



DANCE

ATAR course sample examination

Support document for stimulus material

R&J

**by Australasian Dance Collective
(formerly Expressions Dance Company)**

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About *R&J*

Natalie Weir's *R&J*, inspired by the classic story of Romeo and Juliet, takes this story to three different times and places, proving that love can be eternal and tragic. Questioning what is real, human and inevitable. Love plays a major role in all our lives, but as Shakespeare knew too well, does not always guarantee a fairytale ending. Life and love are cyclical. Time passes and history repeats itself. But in each repetition, there is always something new. One story, set in modern day Brisbane, is brutal and contemporary; another story, set in domestic bliss in suburbia in the 50's, is touching in its realism; the third story, set in more ancient times, captures the romance of young love escalating towards a tragic end.

R&J turns the classic story of *Romeo and Juliet* on its head – cutting to the essence of what is real, human and inevitable. Set across three different eras, this work reinforces the notion that love – no matter what age you are, or what age you are in – is eternal and its power, everlasting.

With music composed by Topology's John Babbage and performed live on stage by this prolific music ensemble, *R&J* tells three moving love stories across three short contrasting acts:

Act One: Valley

"Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die."

An ominous story set in a pulsing nightspot of a modern day Fortitude Valley where passion and desire erupt in a dangerous and tragic love triangle.

Act Two: Young Love Blossoms

"If that thy bent of love be honourable, thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow."

Romance blossoms in this tale of young love and divided households. In an attempt to seal the lovers' devotion to each other, a promise is made, however Fate hands them a devastating ending.

Act Three: Vintage

"Goodnight, goodnight! Parting is such sweet sorrow that I shall say goodnight till it be morrow."

A couple set deep within 1950's suburban bliss happily play out the daily routine of their life until they are rudely interrupted by a heartbreaking inevitability.

Although there are many characters in the original *Romeo and Juliet* story, Natalie Weir only had six company dancers. She gave each female dancer the opportunity to play Juliet and each male dancer the opportunity to play Romeo. This was not only a logical decision based on the number of dancers, but also a passionate decision, as Weir always had an interest in the idea of life and love being cyclical. Since having children, Weir had an acute awareness of time passing, and history repeating itself. But in each repetition, there is always something new.

Weir loves the idea of Fate... that 'it is written'... 'destiny'... or 'in the stars'. She loves that Romeo and Juliet were meant to be together, but not in this life. In death, they are eternally united. Isn't that just the most romantic thing you've ever heard?

Each story will be unique, and yet similar. Each time will be isolated and yet connected.

Choreographer and Artistic Director – Natalie Weir

Australian choreographer Natalie Weir is known internationally for her highly physical partner work, her organic movement style and her touching insight into humanity.

In her 30-plus year career, she has created major new works for world class companies such as The Australian Ballet, Queensland Ballet, West Australian Ballet, Houston Ballet, Singapore Dance Theatre, Hong Kong Ballet and American Ballet Theatre.

Natalie was resident choreographer for The Australian Ballet and Queensland Ballet and was appointed Expressions Dance Company's (EDC) Artistic Director, where she held the role from 2009 to 2018, Natalie has also been the recipient of both an Australia Council Fellowship and the Lord Mayor's Fellowship.

Natalie Weir introduces *R&J* in a short interview: (conducted on 26 May, 2011)**Why did you want to create *R&J*?**

It's something I have wanted to do for about six years, I just had to find the right place to do it. I've always been attracted to the story. It's so extreme, so tragic, so human. I'm a romantic, I like things about love, and I'm attracted to darkness. And we know from the ballet that it translates well into the dance artform.

What was your approach to the creation of the performance?

It's been a very unusual rehearsal period for the company, as it has been broken up by rehearsals and a tour, to perform in South Korea. I also have started on rehearsals without all of John's music – I have some of it but not all just yet, as he is also still creating.

The first two weeks (prior to the South Korea tour) have therefore been more of a workshop period. Working closely with the six EDC dancers, we've worked on primarily finding the characters of each of the pieces and starting a movement vocabulary so that each story has a different look. I've actually been surprised to have completed a 40 minute 'rough draft' of the work in just seven days. The next step will be to video the draft and leave it to simmer away in my mind while we tour South Korea.

When I'm creating a work, it consumes me. It will be quite a different process for me to have this short interlude in the creation of the show. When we get back from the tour, I'll start pulling apart the draft and finalising the choreography for the show.

I see my choreographic process like I'm creating a beautiful painting. I start out with a rough sketch of the work – the characters, the storyboard, the movement vocabulary. Once I have that down, then I can start filling in the details. It's like colouring in, adding definition to the lines. Adding detail to create multi-layered characters and ensuring that the story and the movement are powerful.

The third story (Vintage) in *R&J* perhaps is my ideal 'painting'. A good painting is 'good' because you bring your own stories and experiences into how you see it. You can fill the space how you please. This is how I feel about dance. I don't choreograph to answer all of the questions in the work. I like the audience to decide what they see and feel about the work for themselves.

R&J: Three different times and places**Act One: Valley (00:00 – 20:07)**

Scene	Action	Feeling
Scene One: Valley Story	Night club scene, flashing lights etc, people dancing	Loud and nightclub-like – raw and sensual, strong beat
Scene Two:	Party all freezes – except R & J – who come together. Very stylised	Time stops – one elongated moment in time
Scene Three:	R&J dance together	Raw, sensual, sexy
Scene Four:	Introduce Paris character – Death/Fate	Music that is unique to the Paris character starts to play
Scene Five:	Trio-love triangle	Still in nightclub – pulling J between them, dramatic
Scene Six:	Fight between R and Paris	Percussive, then sustained
Scene Seven:	R is left half unconscious, J can't revive him	Frantic
Scene Eight:	J grieves	Solo for woman – grieving
Scene Nine:	J takes drug, and collapses	Sad, sobbing
Scene Ten:	R wakes up, finds J collapsed – crazy solo	Tragic – drugged, bashed and grief filled
Scene Eleven:	Solo becomes quieter and sadder	Music slows down – then flat line
Scene Twelve:	Romeo lies with Juliet – 2 crumpled bodies	Single instrument – beautiful, sad

Act Two: Verona (20:10 – 41:58)

Scene	Action	Feeling
Scene One: Verona Story	Tableau: 2 Families standing on tomb stones, R&J in between	Strong, dignified – families of power
Scene Two:	R&J are torn between the 2 families	Torn – still with dignity
Scene Three: R&J alone	Families dissolve, R&J left alone	Quiet, beautiful, sad
Scene Four: Wedding	The promise is made	Intimate – 2 instruments intertwining
Scene Six:	Death/Fate begins to come between them, separating them rather than uniting them	Builds in urgency – R&J can't touch, he is always between them
Scene Seven:	Death/Fate hides Juliet, Romeo frantic	Frantic music
Scene Eight:	Romeo kills himself	Sad, haunting
Scene Nine:	Juliet escapes, finds Romeo, kills herself	Sad, haunting
	Death/Fate unites them, intertwining them on the tomb	Sad, haunting

Act Three: Vintage (42:00 – 56:25)

Scene	Choreography/Action	Music/Feeling
Scene One: Vintage Story	Husband and Wife sitting in chairs staring at static on TV	Quiet, content, alone – happy and intimate
Scene Two:	Begin a ritual dance – going through motions each day of domestic togetherness	Feeling of knowing each other – of comfort and beauty – like finishing each other's sentences. Like they have had a lifetime together
Scene Three:	Man leaves for work, woman left alone	Feminine – all slows down
Scene Four:	Man returns, cycle of dinner time and TV begins	After the "cycle", shift into contentment and tenderness
Scene Five:	Man leaves, then returns, cycle gets faster and faster	
Scene Six:	Woman waits – but man does not return	Extremely poignant – like an expectation of his return, then realisation he is not coming – then being hit with loneliness and sadness
Scene Seven:	Woman alone, sad, goes through same routine but he is no longer there – feeling like in life when partner dies, other partner does not last long	Keeps trying to have those sentences answered from before – but there is no answer
Scene Eight:	Woman slumps into chair, TV snow screen	Snowing music – haunted and alone

Design notes

Costume and Set design

After discussions with the choreographer Natalie Weir, *R&J* designer Bruce McKinven, had several strong visual responses to the dance work. He had ideas of the cycle of life, or the seasons of life demonstrating the emotional phases of love – hatred, blind love and dependence/companionship. McKinven had visualisations of sundials, Stonehenge, sacred sites, cityscapes and graveyards. In the background of 'Story A (Valley)' we see a set of structures protruding from the ground that can appear ancient, yet not out of place in a modern context. For 'Story B (Verona)' the cemetery has moved to the foreground, so the characters can really inhabit the structures. For 'Story C (Vintage)' the cemetery has moved to a third position, perhaps split in two. I guess the idea is trying to set up the cyclical nature of love and death; that through the ages love has constantly been reborn and violently/tragically/sadly taken away. His original idea was to suggest the action of a clock without being so literal... I also liked the possibility of how lighting could play into these structures.

Costume wise, he chose line of colour for the 3 Juliets – Red. This reinforces the cyclical feel and is also a dramaturgical tool for audiences to understand who the Juliet is. Death is costumed the same the whole way through, until we get to his scene in the 50's house.

In terms of an Australian context, the 1950s era holds a nostalgic feel, an era often remembered for its working class roots hardworking and proud era. The 40's also hold a similar feel, but I think it is perhaps too far away to connect with a lot of today's audiences. Australia in the 60's has too fresh a feel. I think the 50's is the right era to go with.



Bruce McKinven's Draft 'Valley' Costume design

Bruce McKinven's Draft 'Verona' Costume design



Bruce McKinven's Draft 'Vintage' Costume design

Inspired by Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, which allows the 'audience to 'experience' a sense of haunting, displacement and disorientation', McKinven's set is also stark and haunting, imbued with depth and emotion. The large looming boxes are multifunctional but leave space for the audience to fill in the empty spaces of the set with their own story.



Music

The music for *R&J* is created by John Babbage and performed live by Brisbane local legends, Topology. The musicians are staged behind the dancers throughout the performance.

Babbage created a colourful, evocative soundtrack with a modern jazz vibe, which adds resonance and depth to each setting. The music was composed to reflect the three different eras in which the stories are set – whilst still remaining in the contemporary. The music score is melodious and lyrical, which adds another layer of depth and drama to both the performance quality and the audience experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About R&J

Adapted from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Act One: Valley

Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Act Two: Young Love Blossoms

Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Act Three: Vintage

Quote and paragraph 1 from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Choreographer and Artistic Director – Natalie Weir

Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (n.d.). *Natalie Weir: Choreographer*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://australasiantdancecollective.com/collective/artists/natalie-weir>

Natalie Weir Introduces R&J in a short interview

Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

R&J: Three different times and places

Act One: Valley

Adapted from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). [Table showing the actions and feelings of the twelve scenes in act one]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Act Two: Verona

Adapted from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). [Table showing the actions and feelings of the nine scenes in act two]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Act Three: Vintage

Adapted from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). [Table showing the choreography/action and music/feelings of the eight scenes in act three]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Design notes

Music

Paragraph one adapted from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>.

John Babbage

Adapted from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>.

Topology

Paragraph 1 from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Paragraph 2 adapted from: Weir, N. (Choreographer, former Artistic Director of Expressions Dance Company, now Australasian Dance Collective). (2011). *R&J: Teacher Resource Pack*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Costume and Set design

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McKinven, B. (n.d.). [Draft illustration of Romeo and Juliet's Valley costume design]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

McKinven, B. (n.d.). [Draft illustration of Romeo and Juliet's Verona costume design]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

McKinven, B. (n.d.). [Draft illustration of Romeo and Juliet's Vintage costume design]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

McKinven, B. (n.d.). [Distant photograph of concrete pillars in the Garden of Exile at the Jewish Museum in Berlin]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

McKinven, B. (n.d.). [Photograph looking between the concrete pillars in the Garden of Exile at the Jewish Museum in Berlin]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

McKinven, B. (n.d.). [Photograph looking up at the concrete pillars with leafless branches in the Garden of Exile at the Jewish Museum in Berlin]. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:AP:3dea3b67-c72a-411c-b46f-feb3f2d358d4>

Bruce McKinven

Adapted from: McKinven, B. (n.d.). *Biography*. Retrieved March, 2025, from <https://bruce.mckinven.com/biography/>

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