. That's pretty clear, don't you think?

NINA Roland, we know you can write. There's a body of work, you have a reputation. But, well, this is interesting, this is what I'm talking about. For some reason, you currently believe, for whatever reason, you *believe* can't write.

ROLAND Uh huh.

NINA And it's that kind of thinking that might be a good place to start. Anyone dealing with a creative block can start to look at-

ROLAND No. No. This isn't writer's... thing, no.

NINA Writer's...?

ROLAND You know.

NINA Writer's... ?

ROLAND I don't have... it's not that. Let's just get that-

NINA You mean writer's block?

ROLAND There you are, you see.

NINA I didn't actually use that term.

ROLAND Maybe not, not out loud but it's still there, underneath. See Dr... ?

NINA Nina.

ROLAND Nina, if this is going to work, if, and I really don't, I'm not sure, really, if there's any point and this isn't you, no, I have the greatest, I'm sure you're terrific, you're the one who's read *The Interpretation of Dreams* or you saw your grandfather naked when you were six and you have devoted your life to

understanding the effect that had, I see that, but let me be perfectly clear I do not have Writer's...

NINA Writer's...

ROLAND I told you.

NINA Writer's... ?

ROLAND Okay, uh huh. This is a technique, getting me to admit I have a problem, and then if I admit it then I have it. But I told you. I don't have writer's... block, there I said it.

NINA Roland, I didn't say you did.

ROLAND Not out loud you didn't but it's there anyway, waiting to be... isn't it? And I mean writer's... thing, I mean it's such a meaningless term anyway, a Hollywood fiction, a monumental cliché and if that's how you're going to, if you think that's how you're going to whatever it is you intend doing or attempting, by removing this... block, as if, as if there's this there's this river, that comes bubbling up from the deep, way down in the Permian layers, thrusting up through the ancient strata, forced up by the internal forces, pressures, and it spills out, it bursts out into the dazzling light on the slopes of some painfully clear, bright mountainside and runs down this upper slope, this high country all clean and clear and sparkling like a Norsca ad, pure inspiration running over stones, through rapids, until it reaches the tree line. Then, there, it starts to wander through dank forests, spilling over mossy rocks and forming still, deep pools full of incredibly clear sighted fish and visionary yabbies, carving out ravines all verdurous and gloomy with the slowly forming thoughts, just inklings of works of art. And then our river reaches the edge of the mountain ridge and now it plunges out of this high country, roaring over cliffs, cataracts, thundering over the edge of the falls, down into conscious valleys, deep chasms of impulse and first ideas, flowing on through steep gorges and wild, white water, churning up basic structures. It's violent and dangerous but finally it begins to slow down because it's reached the plains where there's habitation, creative cities full of neo classical libraries and museums with all the previous works and commentaries and interpretations on show so they can be admired, where you can find inspiration and study whatever you need to build your own work. And after the city, it flows even more slowly so the happy peasants can draw the water from the river in their intricate, ancient watering devices to nourish the fields where the new works have been sown and where they start to grow. And then, at last, the river reaches the delta and splits into a dozen different tributaries and the mud is incredibly fertile and masterpieces spring up almost without anyone having to do any work and then our weary river winds safely out into the vast ocean, stately, grand, with loud Beethoven playing, out to where leviathan lives, brooding at the bottom, sending up the simplest, grandest thoughts to keep the ocean busy. And then the sun draws up the water and fat clouds form, thundering with thought so basic it's before thought, chthonic thunderheads. And the clouds drift towards the mountains and get snagged and it rains and the water tumbles down through fissures deep into the earth and it all starts over again and again and again and suddenly. Across our river- bang. Warragamba Dam. And the flow is stopped. It's blocked. By a block, the river is blocked by whatever; impotence, fear of failure, fear of success, fear of death, illness, whatever. And I struggle helplessly with that, until you come along, with the psycho-cavalry and you help me work it through until one day, through persistence and "I will not be defeated" and "I am a valuable person" and I don't know, the workings of grace, you fly in like dambusters and drop your bouncing

therapeutic bomb and it explodes and the wall collapses and water pours out and floods the towns downstream, and everything gets washed away and cleared away and swept away and new levels of fertile mud are deposited and the river is flowing again. And. I'm saved. Now. If that's how you, if that's what I'm paying a hundred and forty dollars an hour for well... you know. I don't think...

He breaks down.

NINA Roland, do you need-

She hands him a box of tissues, he snaps out of it.

ROLAND I'm fine, I faked that, it's easy to do, been around actors long enough, so breaking down, the sobbing confession or the really sad moment in my past that's caused this isn't going to happen either, so there's no point... I won't be... okay? And don't expect me to imagine myself as a ten year old either, I'm not doing that, don't buy that for a minute, talk to my ten year old self, or relive teenage traumas so they lose their power, uh-uh, uh-uh. Is that all... all of that, you know, clear? It's not me, that's all. Not me.

Pause.

NINA So why are you here?

ROLAND A friend thought I should come and see you. This friend is worried, he's really worried, he's always worried about me, he's great, his name's Jake, he's my best, and he worries and he's thinking of moving to New York so he worries even more, so he said he thought it would be a good idea to see someone like you.

NINA But you made the decision to see me.

ROLAND Well yes, but Jake you see, well he's feeling guilty you see, he feels a little responsible for some of what's been happening. He introduced me to this woman who was babysitting a dog that belonged to friends of hers. She's a friend, was a friend of Jake's. The dog went missing, ran away, got stolen and she went crazy trying to find it again. She told me about what happened and then I wrote a play about it, which is where you might say this started this, lack of... me not...

NINA But Roland, you made the appointment, so no matter how guilty your friend was feeling, no matter how worried, you made the call-

ROLAND Uh-huh-

NINA -there was a desire, a need on your part, to come here. You've decided you can't write, then you tell me what you don't want, what you're not going to do, make fun of what I'm trying to get started. Then you tell me you're only here to make someone else feel better. I don't know why you're here. You may as well pay yourself a hundred and forty dollars an hour and stay home as far as I can see.

ROLAND That's probably very true, I thought it would be a mistake, but Jake kept at me-

NINA So what, you have no control over your friend's concerns? He worries, you react? That might be an interesting place to start any kind of work-

ROLAND He's my friend, it matters, what he thinks matters, maybe you don't have anyone to worry about you, you've sorted every one out in your life.

NINA Oh I have someone to worry about me. And I can also be honest about the things that concern me. Sorry, but I'm not going to sit here and get boxed into some personal view you have about me and my kind. Before we even start. How can I proceed if that's where we start from? You must want to be here, you must want to address something, but so far, I have no idea. You have an advantage over a lot of the people I see. Most of them can't put a few words together that gives even the vaguest sense of what they think, feel. I'd say you have language in your grip and that's wonderful. But you also use your command of language to hide, to avoid. You're here for some reason, even if you don't want to admit what it is. You want something badly. So badly you're prepared to do anything, even something you think is as ridiculous as coming here. Yes?

ROLAND Well...

NINA You're in trouble, Roland. You're clearly in denial about something, if that's not sounding too much like a cliché shrink talking. Denial. About your work, your life, something. You're in trouble. I know you're in trouble because... I'll just say it, come out and say it. What's your drug of choice, Roland? There's a slight glassiness, there's irritability, as well as the words, this torrent, this wall of words. You're hiding from something, that's what any substance abuse is about-

ROLAND Okay okay-

NINA But if we're going to start any kind of work, we have to start with where you are right now. Before we start to even think about writing. So, what? I assume some amphetamine, or coke is it?

Silence.

At this point, at any point, you can leave. You can get up and leave, angry at my presumption, every right. Or. We could start. Talking.

Silence.

ROLAND Okay.

NINA Yes?

Pause.

ROLAND So have you read *The Interpretation of Dreams*?

NINA As a matter of fact Roland, I have.

ROLAND Okay. Good. That's something.

Pause.

That's a start.