

A Box of Memories – Transforming Perspectives of Dementia Through Documentary Music Theatre

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of requirements for the degree of*

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Declaration

I, Erin McKellar, hereby declare that this submission is my own work and contains no material previously published or written by another person except for the co-authored creative material submitted and where acknowledged in the text. This dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for the award of a higher degree at this or another institution of higher learning.

Ethical approval has been granted for the study presented in this thesis from The University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee (2022/570). Participants were required to read and sign an information document. Informed consent was given individually prior to the collection of data.

This thesis represents the work of Erin McKellar in developing, composing, performing, and producing *A Box of Memories* and conducting research into audience perceptions and emotional affect from viewing said creative work production.

Signed: _____ Date: 18.12.2023

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Lastly, I dedicate this work to my Nanny, who at the core, is the reason this work exists. Your life has left a legacy culminated in *A Box of Memories*, which has and will continue to profoundly impact many others, who experience the difficulty of dementia.

Abstract

This artistic research study proposes *documentary music theatre* as an emerging hybridised theatrical form. It posits that documentary music theatre fosters transformative experiences for audience members through enhanced emotional resonance. To demonstrate and evaluate the efficacy of this novel sub-genre of music theatre, this doctoral study consists of a creative work and supporting dissertation. The creative work is a documentary musical called *A Box of Memories* which is a one-act, three-hander musical that endeavours to change audience perspectives on dementia. The dissertation documents the development of the musical through artistic research.

This study implemented three multimodal stages - theory, practice, and evaluation - to test and validate the proficiency of documentary music theatre as a medium for audience transformative experience. The first stage, theory, included a critical literature review of documentary theatre and music theatre literature. The literature was synthesised, and a proposed definition of documentary music theatre was presented. Practice constituted all the creative components involved in conceptualising, writing, developing, and performing *A Box of Memories*. The creative process and application of documentary music theatre were documented through an artistic autoethnographic account. The evaluation stage consisted of a post-show perceptual survey.

Audience members were invited to participate in the survey after viewing *A Box of Memories* in Sydney. The survey findings were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicated that audience participants had a transformative experience after viewing *A Box of Memories*. Participant responses demonstrated high levels of emotional resonance, leading to positive perspective shifts towards people impacted by dementia, increased empathy, and greater dementia awareness. This

verified the transformative impact of documentary music theatre but also validated the genre as a novel addition to the music theatre canon. The dissertation concludes by offering a documentary music theatre framework as a guide for future practitioners to pursue documentary music theatre.

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PROLOGUE

In 1992, at the age of 60, Elizabeth Clare McKellar, my Nanny, was diagnosed with younger-onset dementia. I was not yet born. My early memories of Nanny are aided by home video content, where I retrospectively watched Nanny play, hug, and deeply love her grandchildren. In conversation with my Dad, I learnt that one of her greatest joys was becoming a grandmother and spoiling her grandchildren. One of the tremendous losses within her story was that she only had a few years to knowingly enjoy this relationship. I was five when she went into a care home. She had advanced dementia (Alzheimer's). She was incontinent, could no longer eat unsupported, had lost language, and had frequent falls. In my youthful naivety, I remember the excitement of journeying with my family to see Nanny, sitting on her lap and holding her hand. Yet to her, I had become a stranger. Her illness progressed, and she died when I was ten years old. I grieve the years we missed with her.

I was deeply impacted by the effect Nanny's dementia had on the whole family, particularly my Dad, Duncan McKellar. My father had a very close relationship with his mother, and the grief associated with her dementia profoundly changed his life. During her illness progression, Duncan changed careers, went to medical school, and trained to become a geriatric psychiatrist, specialising in dementia. He wanted to provide care for people like his mother. I witnessed his journey from grief to acceptance and his determination to contribute to positive change for people with dementia, ultimately leading him to a senior clinical role in dementia care. Over this time, I shared many conversations with my father, which deepened my understanding of dementia.

In 2017, Duncan was a co-author of *The Oakden Report*, which was a landmark report commissioned by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network (NALHN), after an ABC journalist reported on the story told by whistleblower, Barb Spriggs. Barb's husband Bob had Lewy body dementia. Bob had been admitted twice to the Oakden Older Persons' Mental Health Service. During his admission, he was inappropriately restrained, and his family discovered significant injuries that were unrecorded. This led to a rapid decline in his physical health and subsequent death. The Spriggs family story was the tip of the iceberg and the catalyst for a disturbing discovery of the horrific failure of Australia's aged care system.

The Oakden Report became a significant Australian news story with daily high-profile media interest. It led to a major fallout in the 2018 South Australian state government elections. Ultimately, the report triggered the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Following the report's release, Duncan was appointed as the Head of Older Persons' Mental Health Services to lead the service reform in South Australia. This involved the decommissioning of services at Oakden and the establishment of new replacement services implementing co-designed models of care. This process focused on establishing organisational culture reform to promote compassionate relationship centred approaches to care. The service, led by Duncan, was recognised by South Australian Health in 2018 with an excellence award for improving safety and quality.

I highlight this event because *The Oakden Report* and following service reform was an extremely challenging job professionally and personally for my Dad, which had a rippling impact on our family. I witnessed the profound and emotional impact this job had on my father and empathised with his experience. I heard endless stories about the repeated problems with the quality of care. I thought about Nanny and how these issues may have impacted her. I grappled with questions about how vulnerable people with

dementia might be lost in a system with deteriorating quality of care, leading to their dehumanisation. Why do older people have issues accessing high-quality end-of-life care? How could a service such as Oakden continue functioning for so long without appropriate governmental attention? What is required to prevent this from happening again?

I am not a health professional, but I am an artist who is passionate about sharing stories and experiences through music theatre. A momentary conversation with my father birthed an idea for me. In the wake of our shared family loss associated with Nanny, and on the background of the profound system failure evidenced in the Oakden narrative, I suggested that this story should be a musical. This idea percolated for two years, with an empty folder on my desktop titled 'Oakden: The Musical.' In 2021, spurred on by the opportunities of my doctoral work, these motivational experiences coalesced into creativity and research that led to the development of the musical *A Box of Memories*. *A Box of Memories* is a one act, three-hander documentary musical, that depicts the lived experience of my family and others impacted by dementia.

I open this dissertation with a personal reflection to provide context for the impetus behind this doctoral study. As I considered how a musical might contribute to addressing the issue of dementia in our society, I explored the transformative promise of documentary theatre. This led to conceptualising documentary music theatre as a novel hybridised theatrical form to provide a transformative experience for diverse audiences. This is exemplified through my creative work *A Box of Memories*.

Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us rebuild our future, rather than just waiting for it.

- Augusto Boal, 2002

ACT ONE

The Opener

Research premise & theoretical background





CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It has long been recognised that theatre can foster rich experiences and evoke personal and communal transformation (Walmsley, 2013, p. 74; see also Dewey, 1980; Pugh, 2011). The immersive nature of witnessing live storytelling can deeply impact and change the individual (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 165). Jackson (1998) stated,

The arts do more than provide us with fleeting moments of elation and delight. They expand our horizons. They contribute meaning and value to future experiences. They modify our ways of perceiving the world, thus leaving us and the world itself irrevocably changed. (p. 33)

Transformation mediated through theatre, can lead to positive attitudinal or behavioural change (Lawrence & Butterwick, 2007, p.411; Miller, 2018, p.50; Walmsley, 2013). Yet, there is limited research exploring the transformative experience of music theatre. Whilst various forms of theatre (social-justice theatre, theatre of the real, documentary theatre, performance activism, theatre for social change) share similar transformative goals, music theatre as a distinct genre may hold a broader capacity to impact viewers. This is due to the incorporation of music affecting attention, memory, emotions, and attitudes (Chaturvedi et al., 2022; Davtya et al., 2021; Juslin, 2019). Music provides an additional



layer of expression and meaning to the visual narrative, as well as triggering emotional responses through its melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic components (Almen, 2008; Nagel, 2013). Adding music and melody to text offers the opportunity to augment emotional connection¹ (Moore, 2013; Scherer & Countinho, 2013) and enhance the impact of theatrical moments (Heidi et al., 2012, p. 224; Strick et al., 2015). Accordingly, music theatre offers exciting new opportunities to explore challenging topics, providing audiences with emotional experiences that generate attitudinal and behavioural transformations.

1.1 Study Aim and Approach

The primary aim of this doctoral study is to validate documentary music theatre as a hybrid art form and to test the proficiency of documentary music theatre to elicit transformative experiences. A secondary aim is to develop a documentary music theatre framework for future practitioners. Specifically, the study draws on existing documentary theatre practices to inform the creation of a documentary musical, *A Box of Memories*, to transform audience perspectives about dementia. To do this, practice-based research, in particular, artistic research, is employed as the overarching approach, conducted in three stages – theory, practice, and evaluation.

The theoretical component critically reviews existing documentary theatre and music theatre literature. The findings are synthesised to propose documentary music theatre as a hybridised theatrical form. In the practice stage, I draw upon artistic autoethnography to demonstrate praxis, specifically the conception, development, and implementation of the documentary musical, *A Box of Memories*. In the evaluation stage, a perceptual study is employed to evaluate the transformative experience of audience members after

¹ A study by Juslin and Västfjäll (2008) demonstrated that music can elicit emotional responses in listeners, and the musical characteristics of the piece can influence these responses.



viewing the musical. Ultimately, this study posits that documentary music theatre is an emerging hybridised genre within the music theatre canon, that may hold increased transformative impact for the audience.

To contextualise the study, the following section provides an overview of theatre as a transformative medium and foregrounds the concept of documentary music theatre. A discussion on the impact of dementia alongside current examples of using the arts to increase dementia awareness is also provided. An overview of the dissertation structure is presented at the conclusion of this chapter.

1.2 Background and Context: A Review of the Literature

Theatre and transformation

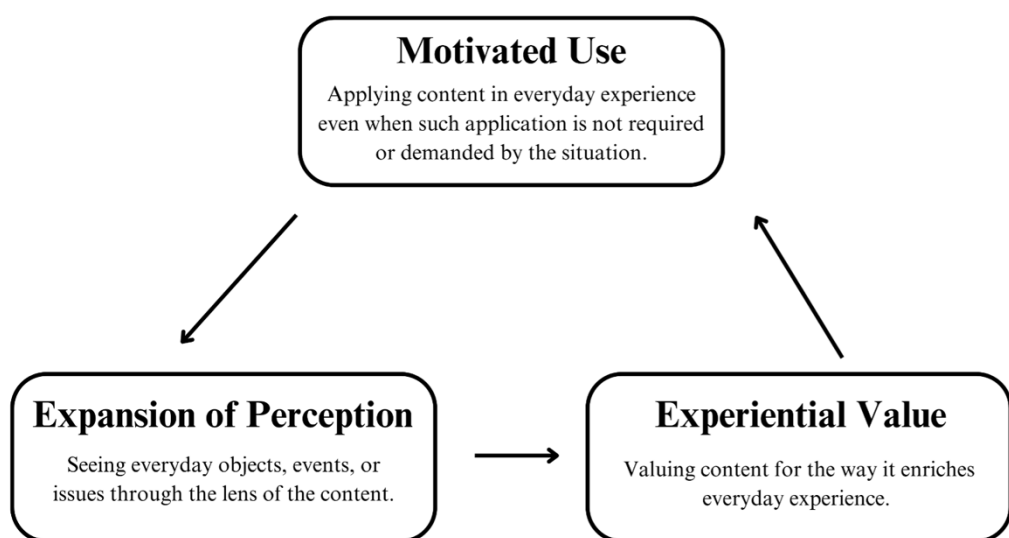
Transformative experiences have been explored in several disciplines, including philosophy, arts, neurobiology, education, and spirituality (Chirico et al., 2022, p.1). Most researchers agree that transformative experiences can lead to “long-lasting, irreversible, pervasive consequences on individuals’ beliefs, perceptions, identity and values.” (Chirico et al., 2022, p.2; see also Hayes et al., 2007; Paul, 2014). The literature on educational transformative experiences describes three interacting characteristics that help to understand and evaluate transformative experiences in the context of theatre. Firstly, *experiential value* refers to adopting a deeper appreciation, interest or value for the issue, object, or event. Secondly, *expansion of perception* involves an active experience of re-seeing – “that is, of coming to see an issue, object or event in a new way and with new meaning” (Pugh et al., 2020, p. 545). The acceptance of new meaning or value “lends significance to the experience, makes it stand out from ordinary experience, gives it an emotional quality and makes the experience consummatory” (Pugh et al., 2020, p. 548). Lastly, *motivated use* is considered. Motivated use is the



application of action, based on the transformative experience, but is not essential (Pugh, 2002, pp. 1101-1137; Pugh et al., 2020, p. 546). Pugh (2011) summarises the interrelationship of these transformative characteristics in an illustrated diagram (see Figure 1.1). Evidence of these characteristics in individuals assists researchers in evaluating the extent to which a transformative experience is facilitated and endured.

Figure 1.1

Pugh's Three characteristics of transformative experience



Note. From “Transformative Experience: An Integrative Construct in the Spirit of Deweyan Pragmatism”, by K. Pugh, 2011, *Educational Psychologists*, 46(2), p. 112. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2011.558817>).

In the context of theatre, the transformative quality of an experience is related to the interplay of “doing” (action) and “undergoing” (receiving) (Pugh et al., 2020, p. 542). Through the process of attending a theatrical performance (doing), audience members permit themselves to be influenced (undergoing), consenting to their “readiness-to-receive” (Brown and Novak, 2007, pp. 10-11). The performance can function as a



medium to encourage audience members to embrace new perspectives, meaning or values due to the heightened emotional component of theatre (Hurley, 2010). Pugh (2020) notes that when an audience surrenders to an experience, they allow themselves “to be caught up and moved by it...in doing so, [their] perception and value are expanded and [they] are transformed” (p.542).

The transformative capacity of an experience is underpinned by a number of enablers (White & Hede 2009). Existing literature on theatrical transformative experiences has identified three enablers (opportunity, resonance, and experience). The first enabler is the *opportunity* for theatregoers to attend the performance. The second is *resonance*, meaning the level of personal and community identification within the work. The third is the *experience*, referring to the form of theatre in which the work is presented, its context, and the environment in which it is performed (Walmsley, 2011, p. 78). Alongside these enablers, Gizlo (2020) suggests that theatre audiences hold a unique “susceptibility for transformation” and that theatre provides a “safe space” where memories can be triggered, and emotions explored (p. 51). Similarly, McConachie (2008) notes that theatre provides moments of connection leading to emotional epiphanies and increased empathy (p. 81). This, in turn, supports the audience to consider different social values and meanings by observing alternative perspectives as presented on stage (Gizlo, 2020, p. 121).

Historically, theatre has been recognised as a vessel for social change and human connection (Gizlo, 2020, p. 117; Wollman, 2017a, p. 358). Numerous forms of theatre endeavour to comment socially and politically on the world and transform beliefs (Mooney, 2019; Baker, 2018; Robinson et al., 2016). Of salience is *documentary theatre*. While traditional theatre commonly utilises counterfactual thinking through fictional narratives (McConachie, 2008, p. 50), documentary theatre draws upon real events,



experiences, and documents. The factual element of documentary theatre enhances the believability of the work, and some scholars have suggested this could increase the transformative experience for the audience (Kattenbelt, 2006).

Documentary theatre as a means of transformation

Documentary theatre is characterised by a “central reliance on actual rather than imaginary events” and favours a political and social disposition (Favorini, 1994, p. 32). Commonly, documentary theatre is created via dramaturgy of text based on real-life interviews, witness accounts, verbatim text, events, and documents (Garde & Mumford, 2016, p. 1; Blacks & Lipscomb, 2017, p. 33). In the last two decades, documentary theatre has expanded in utility and prevalence as a means of education, therapeutic intervention, and social change (Black & Lipscomb, 2017; Dupuis et al., 2016; Snyder-Young, 2013). Stories and experiences are shared through different perspectives depicting actual events, often calling on memories and emotions as though they were recently experienced (Liehr, 2021, p. 154). Contemporary studies argue that by providing thought-provoking awareness to the ‘other’, documentary theatre can bridge attitudinal divisions by promoting cultural awareness and understanding (Liehr, 2021, p. 154). Documentary theatre works offer a unique lens through which to participate in socio-political conversation, enhancing the opportunity for transformative experiences (Hammond & Steward, 2008). For instance, a study conducted by Black and Lipscombe (2017) investigated “the promise of documentary theatre to counter ageism”, finding that documentary theatre influenced audience attitudes toward aging and promoted positive views of the personal experience of aging (pp. 211-212).

Further, Teichert (2020) states that whilst documentary theatre’s reliance on evidence is necessary, it is how the evidence is manipulated theatrically to elicit an emotional response that leads to enhanced transformation. Tiechert (2020) suggested that the



efficacy of documentary theatre could be “anchored on emotional transformation rather than material evidence” (p. 97). Therefore, documentary theatre may stand to gain from incorporating supplementary affective stimuli commonly employed in other theatrical modalities, such as music. Perhaps the inclusion of music theatre with documentary theatre practice could create a means to intensify emotional reactions through music and song. This could consequently enhance transformative encounters for audiences.

The potential of music theatre

An integral and differential feature of music theatre is the integration of music into the action. Whilst music theatre blends an array of theatrical elements (dance, stage, lighting, props), the reliance on music and song as a narrative tool is of particular interest. Music is known to transport audiences to a heightened emotional state (Koelsch, 2014). Music can enhance emotional expression and communication, as well as facilitate emotional regulation, thereby fostering a more immersive and impactful theatrical experience (Hargreaves & North, 1999). Consequently, the intersection of music and drama that is coalesced in music theatre could amplify transformative experiences.

Contemporary music theatre often transcends mere entertainment. Many musicals challenge prevailing social constructs and stereotypes while prominently featuring voices that have been historically marginalised (Taylor, 2016; Browne, 2022). The form is replete with narratives based on historical events and real-life accounts to provide commentary on social issues and influence audience perceptions. The last few decades have provided numerous examples of music theatre’s ability to integrate complex social ideologies and social change agendas. For example, *Fun Home* is the autobiographical tale of a lesbian cartoonist, exploring themes of gender and sexual identity and the implications on mental health (Whitfield, 2020); *Hamilton* is a historiography of America’s founding father, Alexander Hamilton, confronting issues of class and race



(Sekellick, 2018); and *Rent* (1996) follows the lives of impoverished artists, tackling themes attached to the HIV/AIDs epidemic, social expectations, and discrimination (Ellis, 2011). The influence these music theatre narratives have had on audiences is considered “ahead of the curve in contemporary theatre theory” (Balch, 2012, p. 91). Musicals are adept at forging a connection between the audience and performers as they strive to offer a gratifying, impactful, and compelling experience (Balch, 2012, p. 90). Arguably, this is one of the reasons for the genre’s growth in global popularity (Grant et al., 2022; Wollman, 2017, p. xi). Tropes of the form (i.e. comedy, patter songs, ensemble numbers, and dance breaks) reassure audiences that the experience will be enjoyable, even when introducing complex and challenging subject matter. Thus, it could be argued that music theatre enhances the ‘ready-to-receive’ aspect of creating theatrical transformative experiences.

Despite this, as a genre, music theatre has largely been left out of theatre and audience impact studies (Balch, 2012, p. 2). Whilst various academics have sought to bridge the gap between theatre practices, critical theory, and audience impact, more scholarly representation of music theatre is needed (Dolan, 2010; Dunbar, 2014; McConachie, 2008). Coleman (2008) notes the “scholarly bias for spoken-word theatre is ironic given that audiences prefer musical theatre” (p. 3). Bennett (2005), an audience reception theorist, concurs that “historians and critics of contemporary performance have steered a course that veers away from analysis of the dramatic productions most theatregoers choose to see” (p. 408). Music theatre engages a greater audience reach than avant-garde theatre forms, including documentary theatre. Therefore, music theatre’s accessibility could be useful when endeavouring to generate substantial transformative experiences. It is a valuable theatrical form with which to examine the mechanism behind these experiences academically. Further research into the transformative experience of attending music theatre is warranted.



Defining documentary music theatre

Whilst evidence that documentary-based musicals exist, there is not a developed framework with guiding parameters established in the literature, and the form has not clearly been defined within the music theatre canon. By consolidating attributes of documentary theatre and music theatre, this study proposes documentary music theatre as a novel theatrical form. The form claims enhanced transformative appeal through heightened emotional engagement and the affective qualities of music. Documentary music theatre can be described as a musical work that utilises documentary evidence to challenge and transform audiences' attitude and behaviour. Key components of documentary music theatre could be (1) the work is presented under the aesthetic function of a musical with specific attention to engaging emotional response through composition, (2) the work draws upon documentary theatre practice, especially during the conceptualisation and writing of the narrative, (3) the practitioner/s demonstrate intentionality, outlining clear transformative social objectives (Favorini, 1994; Garde & Mumford, 2016). This innovative form requires practical and theoretical examination throughout its conceptualisation, performance, and audience evaluation phases. Assessing the value of documentary music theatre contributes to knowledge within music theatre scholarship, both through the creative work and the accompanying research. It also provides evidence of the transformative impact of this hybrid genre.

1.3 The Rationale for a Dementia Musical

To assess the potential of documentary music theatre, this study explores the praxis of writing and evaluating a documentary musical addressing attitudinal and behavioural perceptions of dementia. Dementia is a complex and stigmatised illness affecting a significant proportion of the global population. My witness to the far-reaching impact of



dementia ignited a desire to use my artistic craft as a means of advocacy, and became a catalyst for this doctoral study. The developed work, *A Box of Memories*, frames the subject of dementia, demonstrating documentary theatre practice by exhibiting real events and documented experiences whilst composing with the specific intent of amplifying emotional engagement. The aim is to provide a transformative experience for the audience, using documentary music theatre to highlight the multifarious issues surrounding dementia. It endeavours to encourage empathy, deepen the audience's knowledge, and expand perspectives whilst motivating action towards bettering the dementia community.

Understanding the context of dementia

Dementia² is the leading cause of death in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2023) and is considered a global health crisis (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). There are up to 480,500 people currently living with dementia across the nation, which is predicted to increase to over 800,000 Australians by 2058 (AIHW, 2022). Dementia affects most of the Australian community, as either a person with dementia, a family member, or a healthcare worker. It is estimated that 1.5 million people are involved in the care of people with dementia (Dementia Australia, 2022). The impact of the illness is a growing concern for the Australian economy. Professor Graeme Samuel, former president of Alzheimer's Australia stated (2017), "We cannot ignore the significant impact of this insidious disease on the people who are living with dementia, their carers and families, the Health and Aged Care systems and the Australian economy as a whole" (Brown et al., 2017, p. i). A primary concern is the negative stigmatisation and dehumanisation of people with dementia within the

² The Australian Institute of Health and Wealth (2023) defines Dementia as a term used to describe "a group of conditions characterised by gradual impairment of brain function, which may impact memory, speech, cognition (thought), personality, behaviour, and mobility."



community (Phillipson et al., 2019). Dementia affects a higher proportion of women, and as such, people with dementia are not only exposed to the stigma associated with mental illness but to age and gender discrimination as well (Milne, 2010, p. 228). Mukadam and Livingston (2012) claim that stigma discredits and ‘others’ individuals, serving as a “state of social disgrace” (p. 6). Stigma negatively impacts the quality of life for people with dementia and their family members (Nguyen & Li., 2020). One of the primary concerns within the dementia discourse is how stigma defines the experience of the condition and accentuates the distress felt by the person with dementia, “adding to their existing disability” (Alzheimer's Society, 2008; see also Thornicroft et al., 2006; Milne, 2010). These negative associations have led to significant dehumanisation within the Australian health and aged care system. In 2017, *The Oakden Report* (Grove et al., 2017) was released publicly, which served as a landmark in Australian history, highlighting the failures of aged care service delivery in South Australia. This triggered the 2021 *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety* (Pagone & Briggs, 2018). These documents found a significant deficit in the quality of care delivered to Australia’s aging population, particularly those with dementia presenting with complex needs and vulnerabilities (Grenfell et al., 2021, p. 32).

Further, a study conducted by Dementia Australia (2017) found a significant lack of dementia awareness within the Australian public. Many recognise dementia as a medical, political, and social issue (Werner et al., 2015, p. 258). Still, there was a substantial deficiency in understanding the symptomatic presentation of the illness, its prevalence in society and management options for families. *The Economic Cost of Dementia in Australia* (Brown et al., 2017) revealed that the awareness level of dementia amongst Australians is low and problematic. It also highlighted that many people felt intimidated by talking to someone with the condition and uncomfortable discussing the topic (Brown et al., 2017). Phillipson (2019) stated that “low levels of public



understanding can contribute to the fear, stigma and social exclusion associated with living with dementia” (p38). As a result, many dementia organisations are “addressing stigma and raising public awareness about dementia” (Department of Health and Aged Care, 2015). Swaffer (2014) highlights that given the social implications of dementia, community action and engagement are needed beyond public policy (p. 714). Given this demonstrated need, creating innovative ways to avoid negative stigmatisation and discuss the impacts of dementia openly is of particular importance (Carhill et al., 2015, p. 274; Low & Anstey, 2009, p. 48). Education through creative storytelling is useful to generate health awareness, humanise, and destigmatise illness (Mukadam, 2012). Using creative arts in health-related research,³ public education and awareness strategies is an established and evolving field (Daykin et al., 2016). Devising creative projects that aim to target ingrained community attitudes and behaviours towards dementia in Australia is necessitated.

Dementia on stage

Theatre can contribute to dementia awareness, challenging public perceptions and prejudice toward the illness (Camic et al., 2018, p. 642; see also Hughes, 2014; Gjengedal et al., 2018; Bews, 2021; Brown Wilson et al., 2023). For instance, research-informed plays have used experiences from interviews with people impacted by dementia (Dupuis et al., 2016). Known plays with this subtext/intention include *In Other Words* (Seager, 2017), *I’m Still Here* (Mitchell et al., 2015), *Forget Me Not* (Davis, 2017) and *Visitors* (Norris, 2015). These plays attempt to humanise the dementia

³ Many studies have explored the impact that music and drama can have on people living with dementia (Raglio, et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2017), including integrating music therapy for people with dementia (Vink, et al., 2003; Wall, & Duffy, 2010); the impact and importance of music on the well-being of a person with dementia (Sixsmith, & Gibson, 2007; McDermott, et al., 2014); and implementing interactive music interventions (Sakamoto, et al., 2013; van der Steen, et al. 2017). Similarly, theatre studies have explored devising ‘dementia-friendly’ theatre in community settings involving people with dementia (Bingyu, 2020; Dassa, & Harel, 2019; Taylor, 2019); and testing if theatre can improve the quality of life for those with dementia (Dijk, Weert, & Dröes, 2011; Dunn, et al., 2019).



experience, but these works led to questions over the added empathic effect of a music theatre representation. Dementia experiences have been portrayed onstage in theatre of the real, *documentary theatre*, autobiographical, and verbatim theatre practices (Gibson, 2011; Martin, 2013). In *Dementia, Narrative and Performance*, Gibson (2011) reviews current theatrical practices and suggests reframing dementia narratives, stating, “the notion of the life story could be amplified to include.... music and song” (p. 76).

Despite studies highlighting the positive impact of integrating dementia within art practices, there is no known documented literature exploring the impact of portraying dementia through music theatre. Situating documentary theatre within music theatre is a logical progression that could provide transformative experiences in relation to dementia by enhancing the audience's emotional engagement.

1.4 Summary and Dissertation Overview

Artistic research in this study is demonstrated by centralising the creation of a documentary musical. Several methodological approaches were engaged to undertake this doctoral study and variety of methods were employed to create, implement, and explore the transformative experiences of the audience. In keeping with music theatre, I have organised the dissertation into three parts following a three-act structure⁴. As such, **Act One** is *the Opener* (including stage 1: theory - setting up the philosophical foundation and musical's idea), **Act Two** is *the Big Ensemble Number* (including stage 2: practice - the work, the characters, the team and impacting the audience) and **Act Three** is *the Denouement* (including stage 3: evaluation - moment of change, evaluation, and resolution).

⁴ From a dramatic perspective, a three-act structure is a frame used to divide a narrative into three parts: the *Setup*, the *Confrontation*, and the *Resolution* (Lui, et al., 2020).



Act One: *The Opener* - Research premise & theoretical background

The First Act introduces the reader to the central premise of the study. It provides a critical review of documentary theatre and presents the concept of documentary music theatre as a hybridised genre. It consists of three chapters:

Chapter 1 introduced the study and outlined the broad research aim: to propose documentary music theatre as a theatrical medium to generate transformative experiences in audience perceptions of dementia. This chapter also provided a rationale for the research topic and situated this within personal experience.

Chapter 2 outlines the overarching research approach. This includes a review of artistic research as a practice-based research methodology. Drawing upon an existing artistic research framework, a tailored study design is presented in three stages – theory, practice, and evaluation.

Chapter 3 is the final component of Act One and constitutes the first stage of the study design theory. This chapter critically reviews existing documentary theatre and music theatre literature. The literature review provides a theoretical foundation and foregrounds the development of a documentary musical. The chapter synthesises the literature and concludes with a proposed documentary music theatre practice inventory.

Act Two: *The Big Ensemble Number* - An artistic autoethnographic account: Writing, rehearsing & performing *A Box of Memories*

The Second Act documents the creative process, drawing upon artistic autoethnography. Here, the reader will be led through a personal account describing the



Act One: *The Opener* – Research premise & theoretical background

approach to implementing the study as practice. The creative process is presented across two chapters.

Chapter 4 discusses the initial phase of the creative process, which entails the contribution of the librettist (Duncan McKellar), the idea germination and the writing of *A Box of Memories* leading to the initial workshop production.

Chapter 5 navigates the reader through the second phase of the creative process, which includes the development of *A Box of Memories* for a professional production. The contribution of dramaturg and director (Narelle Yeo) is discussed alongside the journey of preparing the show for a fully staged and orchestrated premiere in Sydney. Act Two concludes by providing the reader with a link to the recorded Sydney performance of *A Box of Memories*.

Act Three: *The Denouement* - Audience evaluation & finale

The Third Act guides the reader through the post-show audience evaluation of *A Box of Memories* and subsequently offers a comprehensive research conclusion that synthesises the entire study. Denouement happens in most musicals and is the place of change/finding or resolution. Act Three is presented over 3 chapters:

Chapter 6 describes the method used to develop the post-show perceptual survey. A research-based theatre, mixed-methods survey was employed to elicit quantitative and qualitative data. The survey development, validation, implementation, and analysis process are documented.

Chapter 7 reports and discusses the post-show survey results. The chapter draws upon descriptive statistics and thematic analysis to report the findings. The responses are collated, and four main themes are presented with related sub-themes. The chapter

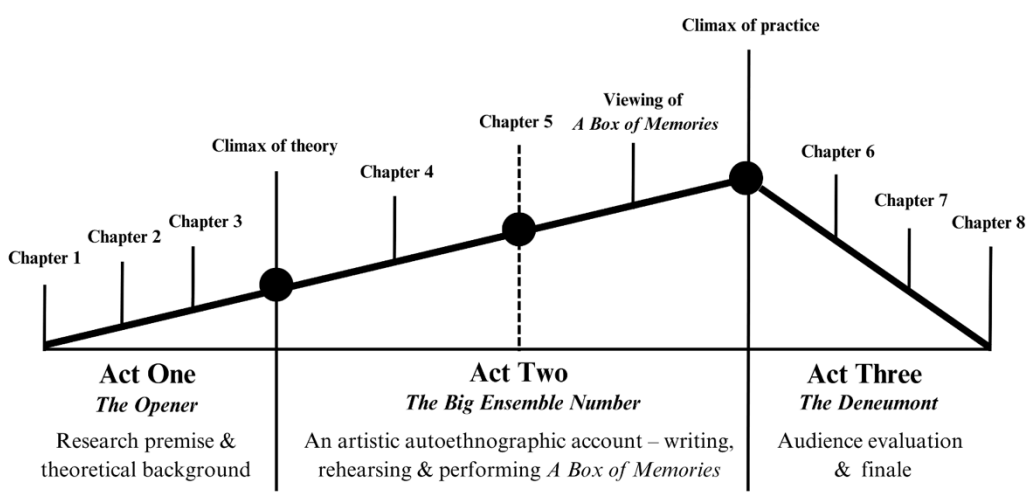


concludes by discussing the findings and examining key transformative enablers identified in *A Box of Memories* as a documentary musical.

Chapter 8 is the concluding finale, summarising the complete doctoral study. Strengths and limitations are discussed, and future possibilities for documentary music theatre are proposed. A personal reflection ends the dissertation. Here, I look internally, examining the individual transformations experienced and observed while undertaking the study.

The following diagram (Figure 1.2) presents an illustration of the three-act dissertation structure with corresponding chapters. Figure 1.2 was adapted from an illustration depicting a dramatic three-act model. (Lui, et al., 2020, p. 5).

Figure 1.2
Three-act dissertation structure overview



Note. The figure is based on “Towards story-based classification of movie scenes.” By C, Liu, et al., 2020, PloS One,15(2), p. 5. (<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0228579>).



CHAPTER 2

PRACTICE METHODOLOGY

This doctoral study is guided by a practice-based research approach. This chapter introduces artistic research as the overarching methodology and details how the study was undertaken, including a deeper discussion on theory, practice, and evaluation.

2.1 Practice-based Research in Music Theatre Scholarship

Current scholarly research in music theatre favours historiography, musicology, pedagogy, and critical theory (Dunbar, 2014, p. 67; Green et al., 2014). In particular, critical theory methodologies have examined nationality, race, gender, mental health, and class in music theatre (Kinney, 2017, p. 37). For example, Hoffman's (2015) work *The Great White Way* unpacked the racial stereotypes and assumptions embedded within the 'great' American musicals. Whitfield's (2020) work has studied gay and bi-sexual representation in musical theatre. Barnes (2015), Halstead (2017) and Wolf (2011) have explored feminist perspectives on music theatre gender tropes. Retrospective analysis - examining existing works - has been the primary mode of investigation in music theatre research. Taylor (2019) reported that much of the existing literature on music theatre are reflections, "referencing, revising, and assuming the form of shows we've seen or heard"



(p. 23). There are few academic undertakings in music theatre drawing upon prospective practice-based research. In the work *Practice as Research in Music Theatre – Reviewing the Situation* Dunbar (2014) questions why music theatre, “an essentially skills-dense vocation...is yet to produce a similar density of practice-based output” compared with other theatrical forms (p. 58). Studies are needed to document and critique the complex musical development process, from conceptualisation to performance and public evaluation⁵. Dunbar (2014) urges music theatre scholars to consider practice-based research as an essential method for enriching the connection between theory and practice within music theatre studies:

Practice-[based] research in musical theatre can perhaps open fresh discourses in re-identifying, defining, and problematizing the field of musical theatre, much like the way the performance- and practice-based turn in research unblocked the incessant inwardness of scholarship in the field of ancient Classics and in literature studies. (pp. 63-73)

2.2 Artistic Research and Praxis

Practice-based methodologies provide numerous angles of enquiry, allowing the researcher to tailor the investigation to the chosen practice. This is particularly relevant for research examining music theatre, an inherently multimodal art form. Practice-based research, which aims to objectify praxis for scientific study, is a “young field” where many perspectives co-exist (Crispin, 2015, p. 56). Practice-based research employs a range of methodologies and nomenclature, including practice-led, *artistic research*, practice-as-research, and practice-related research (Niedderer & Roworth-Stokes 2007,

⁵ The primary sources describing the process of writing music theatre are textbooks. This includes *Words with Music: Creating the Broadway Musical Libretto* (Engel, 1972/2006) and *Writing Musical Theatre* (Cohen & Rosenhaus, 2016), which examine the functionality of a musical’s book, music, and lyrics. These texts offer insight into the genre’s form, outlining the parameters of music theatre writing practices. Beyond this, few academic studies guide prospective developments of new musicals from an artist researcher’s perspective.



p. 7). Whilst each of these methodologies defines research that involves the practitioner in praxis, this study implements *artistic research*.

The artistic practice of each practitioner is unique; thus, the research question, design and methods employed can vary (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 27; Crispin, 2015, p. 53). Artist-researchers examine and observe the process of creation rather than relying exclusively on analyses of the art after the fact (Skains, 2018, p. 84):

Artistic research is distinguished by the fact that the researchers are not only themselves artists, but also use artistic practice as an integral part of the research that they conduct. Artistic practice in all its forms – planning, executing, completing, using as the springboard for fresh work – may play a role in any or all of the stages of the research trajectory. (Crispin, 2015, p. 60)

Artistic research requires clearly articulated academic and artistic intentions (Pakes, 2004, p. 4). The researcher should explicate the artistic process by documenting, presenting, and evaluating the developed work whilst reflecting and returning to the initial question and broader artwork contexts (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 29; Pakes, 2004, p. 4). This generates both academic knowledge and artistic value.

2.3 Components of Artistic Research

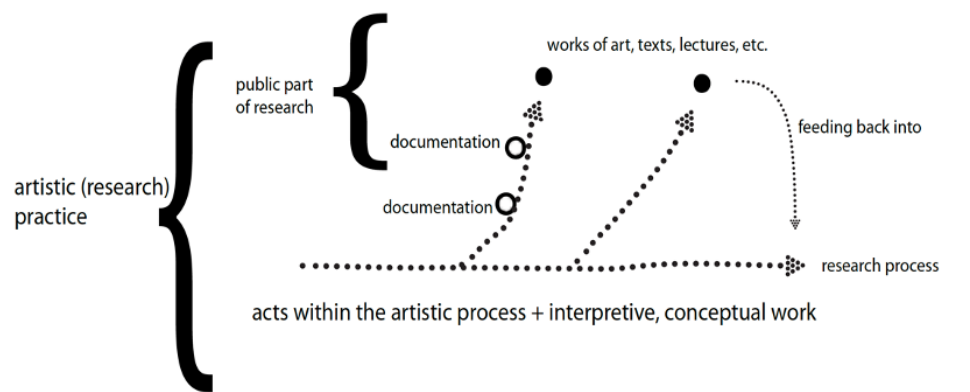
Artistic research encompasses three key elements (Dunbar, 2014; Nelson, 2013). The first is the requirement of practice that takes place in and through the research (i.e., creative writing, dance, musical composition, or other cultural practice). Secondly, the research is expected to be multimodal, often requiring various modes of communication (writing, performing, digitalisation or other) and incorporating interdisciplinary studies drawing upon numerous methodological approaches. This is also described as methodological abundance (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 22). Lastly, the practical output (i.e.



performance or exhibition) should undergo evaluation in order to enrich the subject knowledge (Dunbar, 2014, p. 59). This evaluation may incorporate audience evaluation or conceptual frameworks (narrativity, phenomenology, autoethnography). However, many argue that artistic outputs should integrate public appraisal and response, especially when evaluating masters or doctoral work (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 26) to recognise that art is an innately public phenomenon (galleries, performances, texts, etc). Artistic communication with the public should be considered by artistic researchers as audience education. Similarly, the audience (public) experience should be deemed an essential evaluation aspect (Hannula et al., 2014, p. 19). Hannula (2014) provides a visual structural overview of the artistic research methodology (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

Hannula's artistic research practice overview



Note. From “Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public”, by M, Hunnula et al., International Academic Publisher, 2014, p. 18. (<https://doi.org/10.3726/978-1-4539-1308-6>).



2.4 Artistic Autoethnography

Artistic research often draws upon autoethnography to understand, contextualise, and communicate the personal aspect of artistic practice (Crispin 2014). As a qualitative research approach, autoethnography requires the researcher to reflect on their own experiences to gain insights into broader cultural or social phenomena (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Artistic autoethnography demonstrates this by incorporating artistic forms of expression, considering how the artistic practice interacts with personal and social understandings (Bartleet, & Ellis 2009). Through artistic autoethnography, researchers aim to convey not only the facts and data related to their research but also the emotional and subjective dimensions of their experience. Thus, it allows for a more holistic and multi-dimensional exploration of the researcher's relationship with the subject of the study (Bartleet, 2020).

The arts embrace evocative, empathetic, and critically reflective components that transport artists and audiences “into new, critical and political spaces” (Denzin, 2003, p. 19). Thus, the insights that evolve from the artist-researcher critically reflecting on their own subjectivity, voice, and experience function as an embodied mode of inquiry (Marni, 2017). Artistic autoethnography provides a critical and creative approach to make sense of and question how the arts interact with social justice, activism, and power imbalances (Crispin, 2018). This approach is popular for artist-researchers seeking ways to ensure their creative process, artistic judgements, cultural understandings, and life experiences, fit within the confines of the academy (Burke and Onsman, 2018). Bartleet (2021), highlights that the developed artistic output has the “ability to inspire audiences to reflect critically upon their own life experiences, constructions of self and interactions with others within sociohistorical contexts” (p. 142). He posits that the promise of artistic autoethnography resides not only in its capacity as a creative method of investigation



and a multimodal form of presentation but also as a catalyst for personal, interdisciplinary, and broader social transformation (Bartleet, 2020, p. 142).

In this artistic research study, I specifically draw upon artistic autoethnography to explore the artistic process of creating, collaborating, and composing *A Box of Memories*. In critically documenting praxis, I have used artistic autoethnography to uncover, document, and examine how my personal experience with dementia and its social positioning intertwines with my artistic and research practice.

2.5 Study Design

Drawing upon Hannula's existing framework, artistic research was employed in this study to create a documentary musical about dementia and evaluate the subsequent transformative experience of the audience.

Objectives

In line with the aim of this study, there were three broad objectives:

1. Employ documentary theatre practices to inform the creation of a musical that:
 - Addresses the social and political concerns surrounding dementia.
 - Stages real stories and experiences.
 - Draws upon documents, interviews, and/or witness accounts of lived experience relating to dementia.
2. Use innovative and intentional music theatre practices to:
 - Centre the action around the person with dementia through narrative construction, staging, and textual references.
 - Capture the impacts of the illness on the key stakeholders in the health system: the person, the family/caregivers, and the health practitioner.
 - Depict elements of the dehumanisation experienced in the health system.



- Provide a transformative experience for the audience by promoting dementia awareness, challenging dementia stigmatisation, evoking empathy, and creating attitudinal and behaviour change.
3. Through praxis, seek to establish a practical framework for future practitioners to develop their own transformative documentary musicals.

The three multimodal stages

This study was implemented across three multimodal stages: theory, practice, and evaluation, utilising a variety of methodologies and methods including critical literature review, artistic autoethnography and perceptual evaluation.

Stage 1: Theory: A critical literature review provided a theoretical foundation to underpin the creative work that evolved in relation to the study's aim. This stage involved a review of documentary theatre and music theatre literature. Through critical analysis, essential documentary theatre practices were identified and situated alongside music theatre fundamentals (narrative, music, song). The findings were integrated to develop a documentary music theatre practice inventory. The inventory guided the development of *A Box of Memories*, a documentary musical, in the following stage.

Stage 2: Practice: Artistic autoethnography was employed to capture the artistic and collaborative process of developing a documentary musical from conception to performance. Writing a documentary musical is an innovative, iterative, and creative process. Documenting this process was a critical element contributing to establishing the praxis of documentary music theatre. It also serves as a guide for future practitioners.

Stage 3: Evaluation: A post-show perceptual survey was implemented following a public performance of the musical to gather audience feedback. The survey was designed in alignment with research-based theatre methods to test the effectiveness of a

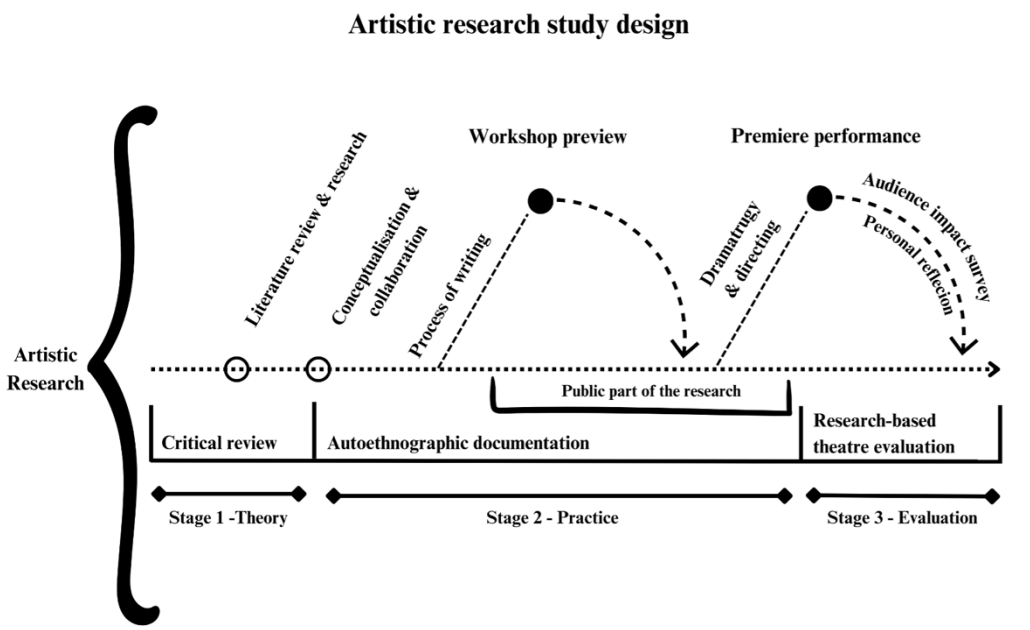


documentary musical to provide a transformative experience. The findings were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The development and implementation of the survey are described in Chapter 6.

Adapting Hannula’s representation of artistic research, Figure 2.2 illustrates a tailored overview of the study design.

Figure 2.2

Artistic research study design overview



Note. Adapted from “Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public”, by M, Hunnula et al., International Academic Publisher, 2014, p. 18. (<https://doi.org/10.3726/978-1-4539-1308-6>).



2.6 Summary

At the core of this doctoral study is praxis, demonstrated through the development, performance, and evaluation of the documentary musical *A Box of Memories*. The performance itself is evidence of artistic research. Ultimately, theory, practice, and evaluation coalesce to demonstrate a novel hybridised genre in music theatre, entitled documentary music theatre.



CHAPTER 3

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Towards Documentary Music Theatre

The previous chapter established how artistic research underpins this study and is conducted in three stages. Chapter 3 constitutes the first stage (theory) in the research design. It offers a theoretical foundation, critically examining the origins and history of documentary theatre and its evolution as a contemporary theatrical form. It focuses on integrating music with diegetic and non-diegetic functions, drawing synergies between documentary theatre and music theatre. This critical review provides the theoretical underpinning to delineate documentary music theatre as a distinct and innovative form. This chapter concludes with a proposed documentary music theatre practice inventory to guide future practitioners.



3.1 Theatre of the Real

Documentary theatre is situated historically within the broader context of ‘theatre of the real’. Theatre of the real⁶ aims to explore the connection between identity, words, narratives and the materialisation of ‘reality’ in theatre practices (Gibson, 2011, p. 94), with realism as a guiding theme (Martin, 2006, p. 11). The form is not bound to a set of preferred aesthetic preferences, nor does it function as a method of creation (DeKoven, 2014). Instead, the form offers a broad framework to explore truth, drawing upon numerous histories, socio-political purposes, aesthetic preferences, and artistic forms (Martin, 2013, p. 2). However, Martin (2015) offers a guiding set of parameters stating:

Theatre of the real identifies an array of theatre practices portraying real events, whether personal, social, political, or historical. This worldwide theatre movement connects theatre to social and political realities in different ways in different places. Globally, the form draws on highly innovative forms of playwriting and directing that include witness accounts, film footage, photographs, documents, legal transcripts, interviews and/or archives. (p. 1)

The literature reveals a developing consensus that theatre of the real includes several subgenres including autobiographical theatre, *documentary theatre*, theatre of witness, testimonial theatre, theatre of everyday experts and verbatim theatre (Martin, 2006; Garde & Mumford, 2016). Martin (2006) acknowledges that “none [of these styles] are ontologically more real, more authentic or true than any other” (p. 12) but instead offer different versions of reality. Of these forms, documentary theatre is considered to take more artistic licence with further considerations of aesthetic experience (Blacks &

⁶ An example of theatre of the real is Rachel, Corrie, Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner’s (2006) play *My Name is Rachel Corrie*.



Lipscomb, 2017, p. 42). The theatrical liberties endorsed in documentary productions influenced the decision to draw upon this form as the theoretical basis for this research.

3.2 The Origin of Documentary

The term ‘documentary’ is broadly used in the vernacular. Emerging in the last century, the notion and philosophy of documentary became a crucial mode of expression in theatre, film, and literature (Paget, 1988, p. 332). Traditionally, documentaries involved sharing information found in documents and were generally perceived as authoritative. Documentary forms generated the impression of a traceable and credible past, offering spectators material that could be trusted (Flynn, 2019, p. 7). Documentaries “adopt no fixed inventory of techniques, address no one set of issues, display no single set of forms or styles” (Nichols, 2001, p. 21). It is, therefore, difficult to explicitly define and categorise the form. However, Paget (2009) offers parameters that guide the creation of documentary works including:

At least one function in any specific manifestation in whatever medium their makers choose:

1. They reassess international/national/local histories.
2. They celebrate repressed or marginalised communities and groups, bringing to light their histories and aspirations.
3. They investigate contentious events and issues in local, national, and international contexts.
4. They disseminate information, employing an operational concept of ‘pleasurable learning’ – the idea that the didactic is not, in itself, necessarily inimical to entertainment.
5. They can interrogate the very notion of documentary. (p. 227-228)



The inherent difference between documentary theatre and other documentary forms (film and literature) is that theatre is often considered representational rather than presentational, with live performance providing spectators with a different encounter of truth⁷ (Paget, 1988; Martin, 2010).

3.3 Documentary Theatre

The first iteration of documentary theatre began after World War I, and is regarded as the first wave. Initially labelled as a “weapon” against other theatre forms (Paget, 1988, p. 317), documentary was favoured by the working class. In the 1960s, a second wave emerged alongside episodes of social unrest (Gibson, 2011, p. 102). Both waves explored political, social, and historical themes, manipulating fixed textual and physical sources. Since then, documentary theatre has been widely recognised for staging real people, words, and places to connect audiences to reality (Stephenson, 2019, p. 3). It presents expressions of truth that are traditionally sourced from documents (interviews, newspapers, photos, videos, journals, reports, etc). Often, documentary theatre is the re-enactment of real people via character acting, photographs, and other documents, verifying the authenticity of the story or event. In other cases, it can include the story of the performers being told (Martin, 2006, p. 9).

The theoretical underpinning of documentary theatre is the presentation of *truth*. It inhabits the space between the fictional dramatic world and the presumed real world of everyday life (Martin, 2006, p. 10). The duality is described by Leavy (2015) as having the ability to offer dramatic performance whilst presenting ‘rich, textured, descriptive, situated, contextual experiences and multiple meanings from the perspectives of those

⁷ For example, a documentary film may include real people from an event, sharing their testimony to the camera and connecting audience viewers directly to a personal truth. Theatre, however, is primarily reliant on actors re-enacting a documented truth. Neither is necessarily right or wrong but offers different forms of communicating truth with differing spectator experiences.



studied in the field” (p. 182). To be labelled as documentary, a performance must permeate a claim to truth and depiction of reality (Flynn, 2019, p. 7), along with a sufficiently authoritative voice, perspective, or point of view. This is because such categorisation inherently embodies connotations of authenticity, thereby insinuating that narratives on the documentary stage possess an elevated sense of reality or truth when contrasted with narratives unfolding in conventional theatre.

Audiences do not expect explicit access to truth but do anticipate that the performance is connected to reality as “the promise of documentary at this level is to establish a link between [audience’s] quest and an absent but acknowledged reality” (Reinelt, 2009, pp. 9-10). Documentary theatre relies on the relationship between the objective, documentation, artists, and audience (Reinelt, 2009, p. 7). The audience can validate or contest the truth value of the work and form a view on the reality-based aspects of documentary theatre. In many cases, the connection to real experience can impact audience members by triggering personal memories or merely creating the conditions for identification and recognition within their own lives (Forsyth & Megson, 2009, p. 11). A theatrical performance can evoke a strong emotional resonance if it aligns closely with the personal narratives of the audience members (Forsyth & Megson, 2009). Paget (2009) posits that spectators may thus engage in the cognitive effort of acquiring knowledge and integrating the performative experience with their existential existence (p. 228). As a result, documentary theatre has been used to impact, influence, and educate its audience.

Those involved in creating documentary theatre share a commitment to present multiple perspectives of any group being represented on stage (Nagel, 2007, p. 42). Flynn (2019) articulates that documentary theatre makers “address tensions in contemporary culture about truth, justice, history, and notions of identity” (p. 2). Specifically, the form



endeavours to address misrepresentations and exclusions, to reframe known incidents and events, and to expose perspectives and voices that would otherwise be silenced⁸ (Kubly, 2014, p. 306).

3.4 Understanding the Contradictions

Any form of theatre that endeavours to address a version of ‘truth’ or the ‘real’ inevitably faces contradictions as “troubled categories of truth” (Martin, 2009, p. 89). Documentary theatre often claims to be a part of an archive, yet documentary theatre dramaturgs use elements of reality to re-construct or represent (Martin, 2006, p. 9). Archival material can both spotlight and problematise the nonfictional due to the aesthetic structuring of a theatrical performance (i.e. actors, staging, costumes, lightings, act-structure, script) (Martin, 2006, p. 13). Therefore, it does not necessarily document with complete historical accuracy and can never present an absolute or completely neutral perspective. Theatre-makers and performers interpret information and history, applying understanding and imagination to the creative process: “Much documentary theatre has complicated notions of authenticity with a more nuanced and challenging evocation of the real” (Forsyth & Megson, 2009, p. 2).

Accordingly, the outcome is, *a version* of truth, rather than *the* truth. This highlights the paradox of showing reality through theatre; all forms are merely constructions, both as real as they are unreal (Martin, 2006, p. 12-13). Nevertheless, the parameters regarding documentary theatre have altered, and one branch of the form is described as *contemporary documentary theatre*.

⁸ Two high profile documentary theatre plays include *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman (2000) and *Talking to Terrorists* by Robin Soans (2005).



3.5 Contemporary Documentary Theatre

Stephenson (2019) suggests that the overlapping relationship between realness and theatricalization should be managed within a self-reflexive nature (p. 10). Within this paradox, contemporary documentary theatre acknowledges its limitations, inherent theatricality, and proximity to truth. The form integrates “the reification of material evidence in performance, as it is with the real-life story or events it is exploring” (Forsyth & Megson, 2009. p.3). Rather than present an unbiased truth, contemporary documentary theatre confronts the contradiction and complexities of truth, exposing its inevitable artifice whilst also making claims to ascribing a version of truth (Martin, 2013). In doing so, the unsettling of reality and fiction within contemporary documentary theatre prompts contemplation on the established conventions of knowledge itself (Jackson, 2011, p. 168).

Current theatre practices simultaneously claim to hold empirical reality whilst recognising the abstract predicament of knowing truth (Martin, 2006, p. 13). The strategic blending of the appearance of, with the recreation of a constructed and informed truth, makes contemporary documentary theatre provocative and compelling (Reinelt, 2009).

The question of what makes a document viable is embraced in the rationalisation of contemporary documentary theatre. Martin (2009) states that “we have to abandon the notion that documentary proceeds only from material documents” (p. 95). As a result, theatre-makers have turned to alternative ways of authenticating truth. For instance, real people are considered ‘living archives’, whose witness or testimony⁹ are aural

⁹ The word ‘testimony’ encapsulates the various ways in which the experience of others can serve as a source of knowledge. Gelfert (2014) articulates that “knowledge of historical events... could never have been acquired without a chain of reporters connecting us to the original events.” (p. 8)



documents. Whilst the credibility of testimony as a source of truth and knowledge has been scrutinised for centuries, the term in relation to dramatic truth-telling derives from the legal domain of *testimony of witness*, which demands truthfulness, accuracy, and relevance, describing the facts as valid first-hand experience (Gelfert, 2014, p. 14). Documentary playwright Vivi Tellas explores how individuals are living archives of text, performance, behaviour, and experience outside and inside the theatre (Martin, 2013, p. 5). Others have authenticated truth via testimony or witness of lived experience, arguing this warrants an alternate credible perspective (Paget, 2009, pp. 235-236). For example, Philip Miller's documentary work, *Rewind: A Cantata*, was created from testimonies recounted during South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This presentation of truth emphasised the "aural domain of documentary" (Martin, 2013, p. 5). Presented as an opera, people's testimonies were told in concert with stringed instruments, voice, narration, song, dance, and visual imagery.

This also highlights how contemporary documentary theatre draws upon various theatrical and affective presentational or emotive tools to frame the subject matter in particular ways. For instance, the documentary work *Is.Man* uses elements of narration, music, Sufi dance, and video to stage the trauma of a Turkish honour killing in Holland (Martin, 2013, p. 5). Another example is the work of Victoria Hanna (2005), whose performance *Signals* employs digitalisation, sound-scaping, and singing. She sings verbatim extracts, which suggests that sound is not only a unit of meaning but could also be aural documentation (Abeliovich, 2015, pp. 43-61).

The rapid change and evolution from earlier documentary theatre trends is "without doubt a millennial phenomenon" with an "appeal to the real in the context of profound uncertainty" (Martin, 2006, p. 10). This distance from earlier forms is marked in Martin's (2013) later work, as she asserts that the discourse around labelling work as documentary



theatre primarily concerns how we endorse and prioritise certain modes of information over others (p. 88). She highlights the problem of defining and limiting the expression of documentary theatre, arguing that the form should not be considered a product but rather a process. The examples highlighted how documentary theatre has guided, informed and championed real stories and truth-telling on political and social issues. Documentary theatre has pivoted strongly towards using different theatrical tools (music, video, text, song, dance) to curate and present the ‘privileged’ information that can impact an audience.

3.6 Documentary Music Theatre: A Case for the Musical

Music theatre is a powerful art form that can influence political and social understanding and can be used as entertainment education that promotes attitudinal change (Heidi et al., 2012, pp. 224-230). Music theatre has not been a genre used within contemporary documentary theatre, although non-diegetic music is a common feature of the documentary form. Yet music theatre is a seminal performance medium with growing popularity that is beginning to exhibit documentary techniques in its social activism. Music theatre-makers in the current era are drawing upon documented archives, real events and people to write new musicals. For instance, the musical *Come From Away* is a retelling of the events that took place on September 11 after the final grounded plane landed in Gander (Broder, 2022); *SIX* the musical, draws upon historical archives to share the stories of Henry XIII’s six wives (McPhee, 2019); and *Starry* is a musical devised from the 600 letters shared between Vincent van Gogh and his brother Theo (Rosky, 2020).

Whilst music theatre demonstrates a connection to real stories, real events and archival documents, many contemporary music theatre makers also favour a political and social stance, mirroring that of documentary theatre. This is increasingly evident in the standard



music theatre repertoire. For instance, the musical *Parade*¹⁰ is a dramatic staging of Jewish American Leo Frank's trial and imprisonment and his subsequent lynching, exploring issues of antisemitism (Stahl, 2016); *The Scottsboro Boys*, a retelling of the Scottsboro trial which functions as a social critique challenging racism (Stahl, 2016); and *The View From Upstairs*, a musical that highlights the injustice felt by those in the LGBTQI+ community by re-enacting the 1973 shooting attack at the Upstairs Lounge (Edgecomb, 2018). Further aligning with contemporary documentary theatre techniques, music theatre makers are also turning to witness and testimony to craft musicals that portray real experiences¹¹.

Whilst these works are not labelled documentary theatre, they suggest that the future of music theatre includes some melding with the documentary theatre canon. Critics of music theatre may see a vast intellectual gap between the work of documentary theatre and commercial music theatre due to the “mild anti-intellectualism” that is associated with music theatre (Johnson, et al., 2021, p. 121). Until recently, historians and analysts of twentieth-century theatre have consistently, albeit unintentionally, upheld the dichotomous division between highbrow and lowbrow art (Savran, 2004, p. 212). Traditionally, music theatre has been denigrated as “middle-of-the-road entertainment”, adopting the reputation of low- or middle-brow theatre practices (Taylor, 2016, p. 3; Wollman, 2017, p. 180). McNamara (1994) defines traditional popular entertainments as consisting of “live amusements aimed at a broad, relatively, ‘unsophisticated’ audience created for profit for professional showmen” (p. 3).

¹⁰ In 2023, I viewed the most recent iteration of *Parade* on Broadway which incorporated real images from the related event projected onto the theatre's back wall. This is a new addition to the musical's directorial development and is inherently documentary in nature. This also demonstrates a leaning towards more ‘real’ elements in music theatre being accepted and received by audiences.

¹¹ For example, the musical *Allegiance* recounts the Kimura family journey following the attack on Pearl Harbour. The musical was developed from the lived experience of family member George Takei. The musical not only draws upon Takei's testimony to devise the script, but he also stars in the show, embodying his story on stage and in the narrative (Gans, 2023).



The notion of entertaining - inviting singing, dancing, and archetypal characters into a ‘vibrant’ live spectacle (Taylor, 2016, p. 1; also Wollman, 2017) may question music theatre’s appropriateness to express and complicate documentary subject matter. Johnson (2019) notes that the unreality of traditional music theatre is obvious from “the very act of people bursting into song and dance [defying] realness in most senses of the term” (p. 267). However, music theatre has moved beyond escapist popular entertainment and the genre “has...repeatedly reinvented itself to fit the needs of its ever-changing audience” (Wollman, 2017, p. xi). New perceptions of music theatre have encouraged the exploration of challenging and confronting subjects, unconventional narrative structures, audience involvement, and reflexivity (Whitfield, 2019). Music theatre mechanisms (song, dance, story) can explore documentary subject matter, and no performance is either “purely efficacious or purely entertaining” (Dyer, 1992, pp. 5-9). Therefore, it is reasonable to acknowledge that a documentary music theatre form could provoke, entertain, attest to truth, and provide an accessible tool to explore difficult ideas and challenging narratives to a large audience base.

3.7 Music as an Affective Tool

Both in contemporary documentary theatre and music theatre, music serves as a diegetic or non-diegetic tool to impact emotional responses to the narrative or documentary subject matter. Music is known to represent, embody or express meanings (Cespedes-Guevara & Eerola, 2018, p. 2):

Music frames a production: emotionally, narratively, temporally, and spatially.

It can be used as a formal device to provide both continuity and unity. It brings in resonances of other music, other texts. It reaches out to the audience in an indirect yet powerful way. (Baston, 2015, p. 25)



Music's ability to create, enhance, and modulate emotions makes it a communication form that consciously and subconsciously impacts audiences (Cespedes-Guevara & Eerola, 2018, p. 215). Music "has the power to communicate the incommunicable" (Bowman, 1998, p. 72). Bowman notes that this overcomes the logical facade of portrayal and semblance – to provide audiences with access to truths that extend beyond the grasp of reason, providing a visceral emotional experience for the audience (p.72).

Roesner (2016) stated that "physiological states, behaviour, mood and feelings as well as social role and action style can be regularised and/or modified by music" (p. 16). What, then, would the audience experience with the overt musicalisation of a 'slice of life' text be? Vorlicky and Gordon (2010), in, *Art, Life & Show-Bizz*, stated that "music accentuates, underpins, or stimulates an aural narrative, one that bridges, unsettles, or heightens the narrative of the lives on stage" (p. 262). For instance, *Is.Man* implemented sung poetry expressing the suffering of both the victim and perpetrator. In this instance, the spoken text could not convey what the performance intended to narrate:

Monologue and exchange can confess, debate, accuse, and console. But for the pain that cannot be described, the shame that can hardly be whispered and the silence that begs for harmony, only the poetry of image, sound, and body will suffice. (Dowit, 2010, p. 110).

Similarly, in reviewing *Rewind: A Cantata*, Cole (2009) stated that "Miller's work highlights something beyond narrative: the aural qualities of testimonies, the texture of sound, the strain in the voice" (p. 87). In this work, the sung voice is used to embody experience and evoke emotions that may not be engaged without music (Martin, 2013, p. 6).



Music theatre places a high value on storytelling and emotional expression, with songs and musical numbers advancing the plot and revealing character motivations and emotions. Music theatre integrates song to primarily serve the narrative, which contrasts with aspects of opera where singing, as Stephen Sondheim notes, “is designed to show off the human voice” (cited in Asare, 2022, p. 55). Alternatively, music theatre songs¹² serve as “centres of gravity and levity” (Blustein, 2020, p. 1). The use of recurring musical themes, motifs, and leitmotifs are common in music theatre as character and plot devices; “a song, if it is well done, is written in the voice, key, and rhythm of the character who sings it. It not only reflects the character; song and person become one” (Swados, cited in Asare, 2022, p. 56). Similarly, Wolf (2019) writes, “songs in musicals sound like what they mean to say” (p. 53). The danger and power of music theatre, as Knapp (2006) states, is that:

The effect of adding music to a dramatic scene that might otherwise play naturalistically serves to exaggerate its content, adding a dimension of artificiality at the same time that it often also strives to tap into a deeper kind of reality, one accessible only through music. (p. 12)

In *A Method for Musical Theatre Dramaturgy*, Valencia (2015) states that the expressive possibilities of conventional theatre are significantly broadened through the implementation of music and song (p. 341). Music complicates and, at points, confuses

¹² Musical theatre songs commonly follow standardised functions. Cohen & Rosenhaus (2016) described several song types used in theatre, including, the ballad, the ‘I want’ song, the ‘I am’ song, the ‘Soliloquy’, the ‘Ensemble number’, the ‘Comment’ song and the ‘Comedic’ song (pp. 13-14). Other commentators have extended the types of song to include the ‘11 O’clock’ song, the ‘conditional love’ song, the ‘list’ song, the ‘musical scene’, ‘narrative’ song, the ‘charm’ song, and the ‘reprise’ (Blustein, 2020, p. 1).



the boundary between subtlety and exuberance, amplifying a musical's ability to engage with its audience (Valencia, 2015, p. 342). A musical does not need to follow the common rules of narrative or spoken text if the work makes sense musically. Accordingly, the reflexive nature of the music theatre song,

...imposes a kind of suspended animation so as to intensify selected emotional moments and through this dramatic hiatus directs us all the more urgently to see behind the mask/make-up/costume of the performer – even as he or she embodies the role being played more fully through the enactment of the song. (Knapp, 2006, p. 12)

Music provides an affect that may intensify the emotional possibilities of theatrical works. This potentially influences how an audience receives a documentary topic. Music theatre does not claim to present reality in a naturalistic way but instead invites audiences to experience a version of reality through song. In this way, a musical “scene is authentic in precisely the way musicals can and should be, allowing [the audience] to identify emotionally with the characters as they interact over the course of the song” (Knapp & Wollman, 2019, p. 45). The possible emotional impact that music evokes should be considered when attempting to write transformative theatre.

Martin (2010) states that “today’s most provocative personal, political, historical, and virtual theatre of the real embraces the cultural and technological changes that are reforming us globally” (p. 1). The hybridisation of documentary music theatre can enhance the transformative emotional power of documentary theatre and is thus a progression for both genres. This echoes the notion that “no entertainment exists in a vacuum” (Wollman, 2017, p. xi) but rather theatre represents “a history of ever-changing relationships and interplays of different artistic practices, aesthetic materials and influence, modes of creation, reception and semiosis” (Roesner, 2016, p. 2). With new



reforms steering away from conservative realism integral to traditional forms of documentary theatre, this doctoral study holds that documentary music theatre could offer a compelling and impactful medium to explore social, political, and personal truths delivering audiences transformative experiences.

In this dissertation, documentary theatre practices inform the conceptualisation, writing and public performance of a musical based on documentary material. The theatrical output adheres to the aesthetic function of music theatre whilst embedding key documentary theatre practices to test the notion of expanded emotional affect and audience response. This study proposes a definition and tests its' transformative effect as a new theatrical genre.

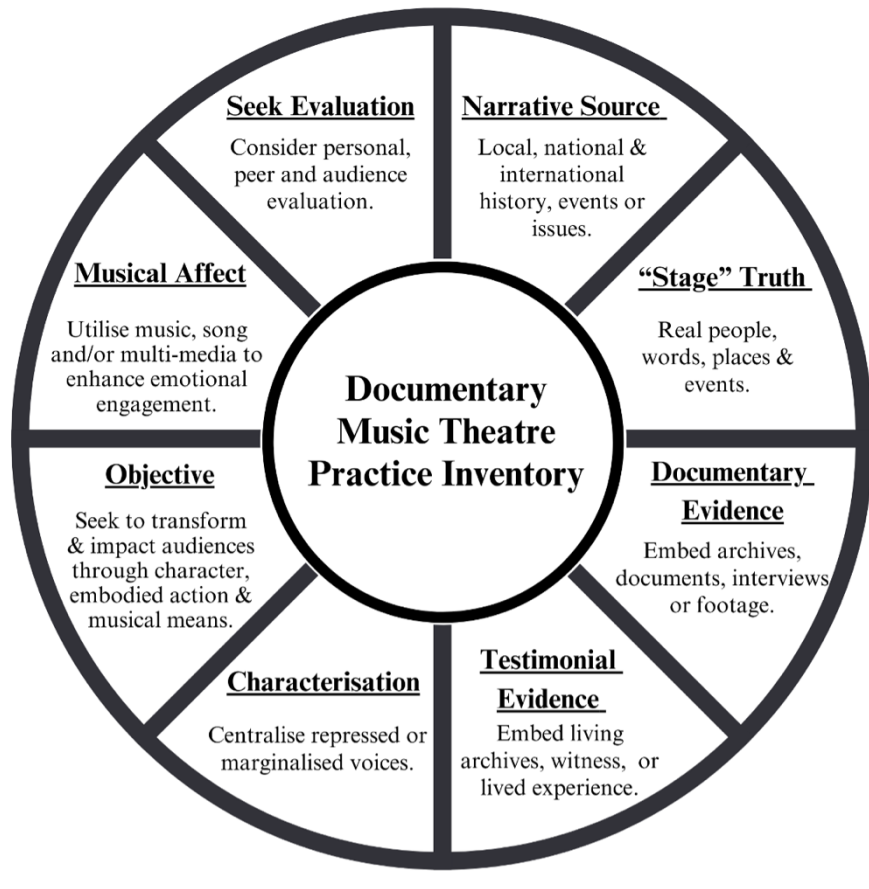
3.8 Establishing Documentary Music Theatre Practice

Aspects of documentary theatre, both historically and in contemporary practice, have been synthesised, along with recent developments in music theatre, to propose a documentary music theatre practice inventory (see Figure 3.1). Drawing upon Paget's (2009) notion outlined in the opening of this chapter, documentary musical works do not need to exhibit all practices (p. 227-228). Therefore, this is not a fixed inventory but a practical guide for future practitioners to develop documentary musicals. The diagram is designed in a circular formation to convey the cyclic nature of writing a documentary music theatre work. Whilst a proposed clockwise order of practice is provided in the visual illustration, this is not a fixed order. Moreover, practitioners should regularly refer to the practice inventory, implementing different aspects throughout the creation and development phases. This inventory informed the writing of *A Box of Memories* and praxis is evidenced in my autoethnographic documentation. The process is discussed in the following chapters.



Figure 3.1

Proposed documentary music theatre practice inventory



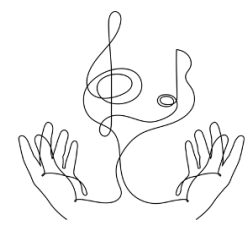
Note. All practices have been drawn from existing literature. (Blacks & Lipscomb, 2017; Dawson, 1999; Dowit, 2010; Favorini, 1994; Flynn, 2019; Forsyth & Megson, 2009; Gibson, 2011; Kander, 2020; Kubly, 2014; Leavy, 2015; Martin, 2006 & 2010; Mumford & Garde, 2016; Nagel, 2007; Paget, 1998, 2008, 2009; Reinelt, 2009; Stephenson, 2019; Velencia, 2015).

ACT TWO

The Big Ensemble Number

An artistic autoethnographic account:

Writing, rehearsing & performing *A Box of Memories*





CHAPTER 4

PRAXIS IN ACTION: CREATIVE WORK

PHASE I

4.1 Introduction to the Creative Phases

The previous Act presented the rationale for the project and described the overarching research approach. It examined the theory supporting documentary music theatre and proposed a practice inventory. Act 2 is articulated in two phases, across two chapters and draws on artistic autoethnography to recount my artistic perspective as the instigator of this work throughout both creative phases. The first phase, described in Chapter 4 reflects on the development of the musical, which included the initial collaboration between Duncan McKellar (librettist/lyricist) and myself (composer/lyricist). This phase included writing the initial draft libretto and musical score, while grounding the work in documentary theatre practices. Chapter 5 describes the second phase, which involved dramaturgy revisions of the script and score, and the direction and design of a fully staged (set, lighting, band) production in Sydney. This was performed professionally under the auspices of the University of Sydney and HammondCare's 2022 International



Dementia Conference. During the production season my role expanded to include Musical Director and Producer.

This chapter provides a reflection on the origin of *A Box of Memories* as a daughter/father collaboration, followed by a detailed description of the musical's conceptualisation through to the first workshop. The chapter explains how the proposed inventory of documentary music theatre practice has been applied to *A Box of Memories*. The reader is taken through the process of developing a narrative frame, building characters, writing lyrics and songs, and crafting the thematic arch. A musical analysis highlights how considerations of musical semiotics were intentionally used in the score to elicit emotional responses. Lastly, the chapter concludes phase I by articulating the unique experience of shared development in working with a cast to develop and present a workshop version in the 2022 Adelaide Fringe. Supporting the artistic autoethnographic reflection, field notes were recorded and embedded. My field notes are a collection of thoughts, emotions, and questions I experienced throughout both phases of the development. These have been written and stored on my iPhone in the Notes app and presented as images in the original format.

4.2 Origins: A Narration

One evening in August 2017, Dad returned home from a challenging workday during the decommissioning of the Oakden Campus. They were in the process of transitioning patients from Oakden to a new facility, Northgate House, as part of the system reform. I was rather used to Dad arriving home stressed and drained from hours of managing the disheartening and tragic stories revealed during his time as an author of *The Oakden Report*, but this time was different. His eyes were glassy, his mood was melancholic, and he appeared grief-stricken as if a close family member had suddenly died. I felt a



Act Two: *The Big Ensemble Number* – An artistic autoethnographic account

wave of anxiety enter my body, anticipating bad news. We sat as a family in the lounge room as Dad began to share what had triggered a profoundly transformative experience.

The story began with Lily a Hungarian woman living with dementia (name and details changed to protect anonymity). Lily had navigated many traumatic experiences during the Second World War, which ultimately led to a journey of migration to establish a new life in Australia. Dad explained that Lily's dementia experience was complex as many of Lily's past traumas and anxieties had surfaced with her illness. This meant that numerous residential aged-care providers struggled to manage Lily, which is why she was placed at Oakden. Lily was one of the first patients transferred to Northgate House but shortly after her move, she rapidly deteriorated, approaching the end-of-life. The Northgate House team provided palliative care with dignity and compassion, but Dad felt frustrated by the lack of personal belongings available when wanting to personalise her environment and share her story through photos and items. Whilst Dad had provided the best possible end-of-life care for Lily, he was still haunted by the reality that she died in an empty room void of any personal belongings.

It was the day after Lily's death, the day of this story, that Dad returned to the Oakden campus. He was walking through the hallways and noticed a door to a janitor's style storage room. As he opened the door, he smelt the stale odour of refuse, dust, and mould. Boxes and suitcases were piled against the wall, and old, incontinent-ridden mattresses, broken equipment, and decade-old files barricaded the walkway. He made his way further into the seeming 'junk' room. He opened one of the boxes and was overcome with an eerie, solemn feeling. It was Lily's box of memories.

The box contained old photos of her with her children and husband in Poland and Australia. There were handwritten journal entries and an array of personal bits and bobs, including her engagement ring. Dad was silenced by the discovery. He cried. He felt



profound sadness that the system had failed this woman. Through her belongings, he felt he knew Lily as he held the final remnants of her life in the palm of his hand. According to Dad, Lily was a woman who loved, laughed, danced, and wept, yet her days at Oakden stripped her of her identity. She was boxed away and forgotten. As Dad composed himself, he scanned the room, which was filled with similar boxes. How many lives has the system lost, he wondered?

As he described the story, we were all crying; such devastation and loss felt by so many was hard to comprehend. Yet I knew I wanted to help share this story and contribute to encouraging change in the system. The only way I knew how to do this was through music and theatre.

A Box of Memories is not simply a musical devised in a room with creative artists and stakeholders. Instead, it is a collection of memories, documented events, first-hand witness statements from *The Oakden Report*, personal testimony from my father and others alongside years of real-life experience in aged care playing out on stage. Importantly, the musical illustrated how I artistically made sense of these experiences within the broader cultural, political, and social landscape. The joint lived experience of my father and I shaped the foundation of *A Box of Memories*. We were unaware at the time how our personal experiences with dementia would deepen our understanding and stimulate the production of a musical narrative, addressing the impacts of dementia.

4.3 Conceptualisation and Framing

Lived experience, documentary evidence and curation

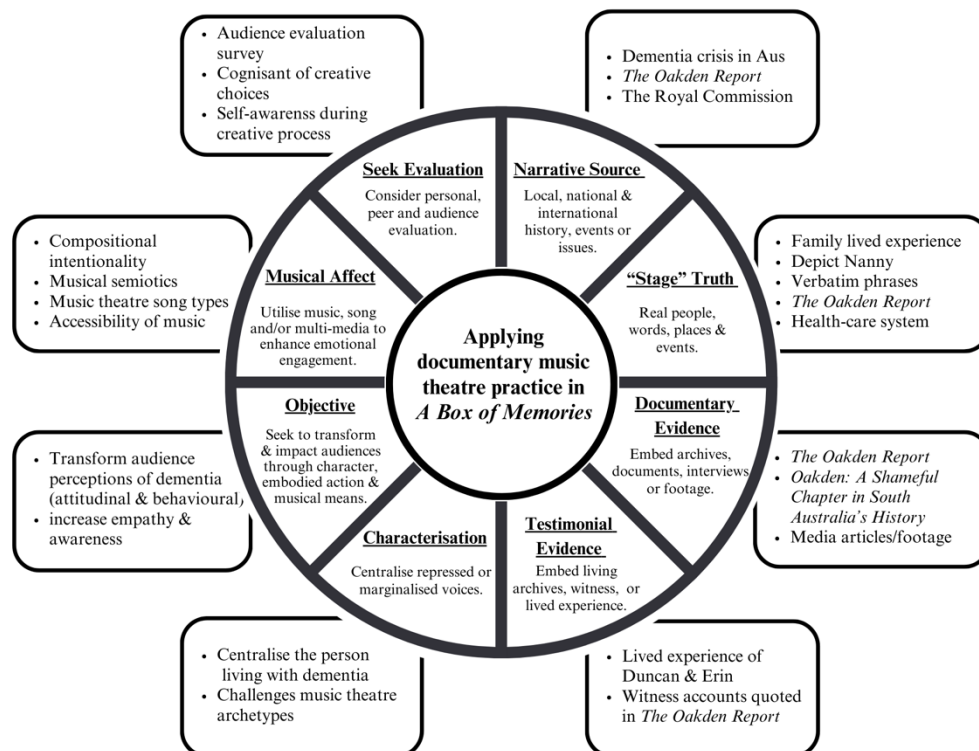
The initial conceptualisation began via regular Zoom and phone meetings. This was amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, and I was based in Sydney while my father, Duncan, lived in Adelaide. Having critically reviewed the documentary theatre practices, I



considered how these would guide the creative process (see Figure 4.1). The diagram (Figure 4.1) shows the emergent process of developing the work, managing the complexities of the material, and organising the documentary elements.

Figure 4.1

Applying documentary music theatre practice



Articulating ways in which the documentary practices would be implemented provided a foundation for writing the musical. It also served as a visual reference throughout the writing process. This illustration may be instructive for other creative artists in considering work of this nature.

Three key documentary sources were acknowledged and discussed: Duncan’s dual-lived experience as a family member and practitioner, my lived experience, and a close reading of *The Oakden Report*. These formed the basis from which the narrative evolved. The initial exploration focussed on key moments derived from our shared lived experience.



Act Two: *The Big Ensemble Number* – An artistic autoethnographic account

We discussed the emotional impacts of losing Nanny. Significant moments during the progress of her illness were noted. This included a recount of Nanny expressing the dehumanisation she experienced from the doctor during the early stages of dementia. This was particularly apparent during diagnosis, where she recalled feeling belittled and silly after unsuccessfully remembering “apple, table, penny”, a component of Folstein’s Mini-mental state examination (Folstein, 1975). Duncan recounted the distressing incident, finding his mother arguing with her reflection in a mirror, where she believed the woman in the mirror was an intruder. We both reminisced on more enjoyable experiences. For instance, Duncan recalled a time when he sat with his mother foraging through old photos and memorabilia, and I remembered my earlier memories of sitting on her bed, holding her hand in the care home. These were juxtaposed against evidence from *The Oakden Report* and formulated into documentary scenes. It was difficult being immersed in mostly tragic stories; unlike my father, I had not been as exposed to the impacts of dementia. There were many times when I felt overwhelmed with grief and anger, but this fuelled my determination to write the show.

Duncan educated me on the complexity of the illness, noting that there are many causes of dementia with a variety of clinical presentations. We considered the health implications of dementia, from early warning signs and diagnosis, through to progressive deterioration. We created an inventory of common symptoms that Nanny and other patients in *The Oakden Report* had exhibited. This included repeated phrases, disorientation and confusion, misplacing belongings, the belief that someone is stealing, and loss of words. Later symptoms presented severe paranoia, incontinence, falls, and an inability to live independently. The advanced stages of dementia, as described in the report and Duncan’s clinical experience, exhibited loss of all verbal communication, loss



Act Two: *The Big Ensemble Number* – An artistic autoethnographic account

of recognition of self and others, loss of mobility, development of apraxia¹³ and dysphagia¹⁴, and subsequent increased risk of aspiration. The deterioration of a person with dementia has significant implications for family members, including accepting new responsibilities as carers, dealing with grief, advocating for loved ones, and managing the complexities of the healthcare system.

The Oakden Report (Groves et al., 2017) was reviewed and discussed many times. Key quotes and written excerpts were embedded in the draft script. Information was primarily sourced from two chapters, ‘Quality and Safety of Care’ and ‘Culture’. Within these chapters, the report outlined central issues from which findings and recommendations were provided. Specifically, the following issues informed the musical’s content, ‘Patient-centred care’, ‘Quality use of medication’, ‘Staff bickering and conflict’, ‘Disrespectful behaviour’ and ‘Loss of possessions’.

Direct excerpts were collated concerning the service provided at Oakden. For example, “many [staff] have stood by, incurious and disinterested” (Groves et al., 2017, p. 75). The environment was described as “toxic”, “disrespectful” and having “low morale” (p. 95). The report highlighted “a lack of leadership”, which subsequently fostered “an old boy’s culture” (p. 69). This resulted in many staff “feeling intimidated” (p. 96) as well as “depleted and defeated” (p. 94). Some felt that they could not speak up, and one staff member expressed, “I failed. I did not do my job properly”. Whilst several staff members were considered “passionate, professional and dedicated”, the report stated, “they [were] not the dominant culture of Oakden” (p. 93).

¹³ “Apraxia is the loss or impairment of the ability to execute complex coordinated movements, despite having the physical ability and desire to perform them”. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

¹⁴ “Dysphagia refers to difficulty swallowing”. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).



In contrast, staff were described as “impersonal” (p. 73) and “lacking any humanity” (p. 78), using “pejorative and demeaning language” (p. 98) when addressing patients and family members. Family members noted that “reporting lines [were] unclear [and] escalation [was] unclear” (p. 75), and consequently, complaints were not managed well (p. 90). Families were not involved in the development of a care plan, and one family member noted, “We [were] only notified or spoken to when things [went] wrong.” “Excessive medication” and inappropriate prescribing was a recurring issue with which reviewers stated was “an avoidable harm” (p. 85). Care was seen as a “job to be done” (p. 98). The report noted that “majority of residents [were] left with little stimulation” (p. 89) and personal “items [were] simply lost” (p. 88) with no resolution. The report captured the damaging culture that was bred within the Oakden health service, stating:

This culture was characterised by poor morale, disrespect and bickering, secrecy, an inwardly looking approach, control, a sense of entitlement and indifference. This culture led to a loss of dignity and of rights for those in Oakden, both consumers and staff (p. 99).

Ultimately, in highlighting failures of care and possibilities for improvement, the reviewers noted that “changing the culture of Oakden will take time” (p. 100), providing philosophical advice that “the threshold must be that everything you do today is what you would want to have happen if it was your most loved one” (p. 82). The final offering of the report highlighted that the tragedy witnessed at Oakden “should be a lesson of failing... and should never happen again” (p. 115). I noted some of the emotions and questions experienced whilst reading the report in the following field note (see Figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2

Field Note 12.05.21 – Reading ‘The Oakden Report’

23.02.22 Post Fringe ope... 11:18 am What a whirl wind of	012.05.21– Reading the <u>Oakden</u> Report That was depressing and hard to read I feel: – Frustrated – Sad – Angry – Motivated (Also inspired and proud of dad) How did this get so bad? It's so wrong - inhumane. So many stories/nuances/angle to take - how do you share this? How can this be turned in a musical but still capture the impact of <u>Oakden</u> ? – Needs to have hope – I carry an important role - need to be respectful.
08.09.22 Post show feels 11:18 am WOW - what a jour...	
07.09.22 – Show Day 11:18 am Good rehearsal this...	
06.09.22 – An Emotional... 11:18 am Day 2 of bump-in/t...	
28.02.22 – The lady with... 11:18 am Post 3rd show	

The lessons proposed from *The Oakden Report* were implemented into service reform. Duncan had a first-hand recall of witnessing staff positively transform within the service; person-centred care became a priority, and families were engaged in care plan discussions. Through my father's story, I recognised that sustainable change is a complex and prolonged enterprise.

Duncan was impacted by the stories uncovered months after investigating Oakden Mental Health Service. Still, his most profound experience during this time was finding Lily's box of belongings abandoned in a storeroom. As discussed in the opening of this chapter, the box contained memorabilia, including an engagement ring, pictures with her children, a scarf, pearls, and handwritten notes. Duncan described how Lily's identity had been boxed away and forgotten. This was not a one-off story; it was the case for countless lives detailed in the report. While the collective findings from *The Oakden Report* and our lived experience informed the narrative, the account of finding Lily's belongings was the defining concept and subsequent title, *A Box of Memories*.

Alongside this, four transformative and creative intentions were identified:

1. Transform audiences' perspectives, attitudes, and behaviour towards dementia.



2. Champion the person with dementia whilst capturing the extended impact of the illness.
3. Generate new understandings and greater awareness about dementia.
4. Utilise music as an emotive enhancer.

Finding and curving the narrative arc

After many deliberations, we had numerous angles from which a narrative could lead. The challenge was synthesising the stories, events, and experiences from the documentary sources into a one-act musical capturing the multi-faceted aspects expressed and identified. Rather than explicitly present a re-enactment of one event, we endeavoured to draw upon multiple perspectives. This was because the impacts of dementia discussed were complex, far-reaching and experienced differently by the person, the family, and the practitioners.

Moreover, writing a musical that presents dementia is difficult for many reasons. There must be considerations of political and social implications. Dementia is a stigmatised illness, and in portraying a person with dementia on stage, we needed to be consciously respectful, considering the use of pejorative language, stereotypical gestures and portrayals that might be overly triggering for audience members. Similarly, the illness is often associated with negativity, fear, and despondency. We did not want to present an unduly bleak picture of dementia or reinforce hopelessness. Still, at the same time, we endeavoured to honestly acknowledge the many challenges that people, and their families face when impacted by dementia. As a result, and with much consideration, we chose not to centralise the abuse and trauma experienced by families at Oakden. Instead, this would become a sub-theme embedded within the larger philosophical message of the work.



Three perspectives were identified to illustrate the extensive impact dementia has on the community. These included the person (Lizzy), the family (Sonia), and the practitioner (Dr Jeremy). We intended to centralise the story of the person with dementia and the subsequent impact on the family. The show would also capture a parallel narrative highlighting the problems encountered within the health system through the storyline of the practitioner. Drawing a motif from Lily's story, the idea of a box of memories being lost and forgotten in the storeroom became a central dramatic concept, depicting the dehumanisation exhibited at Oakden. Successively, a broad narrative arc was established. The musical would portray the illness progression from diagnosis to death, exploring the impacts on the person with dementia and the challenges endured by the family whilst managing the difficulties within the health care system.

Character design and development

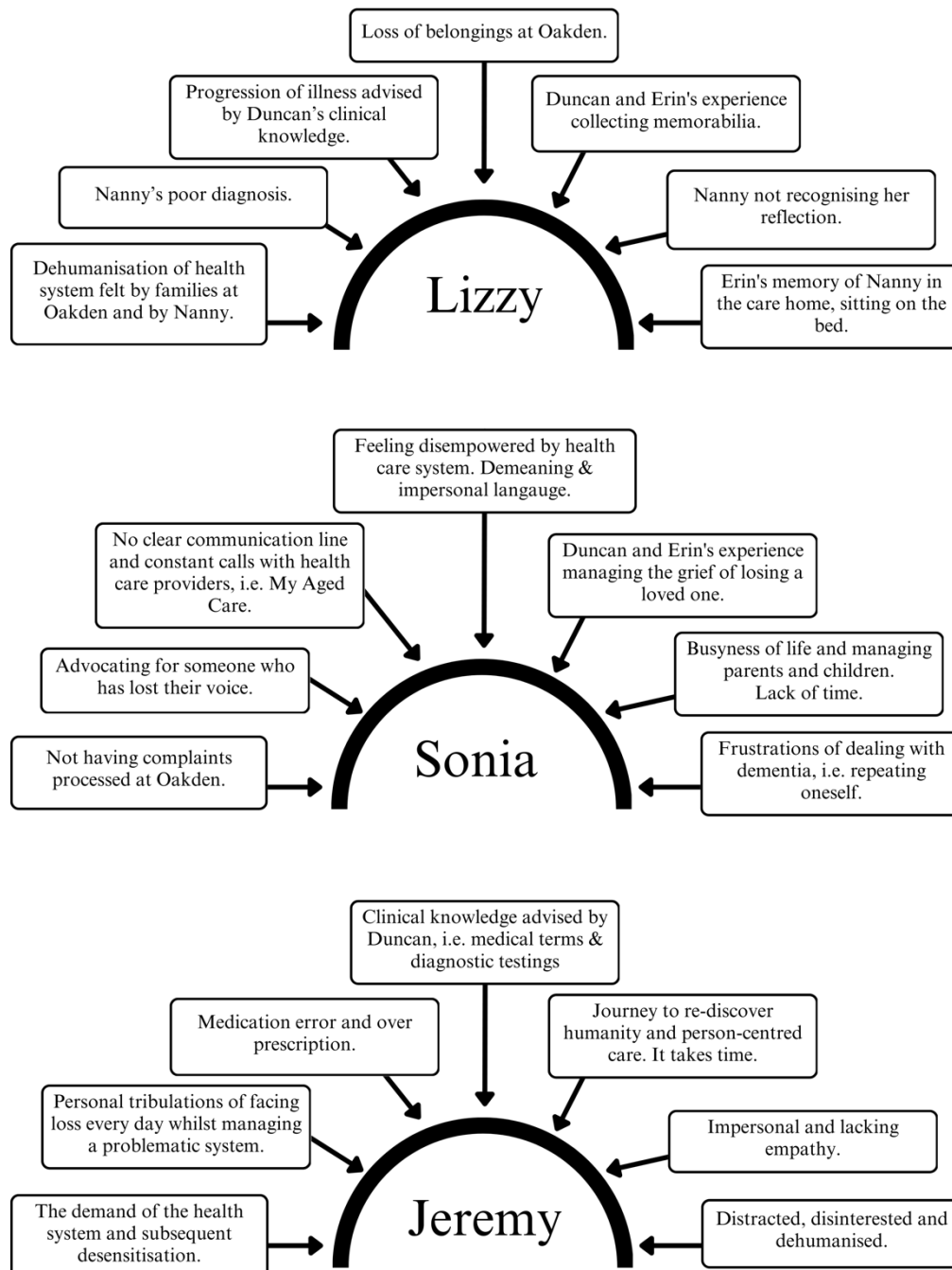
The characters were conceived from the documentary findings accumulated during the initial conceptual stage. For instance, the person with dementia was named Lizzy, after my Nanny. Her depiction of dementia, specifically Alzheimer's, was informed by Nanny's experience as well as drawing nuances from *The Oakden Report* and Duncan's clinical knowledge. The family experience was embedded in the portrayal of Sonia, Lizzy's daughter. Their relationship drew from the experiences Duncan had with his mother as well as the connections I had with both Nanny and my father. The personal struggle experienced by Sonia during her mother's illness was informed by Duncan's journey through grief to acceptance. The practitioner, named Jeremy, depicted the issues raised by *The Oakden Report* in relation to the health and aged care system, as well as Duncan's own experience and insight into the medical profession. The characters implemented key personality traits, descriptions and experiences outlined in the source



documents. The diagram depicted in Figure 4.3 is a visual example illustrating how the character traits were implemented into the development of Lizzy, Sonia, and Jeremy.

Figure 4.3

Documentary elements in the character developments





The role of song in plot progression

The overarching narrative and character arcs were established, drawing upon key documentary elements, experiences, and events. Following this, a narrative timeline was formed, establishing a clear beginning, middle and end (see Appendix I for the draft original timeline). This was primarily based on the broad arcs of each character. A series of songs were written from key moments addressed on the timeline prior to the script. As the library of works grew, the narrative began to evolve. Across both phases, eighteen works were composed. Retrospectively, small sections of the script were written by Duncan, linking the songs, and providing narrative continuity. Though this deviates from the conventional process of writing a musical, it reflects my role as the composer driving the creative work. My interpretation of the evolving plot was expressed through the music.

The compositional process extended over five months. While the core songs were written in Phase I, four songs were composed during the phase II development. The following discussion on the compositional work includes both phases. Two main components were considered during the music-writing process. The first explored how elements of documentary theatre practice could be incorporated. The second ensured that the compositions adhered to a musical theatre aesthetic and function. It is noteworthy that whilst composition, music, and mixed media have been exhibited in contemporary documentary theatre, this has not yet been implemented into the development of a musical. Merging the two components required careful and intentional creative decisions. The lyrical content was written in collaboration with Duncan, whilst the music was composed as a solo undertaking.



4.4 Writing the Lyrics and Composing the Music

Incorporating documentary theatre practice in lyric writing

Documentary theatre practices were implemented into the lyrics by using verbatim phrases, describing real experiences, embedding true events, and using accurate terminology. A series of examples will be discussed, illustrating how these elements have been integrated lyrically. For instance, verbatim phrases were used during Lizzy's dementia assessment 'Just three words' (Song 3) (see Appendix G for a complete show song list and video timestamp). This exhibited Folstein's (1975) mini-mental state examination which is the most extensively used standardised screening test for dementia worldwide. The focal lyric was the exact testing phrase 'apple, table, penny' (Folstein, 1975). Alongside this, Lizzy's negative experience, evidenced through the piece, reflected that of Nanny and many others. Further, the song 'Vitamin H' (song 8) captured the "old boy's culture" experienced at Oakden (Groves et al., 2017, p. 69), as well as the inappropriate use of chemical restraints (p. 105). It employed medication terms, including haloperidol¹⁵. Incorporating clinical language was lyrically challenging due to the pronunciation, longer syllables and limited rhyme options. However, this language was necessary for achieving authenticity, explicitly highlighting the inappropriate medication use at Oakden and witnessed by Duncan. In addition to accurate terminology, the song also included verbatim phrases. For instance, the lyric 'cruisy rotations on the Geri's ward, where they're old and slow' was the verbatim comment from a medical student, who was describing his rotation on a geriatric mental health ward to Duncan.

Real experiences and moments were embedded lyrically in the song and reprise of 'Silver memories and golden moments' (Song 6). Personal memories were recounted as

¹⁵ Haloperidol is an antipsychotic medication. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)



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lyrics, including ‘I remember those red patent shoes’, a memory Nanny shared reflecting on Duncan’s childhood shoes; another lyric reflected Duncan’s experience with his eldest daughter, ‘I remember when you snuck out at night skiving off with friends breaking rules’. Enhancing the real aspect of parent-child connection in the song, a verbatim phrase from my childhood was also included, ‘love you, have a safe trip, have a safe day’ a line I obsessively had to recite every time Dad left the house (song 16). One of the intentions of using real, specific, and personal experiences was to invite the audience to reflect on their own memories. This served as a tool to connect audience members with their sense of reality in conjunction with what they witnessed in the show.

Further, the work ‘Woman in the window’ (Song 9) was a re-enactment of Duncan’s experience with his mother when she aggressively berated her own reflection, ‘It’s that woman!’ Duncan recalled this event and the phrases Nanny screamed unknowingly at herself, ‘dreadful woman’, ‘get out, get out, get out’, ‘what are you doing here’, ‘flibbertigibbet’ and ‘leave me alone’. These verbatim phrases became the song’s foundation (see Figure 4.4).

The experience Duncan had trying to calm his mother down, explaining ‘there’s no one there’, ‘it’s your reflection’ was depicted through Sonia. This event resulted in a period of Nanny’s hospitalisation, which is represented in the narrative. This illustration of paranoia is a symptom of the illness’s progression and was an important aspect to incorporate in the show’s realistic portrayal.



Figure 4.4

Score excerpt - 'Woman in the window'

The musical score excerpt is for a scene titled 'Woman in the window'. It features two characters, Lizzy and Sonia, in a 4/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The score is written for two staves, with Lizzy's part on the top staff and Sonia's part on the bottom staff. The lyrics are as follows:

Lizzy (mf): It's that wom-an in the win-dow!...

Sonia (mf): There's no wom-an in the win-dow... What are you do-ing here?... Dread-ful wom-an in the win-dow... It's your re-flect-ion! Don't be frigh-tened of the win-dow... Get out! Leave me a-lone!... Get out! Leave me a-lone!...

Music theatre song considerations

Whilst documentary practices were implemented lyrically, it was also essential to apply musical theatre writing practices, such as writing the lyrics in the language of the character, developing lyrical motifs, and addressing elements of music theatre song function (i.e., 'Narration song', 'I Want song', 'Soliloquy', 'Eleven O'clock' song and 'I Am song'). The song 'What's happening to me?' (Song 2) functions as the narration song, establishing the dramatic situation, introducing Lizzy as the central character, and giving the audience reason to be concerned and care about her. The expository language was implemented to convey narrative but also provide insight into Lizzy's experience and pre-empt the challenge to come. An example of this is captured during the chorus of 'What's happening to me?' (see Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5

Score excerpt - 'What's happening to me?'

Lizzy

What will peop - le think? What will they all say? When will they not - ice that

I am not the same, and I don't want to look cos' I do not want to see,

and yet I have to ask What's hap-pen-ing to me?

mp

Duncan highlighted that the title phrase, 'What's happening to me?' is a recurring question asked by many experiencing early signs of dementia. It was essential to depict the struggle with a changing sense of identity and coherence. Thus, the phrase served as a lyrical motif, elucidating Lizzy's difficulties processing the changes she is experiencing throughout her illness progression.

Dealing with a complex and difficult topic resulted in a melancholic lyrical palate. With the show being a musical, it was necessary to embed moments of comedic relief. An example of this is Sonia's song, 'I need a GnT' (Song 13) performed after waiting at the hospital for hours and feeling very overwhelmed with life. Relatable phrases enhanced the humour, 'I need a GnT, the tonic must be Fever Tree'. Leaning into a comedic approach, simple and obvious rhyme patterns were used, for example, 'it's been an hour...now five and I think I need a drink just to survive'. Coarse language was a lyrical motif representing Sonia's character. This captured the flustered and overworked nature of Sonia's world with a particular Australian vernacular flare. An example occurs after she forgets to pick her daughter up from dance, singing, 'Am I useless? Or dumb? A shitty daughter and now a shit mum!'. In contrast, the lyrical language depicting Jeremy is clean and direct, reflecting his clinical role. However, lyrically, he evolved from



unemotionally stating facts to using warmer and more relational language. This matches the development of his character arc. This is evident in the conflict song, ‘ABC(D)’ (Song 5) where Jeremy sings overly clinical lyrics (see Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6

Score excerpt - ‘ABC(D)’

Jeremy *Dismissively*

The C - T scan shows at-rophy starts in the hip-po-camp-us, sor-ry to say you'll pro-gress.
We'll start treat-ment now it can help for_ a lit-tle while, it keeps symp-toms mild for a time.

Over-medicalisation is demonstrated through the use of clinical terminology, and the therapeutic nihilism illustrates a lack of sensitivity. Whereas in his later song ‘What if this were me’ (Song 12), there is evidence of greater empathy, emotional awareness, and personal growth. The work functions as a soliloquy, with lyrics providing a sung monologue addressed to himself (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7

Score excerpt - ‘What if this were me’

Jeremy *Almost spoken*

Med-i-cine is vo-ca-tion, it seems like a no-ble cause, But re-al-it-y streams a con-stant de
mand. Some days it's hard to find peace in all of the quest-ions but I re-mem-ber the
peo-ple that I love and know they could be wal-king here, need-ing me_ to care.



The work also captures the philosophical offerings of *The Oakden Report* (Groves et al. 2017). Specifically, the notion of “everything you do today is what you would want to have happen if it was your most loved one” (p. 82). This quote and Duncan’s personal experience underpinned the writing of ‘What if this were me’.

Interweaving documentary practices in the lyrical writing of the music theatre songs enriched the depiction of dementia and its far-reaching impact. Embedding real experiences provided specific insight into the illness’ effect on the person, the family, and the practitioner. The use of verbatim phrasing enhanced the realism of the work whilst correct terminology offered authentication. This allowed us to explore the multiple perspectives expressed through our lived experience and *The Oakden Report*, forming an authentic lyrical narrative.

Compositional intentionality

Considerations of how music can enhance documentary narratives from the composer’s perspective is novel. There is no right or wrong way to approach the compositional aspect. Instead, I have experimented with different techniques, sounds, genres, and musical palettes to achieve a cohesive, emotionally impacting score. Underpinning my compositional choices is the notion that music adopts greater extra-musical meaning by encompassing various cultural, social, and psychological signs and symbols (Tarasti, 2002; Tagg, 2013). This is described as musical semiotics. Painter and Koelsch (2011) contend that “music can activate extra-musical meaning concepts and access semantic memory in a similar fashion to other domains, such as language” (p. 646). Music is considered a language with a unique structured syntax (Levitin & Menon, 2003; Patel, 2003). This music syntax comprises notes, chords, melody, and rhythms with affectations, including articulation and dynamics. Yet the meaning of music “is not entirely contained in its organization of sounds” (Sergent, 2016, p. 2) in the material



sense. Instead, meaning is communicated through musical semiotics associated with broader emotional, social, and cultural contexts (Way & McKerrell, 2017).

Of salience is Phillip Tagg's (1999) notion of anaphones, which suggests that signs embedded in music connect external ideas and themes. Anaphones are musical references that evoke other musical or non-musical associations (Tagg, 1999, p.25). For instance, a rhythmic pattern may be reminiscent of a particular genre, a musical motif may reflect a specific historical event, or a certain chordal totality might trigger a particular emotional reaction. Tagg (1999) suggests that anaphones enrich the meaning of a musical piece, providing intertextual connections within music. He emphasises the importance of considering the cultural and social contexts in which music is created and consumed (p.25). Anaphones often draw upon shared cultural references and conventions, making them especially meaningful to listeners familiar with those references. In this way, composers can intentionally layer musical meaning using compositional intentionality to engage listeners on multiple levels.

I intentionally drew upon concepts of musical semiotics to create works that serve a theatrical purpose and enhance the audience's connection to real and familiar emotional experiences. I implemented various techniques and genres to musically represent the characters, the narrative and the mood of each scene in an attempt to enhance the connection between the intended meaning and the audience's interpretation. The musical is designed for a broad audience; thus, I endeavoured to create a musical score accessible to diverse listeners through an eclectic mix of genres, including pop, folk, rock, jazz, singer-songwriter, and music theatre songbook. To start, I noted many musical inspirations and some affective goals in the following field note (see Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.8

Field Note: 03.06.21 – Planning the music

23.02.22 Post Fringe ope... 11:18 am What a whirl wind of 0.8.09.22 Post show feels 11:18 am WOW - what a jour... 07.09.22 – Show Day 11:18 am Good rehearsal this... 06.09.22 – An Emotional... 11:18 am Day 2 of bump-in/t... 28.02.22 – The lady with... 11:18 am Post 3rd show 22.02.22 – Fringe Openin... 11:18 am The Jade is super q...	03.06.21– Planning the music. Music inspo: - Jason Robert Brown - Sondheim - Eva Cassidy - Pasek and Paul - Sting - The Carpenters - Joni Mitchel - Leonard Bernstein I want the music to make people feel - Capture the heart & emotions - I want the audience to cry - The music needs to reflect the characters voice Piano and Vox to start – potentially evolve into small band? Building song timeline - need lyrical focal points for each song (dad involvement)
--	--

The genre of each song was matched with the context and sentiment of the scene. For instance, ‘How to decide’ (Song 15) is a pop-infused music theatre ballad depicting Sonia’s emotional climax. Another example is ‘David is that you?’ (Song 11), which draws influence from a traditional jazz songbook waltz, reflecting Lizzy’s belief that she was living in the past. The waltz physically embodied the emotional intertwining of Lizzy and Jeremy. I also experimented with pre-recorded tracks using post-production elements, including SFX, vocal distortion, and sonic treatment (‘Falling’, Song 7; ‘The demand’, Song 10). This emblematically reflected scenes beyond everyday reality, such as Lizzy’s paranoia and the extreme system demands placed on Jeremy.

The female vocal range and tessitura was primarily mezzo-soprano, in keeping with the genre palate but also had the impact of challenging stereotypical female ranges where the ‘leading lady’ is commonly a soprano. In contrast, the male range extended to countertenor to also expand expectations of masculine characterisations. Pop vocal inflections such as stronger glottal onsets and subtle melismatic offsets were used to enhance the contemporary aspects of the melody and make them more palatable for a non-music theatre audience. I considered the tonality and motion of melodic passages as



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research demonstrates that minor modes, lower and descending pitches, are often associated with sadness and melancholy, whilst anger is correlated with faster rhythmic devices (Juslin et al., 2014, pp. 599-623). In contrast, major modes and ascending passages are linked with happier and more hopeful associations (Mohn, et al., 2011, pp. 503-517). The intentional use of consonance and dissonance reflected the fluctuating mood of the narrative arc. This is because, characteristically, dissonance is associated with tension and angst, whereas consonance is associated with sweetness and happiness (Shapira & Stone, 2008). Such moments of anger and distress were enhanced through musical dissonance.

Rhythmic consideration depicted the temperament of the characters. For instance, devices including cross-rhythm patterns, complex subdivisions and staccato phrasing were used to generate tension (Vuust & Roepstorff, 2014). Similarly, rhythmic anticipation and offbeat patterns inferred a sense of urgency and haste (Machin, 2013). Elongated passages and legato phrasing are often identified as a “conflict-free” musical expression and are used in emotional and hopeful moments (Han, 2021, p.179). Musical motifs were also used as signifiers. For example, in the opening song ‘Another day’ (Song 1), the piano repeated a two-note phrase that resembled a clock ticking. This anaphone connected audiences with the familiar aural reference of time. The motif would speed up to symbolise a faster pace and slow down to infer a slowing in time. Similarly, through the score, I implemented a descending melodic motif to represent the deterioration of Lizzy’s health aurally. In this way, the audience sees and hears her illness progression.

The orchestration was intentionally minimal, adhering to a pop band instrumentation, which included piano, guitar, bass, drums, backing vocals and violin. The band arrangements adopted similar techniques implemented in the melodies. The soaring



melodies of the violin created colour whilst also emphasising Lizzy's declining voice and her experience with dementia. This was particularly apparent in 'David is that You?' (Song 11), where the violin and percussion create dissonant tension, resembling screeching sounds like fingernails clawing a blackboard. This occurred as Lizzy worsened, aurally depicting her loss of cognition and internal distress as she tried to hold onto her cognition. Further, I was conscious of consistently arranging songs using similar instrumentations for each character and their relationships. For instance, most of Lizzy's vocal solos were accompanied by violin and piano, whereas the acoustic guitar was used in songs between Lizzy and Sonia.

I have highlighted broad examples of how compositional intentionality was embedded into the musical works. For a deeper exploration of this, two songs have been selected to thoroughly examine the process of composing a documentary musical.

4.5 Analysis of Selected Musical Examples

'ABC(D)' musical analysis

'ABC(D)' is the song in which the diagnosis is disclosed (Song 5). *The Oakden Report* (Groves et al., 2017) emphasised the "demeaning behaviour" (p. 98) demonstrated by staff interacting with families. In conjunction, Duncan's account from the perspective of a clinician and family member reinforced the discomfort, tension and frustration felt during a diagnosis appointment. The music needed to mirror the angst, discomfort, and unpleasant experience of a dementia diagnosis. The music began with a disjointed bass line, progressing in a downward motion. This musically symbolised the disconnectedness of the health system whilst aurally foreshadowing the descending deterioration of the diagnosis. The phrase ends on an emphasised augmented fourth, creating tension against the C minor tonality, musically portraying the clash between practitioner, patient, and family. The bass passage continues whilst Jeremy begins to



sing. The melody is robotic in nature, representing Jeremy's impersonal and disengaged persona (see Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9

Score excerpt – 'ABC(D)'

Jeremy
mf *Very clinical*
Please come on in, take a seat, we're talk-ing di-ag-nos-is. I rec-og-nise this is hard.
Don't you be shy, just speak up, if there is an-y thing I say that you don't un-der-stand.

A counter-melody utilising anticipation is introduced as Sonia begins to sing, reflecting her constant urgency. Both melodies rhythmically meet in harmony on the augmented fourth tension point, singing 'stop' (see Figure 4.10). This affirms the strain in the relationship dynamic.

Figure 4.10

Score excerpt – 'ABC(D)'

Jeremy
Liz-y and Son - ia the ev - i - dence is clear and sad-dly this dis-ease we... can-not stop. un
Sonia
No, don't talk! You're speak-ing gibb - er - ish a - gain, just stop!
for-tun-ate-ly fam-ily genes can be a fact - or here I can-not pre-tend there's no risk.
What does this___ mean for moth-er? and_ what a - bout me?



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As the tension grows between Sonia and Jeremy, the melody and instrumentation accentuate the offbeat, inferring the growing animosity. Lizzy's voice is intentionally the last voice to enter; this represents how the patient's perspective is often considered last. In this instance, she is ignored by both Jeremy and Sonia. Her melody employs cross-rhythms, repeating the line 'apple, table, penny' on a single note. Being stuck on a single note and repeating herself reflects her inability to communicate clearly whilst depicting the inner distress of her fragmented sense of self. The busyness of all the vocal phrasing captures the chaotic nature of the health system, family dynamic and the difficulty of having vulnerable voices heard. The polyphonic melodies in the verse briefly meet on key lyrical phrases to highlight important themes by grounding the listener's ear (see Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11

Score excerpt – 'ABC(D)'

The musical score excerpt is for a piece titled 'ABC(D)'. It features three vocal parts: Sonia, Lizzy, and Jeremy. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). Sonia's part begins with a rest, followed by a melody with lyrics: 'I'm try-ing to pro-cess the news, our world has shatt-ered in - to bits and I can't. ad-mit it.' Lizzy's part begins with a rest, followed by a melody with lyrics: 'Get me_ out_ I'm los - ing my mind ap - ple pen-ny shit!'. Jeremy's part begins with a rest, followed by a melody with lyrics: 'Just take your time_ I know, you don't wan-na hear it!'. Below Jeremy's part, there are two more staves of music, likely for a piano or another instrument, with lyrics: 'I know what you'll say I know what I think your di-ag-nos - is is I don't wan-na hear it!' and 'No - one_ see's_ me an-y-more they don't wan-na hear it!'. A red bracket is drawn over the final part of Jeremy's melody, highlighting the phrase 'wan-na hear it!'.



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In this example (Figure 4.11), the phrase from Jeremy's perspective is 'you don't want to hear it', depicting the avoidance of the family and regularity of Jeremy providing a diagnosis. Sonia sings, 'I don't want to hear it', which depicts Sonia's concern for herself and how the diagnosis impacts her. Lizzy's lyric is, 'They don't want to hear it', reflecting how, despite the diagnoses relating to Lizzy, her voice has been lost during the process.

The symbolic details are evident in and throughout the score. For instance, a 5/4 bar leads into the chorus. The choice to add an extra beat reflected the delaying and avoidance of the official diagnosis whilst also displacing the comfortability of predictable down beats. Musically, the chorus adopts a Latin rhythmic pulse with the energy of rock music. The chorus oscillates between downbeat and anticipated phrasing, inferring a lack of grounding. Lizzy intentionally has the lower harmony, reflecting her disempowered position. The use of parallel harmony provides space to emphasise the lyrics. The lyrics employ alliteration, as reflected in the ABC(D) title. The lyrics play with the impending and feared 'D' word. Intentionally, the only moment of harmonic tension in the chorus occurs on 'the deadly D', exaggerating psychological conflict and challenges associated with the illness. Lizzy sings the note D within the chord, adding to her connection with the diagnosis (see Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12

Score excerpt – ‘ABC(D)’

The musical score excerpt for 'ABC(D)' is presented in three systems, each with three staves corresponding to the vocal parts of Jeremy, Sonia, and Lizzy. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The music is characterized by complex polyphonic cross-rhythms, with each character having a distinct melodic line. The lyrics are: 'A is for an-gry coz that's how I feel. B is for blood-y, brit - tle and broke! C is for can - not cope all of this and that dead - ly D is for den- i - al. You're in de - ni - al. I'm in de - ni - al.' The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano).

I introduced a bridge to climax the work. This section vacillates between time signatures, enhancing the vocal melody's polyphonic cross-rhythm. This creates an aural disarray. The music becomes stilted, forming a robotic soundscape as each character becomes fixated on their own perspective rather than Lizzy's. Depicting Jeremy's clinical and unemotional disposition, the words 'disease, diagnosis' are repeated. The melody engages an unconventional rhythmic pattern by displacing the phrase. Sonia's line 'devastation, debt and dashed dream, dead-end day' also employs displacement whilst operating as the busier phrase through the use of subdivision. In contrast, Lizzy's melody uses legato phrasing, singing 'delusion, depressed, distressed, death'. The word death is accented to emphasise Lizzy's inevitable fate. The lyrics intentionally draw upon



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alliteration, with multiple D words crowding the phrases, all avoiding but ultimately leading to the word ‘dementia’ (see Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13

Score excerpt – ‘ABC(D)’

The musical score excerpt consists of three systems, each with three staves (treble, alto, and bass clef). The lyrics are written below the staves, with some words split across lines. The lyrics are heavily alliterative, featuring many words starting with 'D'.

System 1:

Dis-ease di-ag-nos-is Dis

De-vast-at-ion, debt & dashed dreams & dead - end days. De-vast-at-ion, debt & dashed dreams &

De - lus - sion dis - stressed de-pressed Death!

System 2:

ease di-ag nos-is Dis-ease di-ag-

dead end days. De-vast at ion, debt & dashed dreams & dead - end days. Dead - end days.

de - lus - sion sion dis - stressed de-pressed

System 3:

nos-is dis-ease dis-ease dis - ease dis-ease dis ease.

Dead - end days. Dead- end days. Dead end days. Dead - end days. dis ease.

Death! Death! Death! Death! Death! dis ease.

A moment of silence breaks the climatic motion, and Jeremy impersonally states Lizzy’s diagnosis, ‘Lizzy has dementia’. The chorus returns, using harmonic inversion to build the emotional distress, ending on ‘damn dementia’ with an unresolved B sharp eleven (omit five) chord. This reflects the lack of resolution. Overall, the song intentionally depicts the raw emotions experienced during a dementia diagnosis.



‘My life’ musical analysis

The final song, ‘My life’ (Song 18), functions as an epilogue to bring hopeful closure to existential challenges raised by dementia. To do this musically, the chorus theme follows a hymnal chord progression. The melody intentionally opens with a perfect fourth interval resembling classic hymns like ‘Amazing Grace’. The implementation of hymnal music qualities in ‘My life’ sonically depicts spiritual concerns often felt when a loved one passes. It also has a personal connection, recalling the singing of hymns at Nanny’s funeral as an ode to her favourite genre of music.

The opening chorus used a technique called *colla voce*, which means ‘follow the voice’. Lizzy’s voice is the primary focus, lightly supported by the piano. This signifies the return of Lizzy’s voice and the value of her life, having been lost throughout the musical’s narrative journey. The melodic motif of the chorus follows an upward-moving fourth passage, which I intentionally used to symbolise hope (see Figure 4.14). This contrasts with the descending motifs – ‘What’s happening to me?’ (Song 2), ‘Just three words’ (Song 3), and ‘Falling’ (Song 7) – which symbolise the progressive nature of the illness.

Figure 4.14

Score excerpt - ‘My life’

Colla Voce Lizzy p

This is my life, it is my life this is my story, it is my

—song, and I am held now with - in the mem-or-ies of God. this is my life. It is my

♩=77 with more movement

— song.

Ascending lines are used in the band orchestration, particularly the violin and guitar



passage. The violin slowly climbs melodically whilst the guitar phrase enriches the tonal colour by emphasising the eleventh (fourth). Similarly, the piano verse arrangement is grounded by the perfect fourth interval and incorporated an open fourth movement. Sonia's melody also integrates the rising fourth motif in passing phrases. Her melody is musically simple in order to float above the piano line like leaf in the wind (see Figure 4.15). This connects the metaphorical lyrics with the music.

Figure 4.15

Score excerpt - 'My life'

Sonia *mp*

Like flow - ers__and leaves,__ fad - ing and fall - ing, no hold - ing on tight,

Pno.

Gtr.

no sweet hes - i - tat - ion. And it seems like to - day__ I was child you were mo - ther

and the sum - mer__ days__ just went on__ and__ on__



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The score excerpt in Figure 4.15 show how as the melancholic lyrics are sung, the music progresses into a brief moment of minor tonality. The melody reflects a downward shift in movement but returns to the motif at the end of the passage. This musically reflects the acceptance of loss and return of hope. The band fades in the second chorus, centralising Sonia's voice and piano. Like the opening, this highlights the importance of the person's voice but also to highlights how, in every situation, there are always different perspectives, impacting us in various ways.

A rising key change is implemented to transition into the bridge to embody hope and musically depict the idea of Lizzy's transcendence. The bridge incorporates polyphonic melodies, with each character lyrically depicting their narrative arc closures. Jeremy's vocal line functions as the leading melody, constructed from quavers with tied notes to accentuate important questioning lyrics. In contrast, Lizzy's melody is formed from crotchets placed on all the downbeats. This reflects Lizzy's slower but grounded pace. The melody creates a constant musical passage that further suggests that, whilst she may no longer be present in their lives, Lizzy is held in continuing community memory. Sonia's countermelody is derived from semi-quavers, which imitates Sonia's constant motion throughout the show. In an anthemic chant, all parts meet on the lyric 'how do I keep both the loss and the gain'. The melody employs the rising fourth motif. The passage is repeated twice to emphasise the lyrical importance of this line (see Figure 4.16).



Figure 4.16

Score excerpt - 'My life'

Jeremy
How do I hold all these lives, all these stor - ies? How do I walk a path

Sonia *mf*
I sing the mel o dies of the mem or y and I, I nev er for get and I sing the mel o dies of the mem or y and I,

Lizzy *mf*
I don't know you but I know you, my souls known you

through the pain? How do I stay true u - pon my jour - ney? How
I nev - er for - get and I sing the mel - o - dies of the mem - or - y and I, I nev - er for - get How
all a - long. My souls known you all a - long. How

do I keep both the loss and the gain? How do I keep both the loss and the gain?
do I keep both the loss and the gain? How do I keep both the loss and the gain?
do I keep both the loss and the gain? How do I keep both the loss and the gain?

The intention was to encourage the audience to reflect on the notion that dealing with dementia brings both losses and gains and that, despite the challenges there is hope. Following this, the chorus theme is sung by all three characters in harmony, signifying their personal and individual unifying journey to acceptance. The melody is sung acapella. This was intentionally implemented to reinforce the significance of sharing, listening, and owning one's voice. The song closes with the line 'it is our song' sung in complete unison, blending as if it were one voice. Three different characters, three contrasting stories and perspectives, all finding unity and equality (see Figure 4.17).



Figure 4.17

Score excerpt - 'My life'

Jeremy *mf*
This is our life, it is our song, this is our stor - y it is our song. And we are

Sonia *mf*
This is our life, it is my life, this is my stor - y it is our song. And I am

Lizzy *mf*
This is our life, it is my life, this is my stor - y it is our song. And I am

held now with - in the mem-or-ies of God. This is our life. It is our song. *rit.*

held now with - in the mem-or-ies of God. This is my life. It is our song. *rit.*

held now with - in the mem-or-ies of God. This is my life. It is our song. *rit.*

4.6 Performance Workshop

In February 2022, *A Box of Memories* premiered as a workshop performance in the Adelaide Fringe Festival. The intention of presenting a workshop performance was to pilot the work in the public domain, assessing if a musical about dementia would be positively received. We wanted to gauge if the work resonated with the audience and worked theatrically whilst pinpointing areas for further development.



Figure 4.18

Image from the 2022 Adelaide Fringe workshop rehearsal



The workshop included three performers and a pianist, all of whom have personal experience with dementia. The workshop functioned as a song-cycle, and there was no lighting and a minimal set, which included three stalls and a few simple props. In typical fringe style, we only had a 45-minute bump-in to sound-check and set the stage. Minimalism was key. Three performances were scheduled at *The Jade*, an intimate gig space in Adelaide. The common pre-show anxiety approached as the opening performance neared: Will people come? Will we break even? Will people like the show? Will this represent dementia? Will this be critiqued? Will the musical be received well by those with lived experience and professional knowledge? To our surprise, all three shows sold out a week before opening night. This aided one aspect of my anxiety but fed the other. Even though the show sold out, the pressure to have a show that audiences



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resonated with grew. This was summarised in a field note I wrote the evening of opening night (see Figure 4.19).

Figure 4.19

Field Note: 22.02.22 - Fringe opening night

23.02.22 Post Fringe ope... 11:18 am What a whirl wind of 0.8.09.22 Post show feels 11:18 am WOW - what a jour... 07.09.22 – Show Day 11:18 am Good rehearsal this... 06.09.22 – An Emotional... 11:18 am Day 2 of bump-in/t... 28.02.22 – The lady with... 11:18 am Post 3rd show 22.02.22 – Fringe Openin... 11:18 am The Jade is super q... 09.10.21 Is this document... 11:17 am I've had some anxiety	22.02.22 – Fringe Opening Night The Jade is super quaint but charming – No lighting effects - not even a dimmer – Sound is pretty good – Tiny stage but we've managed it – There's a bar! (Drinking a GnT) 1 hour bump in - stresssss – Tech was late & chaotic – Finished with 15 mins til start to open doors This is my first premiere of a musical I've written!!!!!! I feel excited/terrified (need another GnT) The audience is buzzing (full house) I just want people to like it and get it and feel moved Will they get all the nuances? Will the think a dementia musical is appropriate? Will people like my music? Do I back myself and the work? YES (I think so)
--	---

The final line of the show was sung by all three performers in perfect unison: ‘This is our life; it is our song’. A moment of silence followed, only broken by sniffles and the rustling of tissues as audience members wiped their tears. Then, as the performers returned to the stage to bow, the audience leapt to their feet in applause. An overwhelming sense of relief and deep gratitude rushed over me as I knew this musical had the potential to impact its audiences positively. Instantaneously, audience members rushed over to Duncan and me to share how the musical depicted their story, captured the complex impact dementia has on the family and thanked us for creating a work that they felt Australia needed. The demand for extra shows grew, and we added an additional two shows. Both shows sold out, and the affirmative audience feedback continued. We received five and four-star reviews. A critic wrote, “It has the potential to become a beloved staple of Australian music theatre” (Cheney, 2022). Another commented on the quality of the music, stating, “the songs are sophisticated, memorable, and evocative and



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dance adroitly through contemporary pop, jazz, rock, and more textbook music theatre” (Purlin, 2022). Most noteworthy, one reviewer wrote:

As someone who has experienced the emotional turmoil of losing a loved one with dementia, I feel that this piece is a poignant yet celebratory work. It celebrates life and love. The humanity and connections linger long after experiencing the musical. The storytelling will only strengthen through future creative development, and this writer feels honoured to have witnessed it in its infancy. (Trijo, 2022)

By the end of the season, *A Box of Memories* was presented with the ‘Bank SA Best Theatre Award.’ However, one of the highlights of the Fringe season was the response from an audience member who had just been diagnosed with dementia. I wrote about this experience in the following field note (see Figure 4.20).

Figure 4.20

Field Note: 28.02.22 – The lady with dementia

23.02.22 Post Fringe ope... 11:18 am What a whirl wind of 0.8.09.22 Post show feels 11:18 am WOW - what a jour... 07.09.22 – Show Day 11:18 am Good rehearsal this... 06.09.22 – An Emotional... 11:18 am Day 2 of bump-in/t... 28.02.22 – The lady with... 11:18 am Post 3rd show 22.02.22 – Fringe Openin... 11:18 am The Jade is super q...	28.02.22 – The lady with dementia Post 3rd show - Was meant to be closing night but now we have 2 more! - The Fringe team contacted us this week to request additional dates - Positive responses keep coming in (its overwhelming/relieving) - Reviews came out this week - 4-5 stars, great written feedback - Cast happy/keen for more shows Highlight moment: There was a lady in the audience that came up after the show. She didn't tell us her name instead began to explain how she had recently been diagnosed with dementia and the musical depicted her exact experience so far, particularly the diagnosis scene and the interactions with the doctor. She continually thanked us for the show and felt that she had been heard and her story was being told. This moved me. We've connected with real stories. We've impacted audiences emotionally. I feel proud.
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In its rawest form, audience members connected, resonated, and were profoundly moved by the work. There were many revisions needed, but we were reassured that *A Box of Memories* had the potential to depict authentic experiences of dementia, create awareness, and instigate positive change.



Figure 4.21

Image of bump-in rehearsal at The Jade





CHAPTER 5

PRAXIS IN ACTION: CREATIVE WORK

PHASE II

Chapter 4 described the process of writing *A Box of Memories*, specifically articulating how documentary practices were intentionally considered and implemented into the creative writing process. Chapter 5 documents the experience of engaging with a dramaturg and director to focus on the work onstage. This chapter details further refinement and development of the musical in preparation for our national debut in Sydney.

5.1 Dramaturgy

After a successful workshop premiere at the Adelaide Fringe Festival, the show underwent dramaturgy with my doctoral supervisor, Associate Professor Narelle Yeo in mid-2022. A dramaturg is crucial in a theatrical work's development, ensuring that the artist's intention is dramatically matched with the outcome (Cadullo, 1995). This is implemented by asking key questions, challenging creative choices, and offering alternative theatrical solutions (Szatkowski, 2019). We sought expert input to critically



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analyse and prepare the show for a full production run. The dramaturgy process began with a weekend intensive in Sydney, including Duncan, Narelle, and myself and continued via regular Zoom meetings. Butchers paper was rolled out, and key, yet tough questions were raised, challenging the depth of each character arc and the work's overall narrative. This was a fertile yet challenging phase for Duncan and I. We were not only invested as creatives in this work, but it was also very personal. In many ways, we had developed an emotional attachment to the rawness of the show's first iteration. Having an external voice offer a different perspective and challenge the existing choices was hard. Whilst we knew the musical needed dramaturgical development, we didn't foresee the personal struggle that arose with accepting creative change.

Figure 5.1

Field Note: 22.05.22 – Dramaturgy

09.09.22 Reflections on th... 10:05 am We presented at th... 08.07.22 Postshow thoug... 10:05 am IT'S DONE! 07.09.22 – Show Day 10:05 am Good rehearsal this... 06.09.22 – An Emotional... 10:05 am Day 2 of bump-in/t... 22.05.22 Dramaturgy 10:04 am We just completed...	22.05.22 Dramaturgy We just completed our first round of dramaturgy with Nell in Sydney. It has been so beneficial, and the questions asked are very relevant. It's tough though - everything in this piece is very personal, both creatively and narratively. There's part of me that doesn't want to change anything, but I know the work needs to evolve, and this is a very normal process in any musical development. I have to keep reminding myself, that the musical worked as a workshop then it will work as fully staged musical but to do that, we need it to grow with the help of other experts in the field. Some things to think about from today: Do we change the name? less naff? Do we cut some of the songs? - ie cut a verse/chorus? Lyrical changes in 'What's happening to me' - less expository? Could we add in some pre-recorded music - Lizzy unwell and the system We need to add 2-3 new songs - Waltz? Duet between Jeremy and Sonia? Do we include dancers in Vitamin H?
---	---

With Narelle's guidance, dramatic incongruencies were addressed. For instance, when Duncan and I first wrote the musical, we intended that the box would represent the lives that had been lost in the system. However, this was not clear. Narelle discussed the theatre rule of three, explaining how a motif is often repeated three times in order for audiences to comprehend the multiple layers of meaning intended. In this instance, three key references to the metaphorical box were embedded in the script. Intertwined with the box metaphor was the depiction of the problematic health system. One of the difficulties we faced was illustrating that the doctor was not the root cause of the



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dehumanisation prevalent within aged care, but rather, his actions were a result of being constrained within a dysfunctional system. We sought guidance from Narelle to convey this theatrically without disrupting the existing work.

The solution was that the system needed to be viewed as a character. Whilst it was not a physical body, it needed to be a significant presence within the show and play the antagonist role. To do this, I composed a pre-recorded track called ‘The demand’, which underscored an additional scene depicting the doctor’s struggle with the constant demands of the system and balancing the expectations of everyday life. The track was uncomfortably dissonant with layered voiceovers, utilising verbatim phrases from Duncan’s experience as a practitioner, including ‘you’re going to get sued’, ‘we need more money’, ‘we have no more beds’, ‘just up their medication’ and ‘hurry up, there’s a patient waiting for you’. Whilst this scene captured our intent to represent the system, the thread needed to be embedded earlier.

Our discussions and script revisions also led to the inclusion of an additional character, The Orderly. This was a non-speaking role developed to manage stage requirements logistically and to personify the unvoiced ‘system’ antagonist, signifying the institutionalised aspects of the healthcare system. Dressed in scrubs, The Orderly busily set the stage, placing boxes in the storeroom during pre-show as audience members walked in. The intent was that audiences would be aware that the boxes signified that there were other people in the system. The Orderly’s unemotional presence stacking various boxes throughout the show, interacting in scenes without any deep connection to the other character’s conflict and concerns, told an additional story about the way a system can co-opt functionaries who facilitate without moral or emotional engagement, but that this can inadvertently contribute to the dehumanisation of all involved. The following field note is an excerpt from after the premiere in Sydney (see Figure 5.2). I



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spoke about the effectiveness of seeing the system as a fourth character and how audiences understood the intent and metaphorical meaning.

Figure 5.2

Field Note 09.09.22 - Reflection on the cardboard box motif

9.09.22 Reflections on th... 10:05 am We presented at th...	9.09.22 Reflections on the cardboard box motif We presented at the Hammondcare Conference today and countless people came up to us, sharing positive review on the show. One that really stood out though was an audience member saying how they loved the box motif and that throughout the musical they were trying to work out why there were boxes stacked up at the back, and then it all made sense to them when Lizzy's box was found in the box store room - they explained how they realised that the system was the fourth character and that whilst it was ambiguous it was deeply powerful. This was a big tick from our end - that's what we wanted to convey and the audience had understood it! The cardboard store room was so effective visually but also thematically. We wanted the cardboard to add metaphorical meaning - cardboard is everywhere but its always thrown out and disposed of, we need it but as soon as it's off no value to us, it gets in the way and ends up in the bin. In many ways, this is how we treat our ageing population, especially those with more significant needs - people living with dementia. We want to develop the musical even further and play with the box motif more, and the idea was suggested that the entire set be made from cardboard. I love this concept.
08.07.22 Postshow thoug... 10:05 am IT'S DONE!	
07.09.22 – Show Day 10:05 am Good rehearsal this...	
06.09.22 – An Emotional... 10:05 am Day 2 of bump-in/t...	
22.05.22 Dramaturgy 10:04 am We just completed...	
28.02.22 – The lady with... 10:00 am Post 3rd show	

Adding to the documentary aspect of the show, Duncan stepped out of his backstage role and into an onstage role, taking the role of Orderly. This reflexively impacted the work as we all became aware of the intrinsic power of embedding Duncan into his own story.

Further amendments included script rewrites, additional songs, reordering scenes, and clearer character development. Amongst this, Narelle challenged the function of the songs, suggesting that a few needed editing or cuts for narrative flow. This was uncomfortable to hear, as I was deeply attached to the songs. We embraced many of Narelle's lyrical edits and agreed these alternations enhanced the clarity and function of the songs. However, I did not want to cut anything from any song; this is a challenging place for any composer. While some changes to text and songs were made, when it was proposed that the second verse and chorus of 'What if this were me' could be cut, Duncan and I chose not to change the song as our rationale was that this song was written as if it were a diary entry from Duncan. He would always say, 'this is my song'. The lyrics were directly related to his experience and the questions he asked during the Oakden case. It highlighted the complex emotional experience of healthcare workers. Whilst it was one



of the show's longer songs, it was Duncan's most personal and real testimonial account. Accordingly, this song remained uncut.

This back-and-forth creative interaction shows the complexity of developing a work with personal testimony and the importance of naming perspective in making curatorial or dramaturgical decisions when workshopping a new work. In general, the dramaturgy workshop provided insight into the questions that need to be asked, the techniques used to strengthen narrative and character arcs, and developed ways to preserve creative integrity whilst being adaptable to serving the work's best interest. Narelle's dramaturgical expertise was extremely valuable, and after this process, her role moved to Director/Designer whilst my role merged into Music Director and Producer. Duncan added Set Builder and the role of the Orderly. These conversions again reflected the perspective change, transformations and spurring into action that occurs in the creation of documentary music theatre. We all reflected aspects of the narrative in our changing roles and functions, informing the emergent properties of the next iteration of the show.

5.2 Directing and Rehearsing

The amended libretto and additional songs were delivered to the cast prior to commencing rehearsals. Our first rehearsal was a hybrid structure as Duncan, I and the cast were in Adelaide, and Narelle was in Sydney on Zoom. We discussed the core changes and the envisioned set, and Narelle explained the rationale behind these changes as part of the work's development for a new context. As is common in a revision process, the cast raised some concerns over the changing of scenes; I suspect this is because they, too, were attached to the first iteration. I understood the struggle of accepting change from workshop to full production. Still, I recognised change was vital in developing the work theatrically for a larger space, larger audience, and a fully realised production.



Figure 5.3

Image of rehearsal with the director



The first iteration had been an organic team directorial process with most direction coming from Duncan and I collaborating with the cast. It was a workshop performance, not a fully staged production. The second iteration required extensive blocking to be directed within the developed set design concept. The musical action would play out in a simple verismo¹⁶ set with three zones representing the character's worlds, a cardboard box backdrop serving as the central metaphor, and integration of real images and props from our families and the performers' own lives. For example, the cast member playing Sonia placed real pictures in the box of her Nan, who has recently passed after years living with dementia. This specifically drew upon documentary techniques when considering how the musical would be framed on stage with the set. In her book *Dramaturgy of the Real*, Martin (2010) highlights how the stage should avoid separation

¹⁶ A theatrical term used to describe a realistic component. (Merriam-Webster, n.d)



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and simulation but instead work in conjunction with the real elements (p. 2). The set was designed simplistically yet intentionally. In partnership with Duncan, the set was curated and built onsite. Again, Duncan placed his own memories into elements of the build. This created an organic realism to the set-build.

The main rehearsals implemented the musical's dramaturgy revisions and integrated blocking, lighting, set, and sound design. Narelle flew down to Adelaide for an intensive three-day rehearsal period. Having Narelle in person made a significant difference to the efficiency of the rehearsals. The cast had accepted the changes, and their anxiety had turned into excitement. The rehearsals were fast-paced but effective. Within three days, the redeveloped musical had been fully blocked. There were beautiful moments added that felt powerful in the room. For example, the scene where Lizzy and Jeremy dance together becomes a visual representation of their lives interweaving, where Jeremy begins to find his way back to compassionate care. Seeing the script come to life in a visual sense spurred the anticipation for our production in Sydney.

Figure 5.4

Image of the cast rehearsing the Waltz





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Whilst it was a positive experience, it was challenging managing cast expectations. In particular, one cast member, while incredibly talented, was primarily a working vocal musician and had not performed in theatre for over 20 years. This can lead to anxiety over expectations and questioning one's abilities in the context of a short rehearsal run. In many ways, as a producer, I adopted the role of caretaker for the cast, and it was my responsibility as a producer to ensure the cast was happy, confident, and secure. Through regular personal conversations with this cast member, they overcame their apprehensions. Their performance was stellar in both the workshop and the full production.

Figure 5.5

Image of rehearsing 'Just three words'



Producing your own musical requires many hats to be worn. In addition to managing the cast and crew, I also musically directed the band. We were fortunate to be working with many of Adelaide's best musicians, and we had a very short rehearsal time for both



shows due to time constraints and funding. Even so, the band were receptive and incredibly tight.

Figure 5.6

Image of the band rehearsal

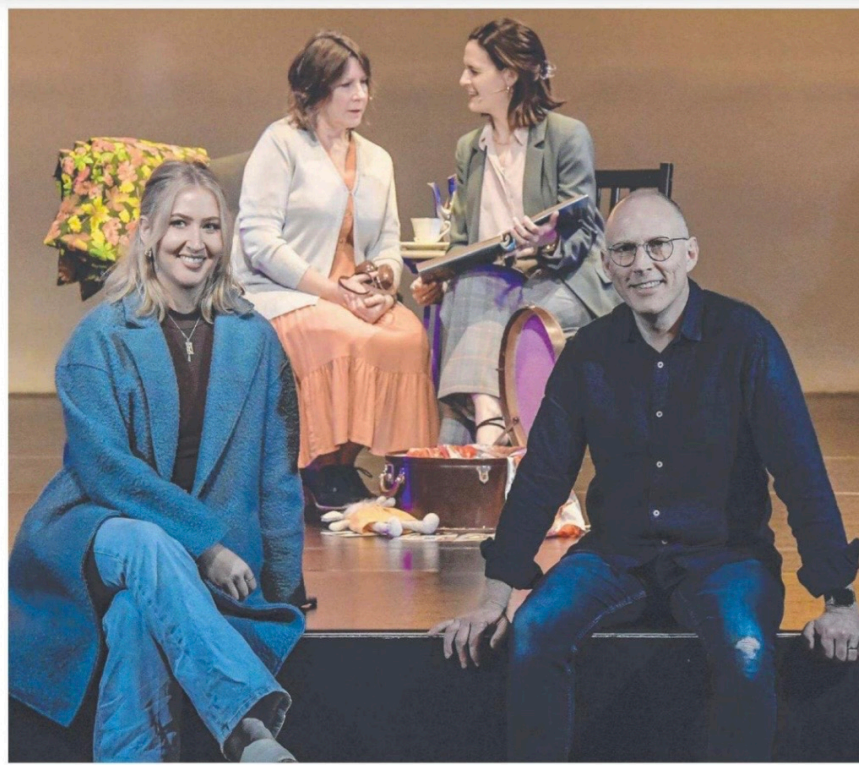


In the leadup to the performance and in conjunction with the HammondCare Public Relations team, the show garnered positive media attention. Duncan and I were interviewed for several radio stations, podcasts, and newspapers. We were also contacted by Neurons VR, an occupational therapy company that uses virtual reality to provide meaningful experiences to aged care residents. In consultation with their team, we agreed to provide filming access to record *A Box of Memories* in VR to provide older people, who would not be able to attend the live performance with the opportunity to experience the show and go to the theatre in virtual reality. This also serves as an exciting new way to explore how music theatre and health interventions could work alongside virtual reality.



Figure 5.7

Image of the article in 'The Australian'



Erin and Duncan McKellar, who created *A Box of Memories*, starring Kathie Renner and Lauren Henderson, at rear

In memory of so many forgotten

Figure 5.8

Image of Erin and Duncan with the team from Neurons VR





5.3 Sydney Performance

On the 7th of September 2022, *A Box of Memories* premiered as a fully staged musical at The Seymour Centre's York Theatre, funded in part by HammondCare¹⁷. There was limited time with the cast and band in Sydney as they arrived on the 5th of September 2022. This meant that bump-in and the technical rehearsal was constrained to one full day prior to the event. As a producer, I ensured schedules were met, props were arranged, instruments were hired as well as managing all involved parties. Duncan built the set, painting the kitchen, cable-tying and placing cardboard boxes and securing props to the stage whilst Narelle was also working the sound desk, running sound cues and, liaising with the technical team, calling the show from the booth.

Figure 5.9

Image of Duncan attending to the set



¹⁷ HammondCare is an Australian non-for-profit aged care service provider. Specifically, HammondCare hosts The Dementia Centre which is a national and international research and development sector, concerned with optimising care for people with dementia and has an industry partnership with the University of Sydney. The organisation is committed to serving the community and generating greater dementia awareness through a myriad of different mediums (HammondCare, 2023). As a result, *A Box of Memories* was invited to open the International Dementia Conference in 2022. This professional performance was funded by HammondCare and the show was open to conference attendees and the general public at the Seymour Centre, Sydney, Australia.



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Likewise, the lighting designer worked closely with Narelle to create a visual lighting scape that enhanced the quality and dramatic intention of the show. The cast became accustomed to the stage and space. During the production week, there was a sense of shared responsibility despite roles changing and expanding. The collaborative energy was unique and may speak to the “heart” of this project.

Figure 5.10

Image of bump-in at the York Theatre



During the first full technical run in a scene shared by Lizzy and Sonia, as Lizzy faced death, a wave of raw emotion filled the theatre. Despite the multiple roles and the stress, everyone in the theatre from the band, the cast, and the tech team, began to sob as the scene played. This was the creative team’s version of a transformative experience, the same experience we explicitly intended for our audience when we first decided to create this show as documentary music theatre. I wrote about this experience in a field note (see Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.11

Field Note: 06.09.22 - An emotional rehearsal

23.02.22 Post Fringe ope... 11:18 am What a whirl wind of 0.8.09.22 Post show feels 11:18 am WOW - what a jour... 07.09.22 – Show Day 11:18 am Good rehearsal this... 06.09.22 – An Emotional... 11:18 am Day 2 of bump-in/t... 28.02.22 – The lady with... 11:18 am Post 3rd show 22.02.22 – Fringe Openin... 11:18 am The Jade is super q... 09.10.21 Is this document... 11:17 am I've had some anxiety 27.09.21 Piecing what we h... 11:17 am We have a list of so... 12.09.21 David on piano 11:17 am I just received the 30.08.21 Composing My L... 11:17 am I want this song to f... 23.08.21 Composing ABCD 11:17 am I has a vision for thi... 04.08.21 Reworks on lyrics 11:17 am The lyrics I wrote fo... 12.07.21 Composing GnT 11:17 am This is classic musi... 03.06.21– Planning the m... 11:11 am Music inspo:	06.09.22 – An Emotional Rehearsal Day 2 of bump-in/tech runs – I haven't been able to watch the show from the audience so can be hard to tell how its running – I'm sitting with the band on a stool (music directing) – Its been stressful and I've felt pushed for time – There more pressure this time around I'd organised Subway platters for lunch - big hit! Fuel for a full run with VR filming and photographer. – Tom (lighting) has a strange order: just a roll with cheese.... OH MY - we just had moment in our full run. – NOTE TO SELF: Need to come back and write about the experience – I needed a moment like this as reassurance and to reset my perspective. – I'm sobbing. The whole band is! – The show is good! Back to the moment: Scene 16: Sonia was lying on the hospital bed with Lizzy. As Sonia sang the <i>Silver Memories and Golden Moments Reprise</i> Lizzy began to reach her hand to Sonia's cheek. You could see the tears in Lizzy and Sonia's eyes and hear the quivering in Sonia's voice as she strung her lyrics together. It in that moment I had this overwhelming sense of emotion wash over me from head to toe. I began to sob uncontrollably. There was a rawness to the emotions on stage that hit differently. I was thinking about Nanny, dad, my family, those who had been impacted by <u>Oakden</u>. I couldn't control myself. Was I feeling grief, sadness, hope, gratefulness? I don't know. Perhaps all at the one time. I thought it was just me having this response given my personal connection and closes to writing the show but as I looked up, the entire band was sobbing passing tissues around. The air was different. A reflective melancholy reverberated through the theatre. It wasn't until after the rehearsal that I heard Duncan, Narelle and tech team were also crying and deeply moved. It was a profound experience that I can't quite express with words. It demonstrated how impactful music was, I truly believe the emotional reaction came as a response to the way the music connected with the story and evoked what dialogue could not. I hope this happens again tomorrow night!
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Show day was met with endless checklists and more challenges requiring quick problem-solving. I was producing, music directing and managing the research component. Despite having a reassuring encounter the day prior, the stress of premiering the musical intensified, and things started to go wrong. We were in our final rehearsal, and Lizzy was being wheeled out on the bed when suddenly, the wheel gave way, and the bed broke. This was three hours before doors opened. I could feel the anxiety mounting; not only was this an integral piece of the set, but it was also the scene that was deeply emotionally impacting and integral to the show. Duncan tried to fix it but failed. The theatre's support team tried to fix it but failed. It was looking increasingly likely that we



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would not have a bed for the show. I remember viscerally feeling ill. Fortunately, my partner, whose name happens to be Jeremy, arrived off the plane and came straight to the theatre to ‘doctor’ the bed. With 45 minutes to go, the bed was fixed. This experience also indicated the frame of medical professionals who shepherd those with dementia through their last stage of life; despite good intentions, preparation, and training, things go wrong; unexpected heroes emerge; and expectations often have to change. I briefly wrote my thoughts throughout the day in the following field note (see Figure 5.12).

Figure 5.12

Field Note: 07.09.22 – Show day

23.02.22 Post Fringe ope... 11:18 am What a whirl wind of 0.8.09.22 Post show feels 11:18 am WOW - what a jour... 07.09.22 – Show Day 11:18 am Good rehearsal this... 06.09.22 – An Emotional... 11:18 am Day 2 of bump-in/t... 28.02.22 – The lady with... 11:18 am Post 3rd show 22.02.22 – Fringe Openin... 11:18 am The Jade is super q... 09.10.21 Is this document... 11:17 am I've had some anxiety 27.09.2 Piecing what we h... 11:17 am We have a list of so... 12.09.21 David on piano 11:17 am I just received the 30.08.21 Composing My L... 11:17 am I want this song to f... 23.08.21 Composing ABCD 11:17 am I has a vision for thi...	07.09.22 – Show Day - Good rehearsal this morning - Everyone is positive - Tech seems sorted - Show still feels a little under rehearsed - still tweaking blocking/some line & lyrics lost FML - the bed broke. THE BED BROKE!! - Wheel came out - Not fixable without new wheels - PANIC/STRESS - We are hours out from opening - DISASTER Tried to fix it - FAILED - it happened again. It's not stable. JEREMY arrived he's onto fixing the bed - He got new wheels and glue HE'S FIXED IT but need to wait for it to dry. OH MY GOD thank goodness he was here. The show can go on. I still need to put program flyers on chairs. - My cortisol level is high/anxiety flying Need to deliver for HammondCare and the show is being filmed for my DMA I also need audience member to complete the post show survey. Sydney crowd is harder to please - I'm nervous. Will it be received as positively as Fringe? Will they resonate? More health care worker here - will they like it/think its an accurate retelling? Show starts in 10.
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Figure 5.13

Image of Erin on the stage just before the auditorium opened



The clock hit 7:30pm and the auditorium was full. The lights went down, and the first music cue started. At that point, I sat amongst the band, knowing we had done all we could, and it was time for the work to shine (see Appendix F for the show program). As the show came to a close, Lizzy gathered her box of memories and walked into the light, creating a lasting silhouette image as the violin sustained a single note. The audience applauded with a standing ovation. There was a buzz coming from the audience members after the show, and the entire team was incredibly proud of the achievement. *A Box of Memories* had successfully premiered in Sydney. The personal element of this work of documentary music theatre weighed heavily on Duncan, myself, and the entire creative team. There was added pressure, knowing that this story represented a truth. We had a responsibility to do that with respect and diligence. I was relieved and deeply proud.



Figure 5.14

Image from the Sydney performance - Lizzy at home



Figure 5.15

Image from the Sydney performance - Jeremy in the office





Figure 5.16

Image from the Sydney performance - Lizzy and Sonia at home



Figure 5.17

Image from the Sydney performance – Diagnosis





Figure 5.18

Field Note: 08.07.22 - Post-show thoughts

08.07.22 Postshow thoug... 10:05 am IT'S DONE!	08.07.22 Postshow thoughts IT'S DONE! The relief is overwhelming! Both for the show's success but also that the creative work of my DMA is completed. Whilst there are always little hiccups and small mistakes, it couldn't have gone better. I'm so proud of the team who pulled this off in a little time frame and a small budget. I'm proud of Dad and I and feel extremely honoured to have shared this experience with him. I think I'm still processing and running off adrenaline as I don't really know what to write. It's really an honour to have been a part of a story that's so important, and I'm glad that I'm a creative who can express myself through the arts. I know the show isn't finished and that more audiences need to see the work, but for now, I'm going to relish the moment.
07.09.22 – Show Day 10:05 am Good rehearsal this...	
06.09.22 – An Emotional... 10:05 am Day 2 of bump-in/t...	
22.05.22 Dramaturgy 10:04 am We just completed...	Tomorrow, Dad and I are presenting at the HammondCare conference, we are discussing the show and using creative mediums for health awareness. After that, I can relax and reflect more.
09.09.22 Reflections on th... 10:05 am We presented at th...	

5.4 Summary

Act Two has provided an artistic autoethnographic account of the multimodal process of writing and mounting *A Box of Memories*. It has explored how documentary theatre practices have been embedded in the musical's narrative, score and subsequent professional performance. To conclude Act Two, the following link presents the filmed performance of *A Box of Memories* at the Seymour Centre on the 7th of September 2022 (see Appendix H for production and creative credits). The performance is the culmination of my artistic autoethnography and artistic practice, functioning as the major output of my doctoral study. This specific performance provided the opportunity for the post-show survey to assess the audience members transformative experience, which will be discussed in the following chapters. At this point the reader is asked to click the link below and watch *A Box of Memories* before commencing the third Act.

Click [HERE](#) for the link or access the video via the media pdf.



Figure 5.19

Image from the Sydney performance – Final scene



ACT THREE

The Denouement

Audience evaluation & finale





CHAPTER 6

POST-SHOW SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Act Two presented a detailed artistic autoethnographic account of the creative process, and the reader was invited to view a recorded performance of *A Box of Memories*. This chapter opens Act Three and introduces the final methodology used within this artistic research study. It describes the research-based method utilised to develop an online post-show, perceptual survey, which sought to evaluate the transformative impact on audience members after viewing *A Box of Memories*.

The intention of writing a documentary musical was to create a work of theatre that authentically represented the real-life experience of dementia, to centre the person with dementia, to enhance the audience's emotional resonance and to provide a transformative experience. Specifically, this study aimed to test if documentary music theatre could increase dementia awareness, challenge negative stigmatisation, evoke empathy and subsequently transform attitudes and behaviours towards dementia in all stakeholders, from medical professionals to family members, carers, and people with dementia. To do this, an online survey design was employed to explore audience perspectives and impact after viewing *A Box of Memories*.



6.1 Appraising Documentary Music Theatre

Chapters 4 and 5 outlined the way in which documentary theatre practices have been implemented in the creation of *A Box of Memories*. Systematic appraisal of the literature and praxis is important to support ongoing utility of documentary music theatre. There is minimal guidance on evaluating documentary theatre, with no reported studies examining this within the music theatre literature. Both prospective and retrospective analyses of theatre works have been used to determine if a work effectively incorporates documentary theatre practices (Martin, 2010)¹⁸.

Audience perspective has been considered in documentary theatre evaluations, as the audience is often deemed “judge” (Paget, 2008, p 136). Audience evaluation has primarily been explored in the literature using talkback discussions between audience members and researchers after viewing a documentary theatre work and post-show feedback via an online survey (Black & Lipscomb, 2017). As I am both the researcher and creator (artist-researcher) of the work, I chose an anonymous post-show survey to reduce possible elements of research bias that might occur if people responded directly to the artist-researcher in a talkback discussion.

Particularly, the survey aimed to gain audience perspective to determine:

1. Does *A Box of Memories* demonstrate elements of documentary theatre practice by being perceived as realistic and authentic by the audience?
2. Does documentary music theatre provide a transformative experience that impacts the audience’s perception, understanding, behaviours and attitudes towards dementia?
3. What capacity does the role of music play in the emotional experience?

¹⁸ This is evidence in the analysis examples detailed in Martin’s (2010) book *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*.



4. Are there identifiable key transformative enablers specifically related to the proposed attributes of documentary music theatre?

6.2 Researched-based Theatre

The post-show survey was informed by research situated within researched-based theatre. Research-based theatre has been used across health, social science, and arts disciplines to inform and evaluate theatrical outputs (Saldana, 2011; Noris, 2000; Wager et al., 2009). Various methodologies and tools have been used within research-based theatre projects to assess audiences' transformative impact with respect to awareness, knowledge, attitudes and/or behaviour change (Belliveau & Nichol, 2017, p. 12; Madsen, 2018, p. 185). Many studies have implemented a mixed methods approach (see Blignault et al., 2010; Cox et al., 2009; Madsen, 2018; Sinding et al., 2006), while others have exclusively used a quantitative or qualitative approach (Jonas-Simpson et al., 2012). Most research-based theatre studies exploring audience impact and transformative experiences have initially conducted a single post-show assessment (Mitchell et al., 2006; Rustveld et al., 2013). Follow-up assessments have also been engaged for long-term evaluations (Kontos et al., 2012). Data collection methods in previous projects include an online or written survey (Bunding et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2016; Tuokko et al., 2013), in-person focus groups (Belliveau & Nichols, 2017), phone interviews (Blignault et al., 2010), direct observation (Madsen, 2018; Kontos et al., 2012), and post-performance talkback (Madsen, 2018).

6.3 Survey Design

This study employed an online anonymous survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The survey design was guided by Belliveau and Nichols's (2015, 2017) research-based theatre study 'Contact!Unload'. Their study explored the linkage between arts and



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health research, focusing on Canadian veteran experiences and the implications on mental health. The project involved the co-development of a play informed by the lived experience of veterans and community members who returned home after combatting war. The research utilised a post-show assessment, including a survey and follow-up focus groups. The study intended to evaluate the audience's transformative impact, questioning (a) if viewing the play captured real experience, (b) challenged preconceived stigmatisation, (c) changed attitudinal views, and (d) created increased awareness of the veteran experience (Belliveau & Nichols, 2017).

The survey collected general demographic questions and used a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). A Likert scale is used to measure a person's opinions, attitudes, and perceptions. The questions were devised in collaboration with their broader research team and were based on previous research-based theatre surveys. For example, questions included: "I think the play accurately showed the struggles of veterans returning home from conflict overseas" and "The play made me better understand the need for programs to support the healing of veterans." Supporting the results collected in the post-show survey, focus groups were undertaken after the show. Five guiding questions were used during these sessions to deepen the survey responses by exploring the visceral and artistic understanding of audience members. A pilot study using the survey and focus groups was conducted in 2015, and the survey was amended for a second investigation in 2017, incorporating open-ended questions in the survey to expand participants' responses.

Drawing upon the post-show survey designed by Belliveau and Nichol (2015 & 2017), I designed a survey, utilising similar qualitative and quantitative questions to assess the transformative experience of audience members.



6.4 Survey Development

This survey utilised multiple-choice, 5-point Likert scale, and open-ended questions to capture the audience's responses to viewing *A Box of Memories* in Sydney (see Appendix C for the survey and participant information statement). This research did not use focus groups; instead, open-ended questions were embedded in the survey to elicit qualitative data. This survey consisted of two parts. Part I included demographic questions. In addition to age and gender, this section also asked participants whether they had encountered personal experiences with dementia and if they were healthcare professionals. This was followed by part II, which consisted of questions directly relating to participant experience and perspectives regarding *A Box of Memories*. Part II opened with three multiple-choice questions:

- Who is the protagonist in this show?
- Who do you relate most to?
- Who do you see as the antagonist in the show?

These questions were intended to understand the audience's perception of characterisation. The following seven questions were presented using a Likert scale with five levels from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Of these seven questions, three had the option for participants to elaborate and explain their responses in an open-ended question.

1. *A Box of Memories* helped me empathise with people living with dementia.
2. *A Box of Memories* showed me a different perspective or view on dementia that I had not previously considered.
3. *A Box of Memories* realistically depicted the experience of living with dementia.



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- 3a.** If you have experience with dementia (for example, a person living with dementia, a family member or a health practitioner), can you please comment on why you selected your answer?
4. Were you emotionally affected by this show?
- 4a.** If yes, do you think this will change how you relate to those experiencing dementia based on this experience? Could you please explain your answer.
5. Lizzy had a degenerative condition. Her character began to sing and speak less during the course of the show. Did you still see her as central to the drama as this occurred?
- 5a.** Could you please explain your answer.
6. Documentary theatre portrays authentic real-life characters in a theatre context. What is the contribution of the music to your experience of this story?
7. Can music theatre improve social awareness of dementia?

The survey finished with an open-ended question asking for additional feedback or comments on audience experience. Given the personal nature of the topic, open-ended questions were included to gain a deeper understanding of how the work impacted participants. The purpose of these questions was to understand the extent to which the musical had: (a) authentically portrayed a dementia-affected protagonist, (b) increased awareness and or knowledge of dementia, (c) enhanced understanding and empathy towards challenges faced by those impacted by dementia, (d) challenged stigmatised perceptions of dementia, (e) demonstrated the effectiveness of partnering music with portraying real experience, and (e) validated the efficacy of documentary theatre applied to music theatre. These criteria contributed to evaluating the overarching transformative experiences of the audiences.



6.5 Validation and Amendments

Validation of a survey ensures that the questions are appropriate and match the intended outcome (Elangovan, & Sundarevel, 2021, p. 1). For validation, the survey was sent to experts to review, including research academics and dementia practitioners (see Appendix B). Three responses were returned for consideration, and amendments were made in consultation with my supervisor. The first modification reworded the questions to reflect more inclusive language in reference to the participant's experience with dementia. The question, 'do you know someone experiencing dementia?' was amended to 'do you know, or have you known someone who experienced dementia'. The reviewer suggested that the wording did not clearly include participants who may have had experience with someone with dementia who had died. All reviewers noted that the words 'protagonist' and 'antagonist' used in the first set of questions may cause confusion. Lay language or definitions were recommended, and in response, definitions were added in brackets.

Another reviewer noted that audience members may not remember the character's names and it would be helpful to add in brackets which character was associated with each role, i.e. daughter, mother, doctor. Reviewers also advised that an individual may relate to the three responses in the multiple-choice questions and that allowing multiple answers rather than one would be beneficial. The survey was amended to allow more than one answer for these questions, and participants were made aware of this option. Initially, the survey used the phrase 'please explain' in relation to the open-ended responses. It was advised that this could be read as a directive and to consider less direct language. In response, a revision was made, reading, 'could you please explain why you selected your answer?'



6.6 Ethics Approval

Human ethics was approved by The University of Sydney. The approval number is 2022/570. See the appendix (A) for ethics-approved document.

6.7 Performance and Audience Participants

In September 2022, the Sydney production of *A Box of Memories* was performed in conjunction with HammondCare's International Dementia Conference. Both the University of Sydney and HammondCare promoted the musical via their extensive connection to healthcare professionals, people living with dementia and their families. All conference delegates were invited, and the musical was open to the general public. The musical was advertised by the Hammondcare team, which included entertainment magazine listings, national newspapers, radio, social media posts and email invitations to their personal contacts.

While HammondCare's involvement in the work was only to fund the production and they were not involved in the dramaturgy process, the show was viewed by HammondCare's dementia experts prior to the performance and approved for audience viewing. In recognition of the sensitive nature and potentially distressing content, audience members were provided contact details for support services. This content was included in the performance program and the survey. The performance was a one-act show of 70 minutes duration, performed in English.

6.8 Procedure

On admission to the theatre, audience members were provided with a paper-based program flyer with a QR code to an online theatre program (see Appendix E). The theatre program contained an embedded link to the survey. Audience members could also access



the survey via a different QR code on the backside of the program flyer, which took them directly to the survey. The survey QR code was also presented on posters surrounding the theatre foyer. After the performance, the creative team verbally invited the audience members to participate in the post-show survey. In line with ethics requirements, audience members were not requested to participate in the survey via email. This was due to reducing privacy violations in accordance with the Seymour Centre's ticketing management policies, who do not share the personal information of ticket buyers. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and was available for up to four weeks post-show and could be completed at the participant's convenience.

The survey commenced with a Participant Information Statement outlining the research, followed by a question requesting consent. Before the main survey questions, a statement highlighted the potential for distress and advised that if a participant found the content triggering, they could skip the question or terminate the survey. Support helplines, including Dementia Helpline and Lifeline, were embedded in the survey. On completion of the survey questions, the participants were redirected to a new page where they could indicate if they would like to receive a summary of the findings by leaving an email contact. This ensured that the email was not collated with the responses to ensure anonymity.

6.9 Data Analysis

The survey was developed using Qualtrics. Multiple-choice and Likert scale data were presented as descriptive statistical analyses. Thematic analysis (TA) was conducted to analyse the open-ended responses as it provided a means for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clark, 2017, p. 297). The six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used and include (1) data familiarisation, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing



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themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) report writing. This multiple-step analysis allows for rigorous and high-quality data analysis. According to Braun and Clark (2006), the researcher must demonstrate a comprehensive familiarity with the data in order to generate codes. Codes are the small units of analysis that emphasise notable data features. Coding is an essential component in discovering patterns of meaning and subsequently identifying larger themes. As a result, codes are categorised under a shared core idea and function as a unified theme. Themes provide a framework for organizing and reporting the researcher's analytic observations. TA does not function as a summary of findings, instead, it identifies and interprets significant data features. TA offers theoretical and functional flexibility and can be applied to various research questions, sample sizes, data collection and meaning-making methods. Using TA to identify patterns within data relating to participants' live experiences, views, perspectives, and behaviour is of particular interest (Braun & Clark, 2017). All open-text responses were extracted and analysed as a whole. Two independent reviewers validated the initial codes. These reviewers subsequently verified themes and sub-themes against raw data to ensure the participants' responses were authentic. The themes and subthemes are reported in the following chapter.



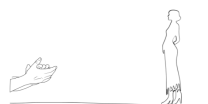
CHAPTER 7

SURVEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The previous chapter established the methodological framework from which the survey was designed and distributed. This chapter will report the findings from the online post-show audience survey. The findings provide a public evaluation, valuable insight, and discussion on documentary music theatre praxis. This survey collected audience demographics and perceptions of the narrative through the Likert scale and open-ended questions to elicit audience profiles prior dementia experience and perceptual responses to the production. Data were collected using Qualtrics and held securely as per University of Sydney ethics guidelines (#2022/570). Descriptive statistics provide a summary of demographic, multiple choice, and Likert scale responses. This will be followed by a thematic analysis of open-text responses, from which four major themes were identified. A concurrent discussion is included in this chapter to explore the implications of the findings.

7.1 Demographic Data

The survey was completed by 109 audience members. Most participants were aged between 50 and 64, and the majority (80%) were female (see Table 7.1). Further, the



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audience was closely divided between healthcare workers (43%) and non-healthcare workers (56%) as this production occurred during Dementia Week and was publicised through healthcare as well as traditional and social media channels. Of the 109 participants, 88.5% knew or had known someone with dementia (see Table 7.1.)

Table 7.1

General demographic data

General demographic data ^a							
Age <i>n=105 (%)</i>		Gender <i>n=104 (%)</i>		Health-care worker <i>n=104 (%)</i>		Dementia-connection <i>n=105 (%)</i>	
18-24	8 (7.62%)	Female	84 (80.77%)	Yes	45 (43.27%)	Yes	93 (88.57%)
25-34	18 (17.14%)	Male	20 (19.23%)	No	59 (56.73%)	No	9 (8.57%)
35-49	17 (16.19%)	Non-binary	0 (0%)			Unsure	3 (2.86%)
50-64	45 (42.86%)	N/A	0 (0%)				
65+	17 (16.19%)						

^a Proportions are based on the total number of responses, which varied between questions.

The participants had the option to indicate if they knew or had known someone with dementia and to comment on their relationship with that person. Of the 93 participants who knew or had known someone with dementia, 87 participants provided comments on the relationship. Some participants indicated they knew more than one person with dementia. From these responses, it was evident that, in total, participants knew at least 106 people affected by dementia. The most prominent relationship was with the participants mother (22.6%), followed by grandmother (20.8%). Interestingly, 61.3% were described as female, 23.6% unspecified and 15.1% male (see Table 7.2). This is unsurprising as Australian statistics indicate dementia affects females more than males (AIHW, 2022)



Table 7.2

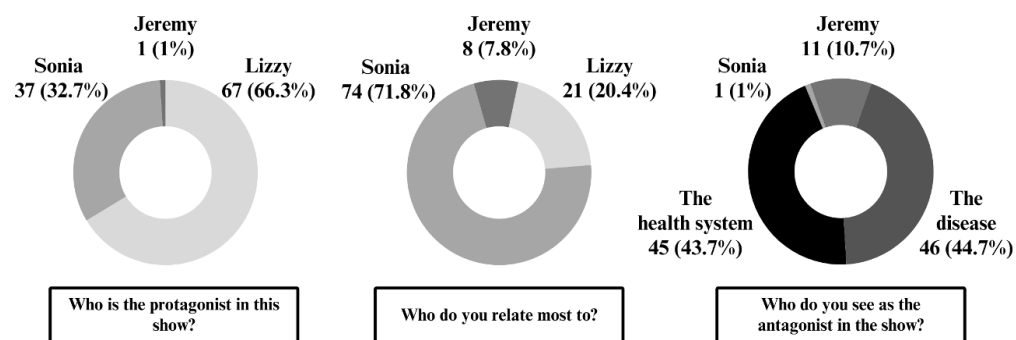
Dementia-connected data

Dementia-connected data					
Female <i>n</i> =106(%)	65 (61.3%)	Male <i>n</i> =106(%)	16 (15.1%)	Unspecified <i>n</i> =106(%)	25 (23.6%)
Mother:	24 (22.6%)	Father:	6 (5.7%)	Friend:	10 (9.5%)
Mother-in-law:	11 (10.4%)	Father-in-law:	5 (4.7%)	Grandparent:	7 (6.6%)
Grandmother:	22 (20.8%)	Grandfather:	4 (3.8%)	Patient:	8 (7.5%)
Wife:	1 (0.9%)	Uncle	1 (0.9%)		
Auntie:	6 (5.7%)				
Sister:	1 (0.9%)				

In reviewing the multiple-choice results (see Figure 7.1), 66.3% of the audience perceived Lizzy as the central protagonist, 32.7% thought the protagonist was Sonia, and only one percent (0.99%) Jeremy. In contrast, the majority of the audience reported relating the most to the experience of Sonia (71.8%), followed by Lizzy (20.4%) and then Jeremy (7.8%). Audiences indicated the perceived antagonist was shared between the disease 44.7% and the health system 43.7%. Interestingly, a limited number of participants also indicated that Jeremy (10.7%) and Sonia (1%) could also be perceived as the antagonists.

Figure 7.1

Multiple choice questions





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Furthermore, Figure 7.1 shows a clear audience preference for the concept of Lizzy as the protagonist. This is noteworthy, as centring the person with dementia in theatre is rare, especially given that Lizzy's voice gradually declined throughout the show. This suggests that our intention to keep Lizzy central to the narrative, even as she was losing the ability to speak, was effective for the audience.

Seven Likert scale questions explored a range of audience perceptions regarding the musical. The data is collated in Table 7.3. Most participants (76.5%) strongly agreed that the musical enabled them to empathise with people living with dementia. Only one person strongly disagreed with this statement. Notably, 61% either strongly or somewhat agreed that *A Box of Memories* offered perspectives on dementia they had not considered. Only 18% did not gain an alternative perspective.

Similarly, 92% agreed that the musical realistically depicted the experience of living with dementia. Only three people said they were not emotionally affected by the show, contrasted to the 87% who were. Whilst Lizzy had a degenerative condition and her character began to sing and speak less in the show, 79% still saw Lizzy as central to the drama, whereas 13% were unsure, and 8% disagreed. Only 5.2% felt the music did not contribute to the story, whilst 85.5% agreed the music did aid the story. Lastly, all participants agreed that music theatre can improve social awareness of dementia. Specifically, 72.9% strongly agreed with this notion, 17.7% somewhat agreed, and 9.4% were unsure. This is a strong positive finding for the community impact of documentary music theatre in relation to dementia.



Table 7.3

Summary of Likert Scale results from the post-show survey

Summary of Likert scale results from the post-performance survey						
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Strongly Disagree n=(%)	Somewhat Disagree n=(%)	Unsure n=(%)	Somewhat agree n=(%)	Strongly agree n=(%)	Sample size response
<i>A Box of Memories</i> helped me empathise with people living with dementia	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	6 (6%)	17 (16.5%)	77 (76.5%)	101
<i>A Box of Memories</i> showed me a different perspective or view on dementia that I had not previously considered	8 (8%)	10 (10%)	21 (21%)	38 (38%)	23 (23%)	100
<i>A Box of Memories</i> realistically depicted the experience of living with dementia.	0 (0%)	3 (3%)	5 (5%)	33 (33%)	59 (59%)	100
Were you emotionally affected by this show?	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	10 (10%)	29 (29.4%)	57 (57.6%)	99
Lizzy had a degenerative condition. Her character began to sing and speak less during the show. Did you still see her as central to the drama as this occurred?	2 (2%)	6 (6%)	13 (13%)	25 (25.4%)	53 (53.6%)	99
Documentary theatre portrayals authentic real-life characters in a theatre context. What is the contribution of the music to your experience of this story?	3 (3.1%)	2 (2.1%)	9 (9.3%)	26 (26.8%)	57 (58.7%)	97
Can music theatre improve social awareness of dementia?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (9.4%)	17 (17.7%)	70 (72.9%)	96



7.2 Thematic Analysis

Viewing *A Box of Memories* prompted audience participants to describe personal accounts and opinions on dementia. There were copious open-text responses providing ample data for thematic analysis, and offering a deeper understanding of the way in which the musical emotionally and behaviourally impacted the audience. It is noteworthy that despite dementia being a difficult topic, there was an apparent willingness to discuss these clinical and personal impacts within the survey. This is demonstrated by the large number of audience participants who responded to the optional open-ended questions (74%).

This was a particularly interesting finding, as the survey was designed to gather data via close-ended questions with optional open-ended questions for participants to expand their responses. Generally, participants are less likely to respond to open-ended questions in a survey because these questions require increased time, cognitive measures, or processing from the respondent (Zhou, 2017, p. 1274). However, participants are more likely to respond if they are actively engaged and interested in the topic (Zuelli et al., 2015). Similarly, prior personal experience or topics evoking an emotional reaction are also considered important factors for generating active survey responses (Zhou, 2017, p. 1275; see also Behr et al. 2012; Holland and Christian 2009;). Notably, in this survey, some of the most meaningful findings came from the optional open-text responses. Audience participants actively chose to discuss and contribute their experiences and opinions despite this not being a requirement for survey completion. For instance, question six of the survey attracted 99 closed-ended responses. Of these, 78 (78.7%) audience participants also answered the optional open-text responses. This is a significant finding, indicating that most of the audience participants actively wanted to provide supplementary personal information regarding their experience.



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Chapter 1 highlighted how many Australians felt uncomfortable and intimidated discussing dementia and that developing innovative ways to instigate open discussion was of particular importance (Dementia Australia, 2017). Participants being overtly responsive in the survey suggests that the musical may have been a catalyst generating further discussion and greater awareness of the issue. It also indicates that despite dementia being a difficult and taboo topic, there was a collective desire to express and exchange perspectives following the performance.

Through thematic analysis of the open-text response, four major themes and related sub-themes were identified in relation to the research topic: (1) Discussing dementia: Devastating, distressing & difficult; (2) Lizzy's Story: Playing dementia on stage; (3) The musical resonated personally and musically; and (4) *A Box of Memories*: More than a musical.

Theme 1 | Discussing dementia: Devastating, distressing & difficult

The theme 'Discussing dementia: devastating, distressing and difficult' describes participant responses in dealing with dementia and highlights the widespread experience and exposure to this illness across the audience. Participants described dementia as "complex", "distressing", "a devastating diagnosis", and "a difficult topic". These responses affirm the challenging and, at times, devastating impact of dementia in society. In keeping with the aim of documentary music theatre to engage with a social issue, this musical provided a forum to challenge perspectives and ideas on the impacts of dementia.

This theme has been divided into four sub-themes, which highlight an openness to converse on dementia and the related impacts of the illness. The first sub-theme, 'Dealing with dementia among family and friends,' refers to the experiences of audience



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participants impacted personally by dementia. The second sub-theme, ‘Dealing with dementia within the healthcare system - users’, captures the challenges audience participants had experienced within systems of care as users. The third theme, ‘Dealing with dementia within the healthcare system - practitioners’ highlights the perspectives of audience participants who have navigated the health system as a practitioner. The fourth sub-theme, ‘Beyond dementia’, highlights how witnessing the challenges of dementia led audience participants to reflect more broadly on ageing.

Dealing with dementia among family and friends

Many audience participants reported having encountered dementia intergenerationally within families and amongst friends. This was experienced as “tough”, “awful”, “frightening”, “confronting” and “emotionally overwhelming”. Dementia is a “complex illness”, and participants openly shared their personal struggles:

My mother had vascular dementia and has now passed. It is a horrible disease.

It is horrible to be the carer - watching someone who was so intelligent, fun, and loving deteriorate to the point they no longer know you or what is happening in their life.

Similarly, other participants described dementia as “degeneration”, “a slow demise”, “shutting down”, “fading away” and “progressively robbing”. Many noted that the complicated bereavement process began with diagnosis, and one participant explained, “often those closest, take a while to understand and come to terms with the changes in their loved one, the loss of what was, what had been hoped for, the reformed relationship, financial and emotional strain”.

Participants articulated that managing dementia was “hard on everyone”, emphasising that “the demands on family members supporting a person with dementia are huge”. This



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is an interesting point, as commonly, primary concerns relate to people with dementia rather than the family. Audience participants expressed facing “burnout” as a family carer. In particular, one participant highlighted in relation to their father that “not only did they grieve him, but all those years the [family] struggled to support and care for him while raising their own children”.

The notion that living with dementia is an emotionally difficult experience, an experience shared by the person, their family, and their carers was evident across audience participants' responses. Viewing a depiction of dementia through *A Box of Memories* appeared to provide a space to share personal experiences and respond intellectually and emotionally to the content.

Dealing with dementia within the healthcare system – users

Audience participants with a relative living with dementia in the care system described their experience as “not easy”. They expressed concern over the quality and safety of the aged care and healthcare systems. Participants experienced “distress” and “guilt” when moving a family member into residential aged care. One audience participant wrote, “the decision about moving into care is a particularly difficult one for all involved”. This suggests that audience participants were cognisant of the systemic problems associated with dementia care (as described in *The Oakden Report*) and demonstrated a reluctance to rely on this system.

Similarly, many audience participants identified “dehumanisation” within care systems, emphasising that people with dementia are “not being recognised as individuals by professionals in healthcare”. One participant observed that people with dementia “can be treated as children as if they never led a responsible life”. Others referred to professional care providers as “off-putting”, “dismissive”, “distracted” and “frustrating”. This approach to care left families and people with dementia feeling “useless” and



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“unimportant”. This commentary parallels the content of *The Oakden Report*, supporting the notion that dementia is a highly stigmatised illness whilst also affirming instances of problematic practice within the system. These were key issues the writers intended to capture in the musical's narrative. It appears that after viewing the musical, audience participants felt comfortable expressing concerns regarding dementia care.

Numerous participants referred to the valued concept of “patient-centred care” but felt that it was lacking in aged care systems. One audience participant wrote, “Patient-centred care is so important - particularly with degenerative diseases - and by being a brain-related and predominantly older person’s disease, it tends to be one that is not respected or given enough focus.” This comment also highlighted the intersection of marginalisation experienced by those impacted by dementia. It suggests an awareness of the problematic nature of attitudes towards specific health-related illnesses and age more broadly. It was interesting that audience participants used the survey to voice their concerns about the healthcare system (as users). Perhaps affirming that the musical and survey opportunity provided a welcomed forum to contribute to broader conversations relating to dementia.

Dealing with dementia within the healthcare system – practitioners

As reported in the demographics, many audience participants (43%) worked in health and aged care contexts. These participants provided surprisingly honest responses, with valuable insights into the experience of working in a demanding system. Some described the constant inflow of patients with dementia into hospital systems as creating pressure that was “frustrating” and “challenging”, resulting in being “overworked”. Many suggested that the medical profession is “stretched” and “overloaded”. One audience participant wrote that “the demand on doctors is ridiculous”. These responses suggest



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acknowledgement of that challenges beyond the practitioner, healthcare policy and culture.

Participants also revealed a philosophical conflict, balancing system pressures with quality care. Many acknowledged struggling to maintain “people moving through the system and being able to provide good care and support.” One audience participant summarised the tension placed on healthcare workers, explaining that “taking care of multiple residents in a facility multiplies these frustrations as it is impossible to give each person the attention they deserve.”

Audience participants working in health and aged care acknowledged the personal impact of their work. One reported finding it difficult to witness “the stresses of families as they visited their loved ones”. Another participant acknowledged the strain of the work itself, reporting that it was challenging providing care for “frustrated residents who are confused and not able to communicate clearly.” In keeping with the challenges of providing care within these systems, several audience participants reported becoming “desensitised” to people with dementia despite “advocating for excellent dementia care.”

The sub-themes ‘dealing with dementia within the health-care system - users’ and ‘practitioners’ reflected the dual experience of people grappling with dementia as providers and recipients of care. On the one hand, the sub-themes captured the tensions of providing care in systems with “huge demands” on healthcare workers. On the other hand, it reflected the perspectives of families and carers dissatisfied with current standards of care. This cohort strongly suggested that humanised approaches informed by “love and understanding” are needed “more than medicine.” The musical attempted to capture this sentiment by portraying Jeremy and Sonia, who, amidst their own personal challenges, were reminded that compassion and love were key responses in



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managing dementia care. The contents of the musical appear to have been an impetus for generating discussion and reflection on dealing with dementia care. Audience participants generously offered personal insights and potential solutions for overcoming a challenging and complex issue. The level of engagement in the related questions is evidence of the transformative potential of this work.

Beyond dementia

As audience participants reflected on difficult experiences with someone impacted by dementia, they appeared to have been prompted to consider the issues of ageing more broadly. The musical seemed to have provoked thoughts around “existential fears” and “the reality of human mortality.” Similarly, many participants found that watching the relationship between Sonia and Lizzy reminded them of “the importance of spending time focusing on elderly parents (with or without dementia).” One audience participant stated that they were reminded “to catch up with [their] grandmother and discuss ageing with [their] own mother.” Another wrote:

I also took it beyond dementia, though and looked at the frustrations I have with my mother and father at times as they are getting older and made me realise that they may be going through things I just don't understand, and I need to be sympathetic and help them navigate their new normal.

Although the primary focus of the musical was on dementia itself, it also portrayed ageing and mortality, prompting participants to contemplate the broader implications of age. It appears that *A Box of Memories* offered wider emotional resonance and stirred compassion and respect for aging individuals. This is also consistent with aim of the musical which sought to generate transformative experiences that would lead to increased empathy.



Theme 2 | Lizzy's story: Playing dementia on stage

Documentary music theatre's commitment to authenticity necessitates true-to-life portrayals, relying on the audience to validate the authenticity of the characters. Moreover, the genre also endeavours to spotlight marginalised voices; in this case, the writers aimed to keep Lizzy's character at the forefront. This can be challenging because music theatre is imbued with formulaic character types. Theme 2 'Lizzy's Story: Playing dementia on stage' highlights audiences' willingness to accept Lizzy as a realistic central protagonist. The first sub-theme, 'The role of realism', describes how audience participants found the portrayal of Lizzy's dementia authentic. The second sub-theme, 'Centralising dementia', explores how the character Lizzy remained central to the dramatic narrative despite becoming less active and vocal on stage as her dementia worsened.

The role of realism

Depicting dementia on stage required careful and intentional creative consideration. The audience recognised this, and a participant noted that "it's certainly a challenge representing [dementia] on stage, but the production handled [this] very well." Lizzy's dementia portrayal was repeatedly considered as "very realistic". The symptoms of dementia depicted in Lizzy's character were recognised by audience participants, with parallels drawn to their own family members. They affirmed that "the genuine fear experienced by people with dementia" was true to life. Participants stated that Lizzy's "disconnectedness", "paranoia", and "confusion" were consistent with their experiences. For instance, one participant commented, "some of the things Lizzy said or did were exactly like my grandma. It was a very accurate portrayal of dementia."

Participants agreed that Lizzy's decrease in physicality, "cognitive decline and loss of social interaction" were appropriate and accurate. Lizzy's "loss of voice" and



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deterioration were recognised as integral to the dramatic arc. This is captured in a response reading, “Lizzy’s decline and descent into relative silence emphasised how dementia unhooks the person from normal life. In the performance, I saw this as central to the development of the drama.”

A Box of Memories delivered “a powerful depiction of the illness’ progression.” Lizzy’s characteristics, personality and episodic dementia experiences were directly drawn from the writer’s lived experiences and professional knowledge. This is important as highlighted by Dementia Australia (2017) there are significant deficiencies in public understanding of the illness’ symptomatic presentation. It is reasonable to suggest that *A Box of Memories* served as an educative tool by portraying accurate symptomatic and true-to-life presentations of dementia to the public.

Centralising dementia

A primary objective for dementia care in Australia includes addressing the stigma associated with dementia. This is because stigma often leads to social isolation and othering of those who are diagnosed (Nguyen & Li., 2020). The writers intended to address this issue by centralising Lizzy within the narrative, as audiences look favourably and are more likely to emotionally bond with protagonists (Rathje, et al., 2021). However, Lizzy, an older woman with dementia, is not a traditional music theatre protagonist. Notably, most audience participants agreed that Lizzy remained central because the “action revolved around her situation”, and she was “vital to Sonia and Jeremy’s storylines.” Some audience participants commented on staging, noticing that Lizzy was “centrally positioned in each scene” and “even when she wasn’t onstage”, her presence was “represented by the box of memories” prop. Sonia and Jeremy may have had more stage time and sang more in the second half of the show, but many



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acknowledged that their actions still “focused on supporting Lizzy” as the “binding factor” between the character relationships. A participant shared their view, writing:

Everything was a result of Lizzy. The spin-off was the collateral effects Lizzy’s dementia was perpetrating upon Sonia and Jeremy’s lives and relationship(s). Lizzy’s increased silence forced them to look in on themselves. I see the dementia as having manifested itself in Lizzy whilst having an effect on Sonia and Jeremy.

This is a fascinating response as it highlights the interplay of all three characters. Lizzy, Sonia, and Jeremy could all be considered protagonists through a music theatre lens because they hold equal dramatic agency, yet Lizzy was considered “the focus” and the “protagonist at large.” Despite most audience participants acknowledging that they identified more personally with Sonia and Jeremy, they recognised “the narrative existed because of Lizzy” and “it was first of all Lizzy’s story.”

The writers and director were concerned with maintaining Lizzy’s agency throughout the illness’s progression. Most audience participants affirmed she “remained central” to the narrative and the relationships around her as her actual voice became smaller. Audience participants observed that Lizzy’s vocal and physical absence “created space for [the] response, reaction and growth” of the surrounding characters. Others commented that “silence speaks loudly” and that “her presence was felt even without her being involved.” In many recounts, it enhanced an emotional connection. For instance, a participant explained:

Although she sang and spoke less, for me, I felt more connected to her as a person with a rich life story as the show progressed. This wasn’t necessarily only portrayed as she sang and spoke and became more pronounced on an emotional level.



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By placing Lizzy at the centre of the narrative, the audience embarked on a journey alongside her as she navigated her dementia progression. Interestingly, audience participants were cognisant of Lizzy's focal status from the start to the end, despite the show not adhering to traditional music theatre character arcs. One audience participant explained that:

Because Lizzy had been at the centre at the beginning, that still propelled her through to the end because the musical had started [by] engaging empathy for her position, when she lost stage agency, you NOTICED. We witnessed her degeneration, rather than coming in just at the end. We FELT the loss as we saw it happen in front of us. The arc of the play mirrored the arc of her loss. Right in front of us.

It appears that *A Box of Memories* fostered a connection between the focal character and the audience, intensifying the emotional investment of those watching. Noticeably, there was no reported stigmatised language directed at Lizzy. Instead, the audience viewed her favourably and empathetically. Although Lizzy's narrative reflected the losses associated with dementia, it purposely depicted her as “a person who had lived a full life.” This underscores the capacity of documentary music theatre to elevate certain protagonists and provide a platform to re-voice groups of people who might otherwise be perceived through a stigmatised lens.

Theme 3 | The musical resonated personally and musically

The third theme, ‘The musical resonated personally and musically’ encapsulates the noticeable impact the performance had on the audience, marked by a palpable sense of resonance. Resonance is an established term associated with transformative theatrical experiences (Wimsley, 2012, p.78) and is particularly applicable in a musical sense.



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Interestingly, the audience expressed identification with the narrative presented on stage. This suggests that the character depictions on stage were presented realistically, contributing to the musical's relatability. Further, audience participants found that music enhanced how they emotionally resonated with their own experiences. The first sub-theme, 'Individual personal resonance' describes how audience participants found personal connections when witnessing a portrayal of dementia on stage. The second sub-theme, 'The music resonated' explores how the implementation of song enhanced the audience's ability to connect with the characters onstage, augmenting their emotional experience. Thus, resonance (both musical and character) is key to a transformative experience.

Individual personal resonance

In any performance, audiences are tasked with finding relatable elements within the on-stage narrative. This musical particularly prompted audience participants to reflect on how dementia impacted their lives through their family or work. Audience participants used terms such as "it brought back memories", "I recall," and "this resonated". Personal identification was indicated with references including "my mother", "my grandparent", "my wife", or "husband", "my father-in-law", "my friend", and "my story". Many shared that the show "mirrored their experiences" and was a "very true", "accurate", "realistic", and "relatable" depiction of people dealing with dementia in their family. Audience participants noticed similarities between themselves and the characters on stage, and many placed themselves in the position of Sonia. One participant wrote:

I have observed many interactions (and frustrations!) between my parents and grandparents that were very similar to those between Sonia and Lizzy. The confusion and forgetfulness Lizzy experienced in the earlier parts of the show



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also reminded me of interactions I've had with my grandmother (who has dementia) and stories I've heard from friends who have relatives with dementia.

Sonia's turbulent emotional response to Lizzy's diagnosis resonated, and another participant felt that "the stages of grief, uncertainty, coping mechanisms and humour, for me, played a big part in the realistic depiction."

Similarly, one audience participant asserted that their experience with their mother was almost "the same" as what was depicted on stage, suggesting the validity of the documentary music theatre method. They recalled their "difficulty getting a diagnosis with concerns for [their] mother's safety who was living in her own home." In response to the diagnosis scene, they wrote, "the same questions were asked as in the musical and medical scans were done the same." They continued noting that their mother forgot appointments just like Lizzy, recounting times "discovering expired food in [their] mum's fridge [and] daily tasks inappropriately not done." This participant expressed further uncanny correlation by referencing their mother's "memory box" and describing similar difficulties with hospital admissions and staff "losing her mother's belongings", just as Sonia experienced on stage. Audience participants continued to resonate with Sonia as she coped with "too much to juggle", combating a "system overloaded" whilst "trying to focus on [her] mother", creating a "rollercoaster of emotions" as demonstrated through Sonia's narrative. Many found relief in knowing that others struggled with the "challenges" and "frustrations" of responding to dementia and that "I was not alone in my experience."

Although most participants related to the depiction of Sonia, as evidenced in the descriptive statistics, numerous open-ended responses indicated identification with Jeremy as a health practitioner. Healthcare workers' responses seemed to mirror the narrative arc of Jeremy, agreeing that it can be difficult to maintain compassion in an



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“overworked system”, but they were “remind[ed] to always interact with compassion and understanding.”

The writers intended to highlight the problematic culture fostered in the healthcare systems, and this depiction resonated with audience participants. One participant wrote, “I found the medical intervention difficult and related them to how most of us who are working in the health system struggle.”

Many appreciated the show capturing the demanding system as it demonstrated that “the system impacts everyone within it”, including the healthcare workers. In the musical, Jeremy sings ‘What if this were me’ where he considers experiencing the impacts of dementia within his family and accordingly reflects on his approach to dementia care as a professional. This awakening was shared by a participant who wrote, “as a healthcare professional who can sometimes find myself desensitised to conditions such as dementia this ... made me think of my own mother and reflect on my treatment of people with dementia.” This is a positive finding, as the writers had intended to influence healthcare workers through Jeremy’s depiction. It appears the personal identification and resonance with Jeremy prompted healthcare practitioners to consider ways to practise compassionate, person-centred care intentionally.

Another notable finding was numerous participants identified with more than one character:

I could relate to each in turn - family members looking after the dementia victim; the victim themselves (particularly at my age of almost 70); and a medical career trying to do his best in a system that seems to be getting overwhelmed.

Audiences' self-identification in more than one character is evidence that dealing with dementia is complex and the experience of individuals can't be fully captured through



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one perspective. The progression of dementia is also different for every individual. Audience responses acknowledged that dementia may present with a wide variety of symptoms and issues and that the narrative depicted in the show was one version of the experience. An audience participant reflected:

There are many variations of experiences living with dementia, and this was one realistic depiction. For my father-in-law, there was a lot more anger and physical aggression, which we only saw once and mildly with Lizzy. For my Nanna there was a complete shutdown, emotionally and physically. For my grandma there is denial, confusion, worry, repetitive thought- this is the version closest to that depicted.

Whilst dementia manifests in various ways and no experience is the same, it appears that *A Box of Memories* managed to capture a real and relatable depiction of the experience of dealing dementia. The responses also indicate that the musical's ability to resonate through a life-like depiction enhanced the work's emotional impact. For instance, one participant noted, “it was very emotional watching [*A Box of Memories*] because it was very real”. Audience participants described a physical-emotional reaction exclaiming they “cried the whole way through the show” because they were currently “living the experience as a carer”. While the audience always compare their own circumstances to those reflected on the stage, either in opposition or comparison, in this case, the audience's literal experiences are reflected in the action onstage, confirming the legitimacy of the documentary elements embedded in the work.

The music resonated

Audience participants commented extensively on the impact of music on their experience. Music's effects were discussed in various contexts, referring to audiences' aural, dramatic, and emotional resonance. Audience participants described the quality of



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the music with adjectives including “brilliant”, “beautiful”, “profound”, “outstanding”, “clever” and “touching”. Other comments observed that “music made the topic more palatable” and “conveying the message through the medium of music was really effective.” Audience participants felt the power of connecting music and emotional resonance to disseminate a positive message about dementia. One participant wrote that “the joy of the music indicated there is hope even in such tragic circumstances.” They continued to explain that “the vehicle of a musical works to spread these ideas gently and to de-stigmatise the disease.”

In this study, music is shown to have affective qualities. Many commented on how music enhanced emotional engagement and drew a connection between the music and an “intense” and unexpected reaction. For instance, a participant expressed that “without the music, I believe I’d have had a very different (and not so emotional) reaction to the show - I doubt I would’ve cried (I’m not really an emotional person) which I did for the whole time.” This also highlights how music broadened emotional reception, allowing the audience members to encounter experiences they may not usually have.

Further, audience participants understood that music “dramatised the dynamics of the story”, and “was critical to how the story was told.” Others commented on the “storytelling of the songs”, reflecting on the combination of music and lyrics, which affected “deep insight and empathy.” As noted earlier, songs are often considered more memorable than spoken word because songs involve the repetition of musical motifs and lyrics (Chaturvedi, et al., 2022; Juslin, 2019). This is evidenced in the responses, where participants recalled specific musical motifs and lyrics. One audience participant recited Lizzy’s lyrics, ‘I don’t want to ask because I do not want to know,’ stating they reflected on this line after the show as a “very powerful tool for understanding Lizzy’s perspective.” Interestingly, audiences requested a cast recording to relisten and



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experience the show again. This suggests that music could be further used as a listening tool post-show to reinforce the message.

Music appeared to contribute to changing the audience's perspective. One audience participant suggested this is because the music conveyed deeper emotional nuances, stating:

The songs also offered insight into Lizzy's point of view and emotional response to her condition, which I am not often privy to in my grandmother - this was one of the ways that *A Box of Memories* showed me a perspective of dementia I had not considered (or been able to consider) before and helped me to empathise with those living with dementia.

The responses credit music as the primary elicitor, prompting an expansion of perception whilst also insinuating that it was a perspective shift only reachable through the effect of music. In addition, narrative and character arcs were considered more influential because of the use of music. One audience participant asserted:

Music is such a powerful medium for communication. I think that the presentation of Lizzy's dilemma and that of her daughter were more powerful for being expressed through music. I also felt that the 'transformation' of the psychiatrist was equally well demonstrated through music.

Interestingly, this also suggests that music resonated beyond the lyrics. Here, the participant reported awareness of music's semiotic value. Similarly, the orchestration was noticed with different instruments increasing impact. Some said the solo violin increased the emotiveness and added symbolic value to Lizzy's depiction. Likewise, many reported synergies between loss of spoken language and how "music is so important to connecting to people with dementia" when words fail. Audience



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participants recognised the competency of music to transcend dialogue, writing, “the most moving musical moment was when Lizzy can no longer speak, but when her daughter takes her hand and starts to sing, she starts to hum, then sing in harmony to her.” In this example, the participant demonstrated an awareness of music’s affective power, as this scene particularly relies on music as a communicator when Lizzy is unable to speak. Music’s ability to “engage with emotions” meant audience members could gauge “what is unseen as well as seen.” The findings reveal that the multifaceted capacity of music was integral to the audience’s emotion and resonance. This supports the writer’s intention to use music beyond entertainment purposes. Akin to this sentiment, a participant applauded *A Box of Memories* as “a perfect example of music creating social impact”.

It is, however, important to highlight that as an intimate live musical, some audience participants raised concerns regarding sound quality. Some stated that lyrics could not be clearly heard against the band’s volume. Another noted that the microphone quality of the performers caused the “phs to ring out”, resulting in difficulty hearing the dialogue and the melody. Consistent with the challenges of live theatre, particularly in the context of a limited budget and time in the theatre, these responses reflected the realities of working in a live environment. This also highlighted how aural components can have negative and positive implications. The findings reveal that when music is balanced and used effectively, it can add to the affective experiential value of a production.

Theme 4 | *A Box of Memories*: More than a musical

The final theme, *A Box of Memories*: More than a musical,’ captures the broader impact of the work and explores how music theatre may be used as a transformative medium promoting attitudinal and social change. Many audience participants indicated that viewing *A Box of Memories* delivered an experience beyond expectation, changing their



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perspective on dementia, increasing empathy, and offering new insights into the impact dementia has on the person and those around them. Participants reported that seeing dementia on stage made it “easier to understand and relate to.” One audience participant pointed out that watching the story unfold as a live drama was “very different from reading about dementia.” The first sub-theme, ‘The musical effect: A surprisingly good night at the theatre’ captures audiences' surprised yet positive response to a musical portraying dementia. The second sub-theme, ‘The personally transformative experience’ presents how the musical evoked personal change. The third sub-theme, ‘The communal transformation’ explores how audience participants viewed the musical as a way of creating long-term change in people and systems.

The musical effect: A surprisingly good night at the theatre

The findings indicate that music theatre was an effective theatrical medium to convey the unconventional storyline of dementia, but one of the most interesting findings related to audience satisfaction. Adjectives used to describe the show included “excellent”, “wonderful”, “fantastic” and “absolutely incredible.” Others remarked that they “loved it” and were “incredibly moved”. Audience participants were surprised to discover that a musical about dementia was “entertaining” and “enjoyable”. One participant reported that they “had no expectations but were blown away.” Another said that they “didn’t realise the show was a musical” but were “pleasantly surprised”. This view continued:

I wouldn’t have thought this subject would make great theatre, but it certainly did. If I had any idea how truly excellent it is, I would have tried to get my whole book group to attend. It wasn’t simply a ‘worthy’ subject but remarkably well done. The timing, musicality and theatrical experience combined to somehow thrill one with new perceptions.



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Given the nature of the topic, the responses indicate that the audiences were willing to accept the dichotomous relationship of a ‘dementia musical.’ Moreover, they highlighted how it facilitated new perceptions. Portraying dementia through a musical provided opportunities to theatrically depict the fluctuating emotions associated with the illness, balancing the “frustration, confusion, stress, humour” experienced. One participant described experiencing “emotional highs and lows” because the show was “confronting and comforting. Witty and raw.”

By utilising musical theatre attributes - characterisation, narrative arcs, music and song - the “message was clear”, and the show was seen as “a very visceral experience” that was “so impactful.” The resounding imprint spurred audiences to express gratitude for the show, writing, “thank you for creating and staging this show. It was beautiful, funny, musically sophisticated, and deeply moving.” Whilst dementia is a surprising topic for a musical, the audience responses show that documentary music theatre can be efficacious and entertaining.

The personally transformative experience

Audience participants reported that the musical “opened [their] eyes to new perspectives of the disease”, gave them “increased awareness”, and informed them that dementia is “more complex than [they] initially thought.” Participants appreciated having new insight into “what it’s like to live with dementia”, helping them to “see the person, not the diagnosis”, and providing them with a “deeper understanding of the frustrations felt by those diagnosed.” Interestingly, participants who had past experiences with dementia expressed that they “wish [they] had seen ‘*A Box of Memories*’ years ago when we [they] dealing with [their] mother’s dementia”. This is because the musical affected positive change in audiences’ outlook on dementia.



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The phrase “I was moved” was used numerous times. Audience participants felt this effect encouraged “increased empathy [and] sympathy”, “more patience”, “grace” and “greater respect”. It appears the musical engaged the audience to connect to the characters on a personal, humane level. A participant summarised their reflection writing:

Despite my family experience with dementia (as a carer) I don’t think that I have ever empathised as much with the sufferer of dementia, as I did after seeing the musical. The musical really made me SEE the sufferer... probably more than I ever have previously. Previously, I had thought of what had to be done to care and assist, but I have never felt that I have ‘seen’ the ‘person’ as much as I did in the Musical. The fear, the confusion, the loss.... I felt that I saw a totally new perspective, and it was from Lizzie’s point of view.

This supports the transformative power of documentary music theatre, even for those participants who described first-hand knowledge of dementia. The musical contributed to audiences re-humanising the person with dementia. Responses concluded that “the compositions, content, contextualization, the theatre, the music, the performers, the singing” provided an encompassing experience that “moved [audiences] to tears” and had a “profound” emotional impact.

A further finding was that audience participants reported being motivated towards actionable behavioural change. Most participants asserted they would be “more inclusive” and “more present”. Others said they would show more “compassion and kindness” and do more to “serve those in need”. Many were practical, such as “dealing with [their] frustrations by not expressing them to the person” and being “more tolerant and caring”. They reported being reminded to “go slowly” and “cherish the time.” The musical evidently encouraged a shift in perspective as participants disclosed how they



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would manifest change in their own lives. This is further detailed in the following recount:

I have cared for my father-in-law almost daily in recent months, and since viewing the musical I feel that I could have been gentler, more understanding..... in a way seeing things more through his eyes, than through just my own. And that is not to say that I wasn't caring before! It is just I think to see the sufferer more as a person, and see dementia presented through their eyes, does make you think more, and be more patient.

A Box of Memories seemingly enabled the audience to humanise the person with dementia. This revelation triggered audiences to re-evaluate how they were “allowing frustration to override [their] ability to be understanding.” With a fresh perspective, audiences reported their plan to “create a box of memories for mum”, just as Sonia and Lizzy did in the musical. This spurring into action and change can be directly related to the transformative power of the musical:

I hope it will help me to treat anyone experiencing dementia with greater respect. To see the person, not just the person in terms of the disease. To look for the fragments of the person as they were. And to support those living with a close friend or relative with dementia more fully and with less judgement.

Audience participants also reported gaining new perspectives regarding the role of healthcare workers. One participant commented that the “most eye-opening” aspect of the show was the “life behind the geriatrician.” Another suggested they would be “more gracious towards clinicians who are usually doing the best.” Others disclosed that the musical ‘humanised’ the healthcare professional as much as the person with dementia.



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This new understanding of healthcare dynamics showed a commitment from healthcare professionals and healthcare users to better understand each other's needs and aspirations. Healthcare professionals in the audience reported being encouraged to “get to know the patient better” and show “more compassion for family members and [the] person experiencing dementia.” One healthcare professional in the audience felt that from now on, they need “to explain to family members how extremely frightening it is for their loved one and encourage them to focus on comfort and reassurance.”

Some healthcare professional participants described expanding their focus of care to include the family, not just the patient. For instance, a participant shared that “*A Box of Memories* has increased my empathy for the challenges of being a carer who is managing competing responsibilities and dealing with their own grief.” Other practitioners considered that the show was a “positive reminder” that “the patient has a story beyond dementia.” One asserted that they were prompted to “have lots of empathy for patients and their loved ones and to deliver the diagnosis carefully.” Others affirmed that they would “reflect on their skills and approaches.”

Finally, participants with healthcare expertise felt that the show served as a “valuable reminder of the positive impact the right approach can have on a person living with dementia.” The performance re-affirmed to practitioners that their role “can really make a difference in a person's life.”

The communal transformation

The musical “reinforced how important awareness is” and highlighted a need for greater social “understanding and acceptance” regarding dementia. Expressing the story as a musical was regarded by the audience as a “beautiful way to reach people and increase knowledge of dementia.” Participants also shared that the musical “refresh[ed] the need to find a cure” whilst at the same time “interact with compassion” to those impacted.



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Many concluded that the musical could “shift attitudes” and evoke “changes in practice”. One audience participant stated that *A Box of Memories* could “create great social impact”, explaining how they “struck up conversations with the people [on] the way home.” While theatre can have this impact, the impetus for change and activism is particularly noticeable among these responses.

Personal storytelling, through creative arts, was seen as a vital component of the show’s capability to affect this change. A participant wrote, “I am a firm believer in the power of storytelling... specifically music theatre, to effect social change by raising awareness, prompting conversations, and challenging perspectives”. They continued, requesting this work be shared amongst the community as it “is so important.” The participants supported further action, with one participant stating, “all sorts of audiences should see and experience” *A Box of Memories*. More specifically, some considered the show to have specific educational value with the potential to impact healthcare training:

I believe it would be a valuable thing for medical students to watch to see ‘the other side’ to the story and hopefully both make them respect the person with the illness and their family a little more through increasing their understanding/insight.

Another audience participant summarised that it was “a privilege to witness the thought-provoking and even behaviour-changing” musical, with a request to “please keep sharing this important story.” The broader perspective and eagerness for societal change present within the responses went beyond the writer’s intention. This indicates that documentary music theatre may be an appropriate tool for community impact.



7.3 Discussion on the Transformative Enablers in Documentary Music Theatre

The findings from this survey indicate that *A Box of Memories*, as a documentary musical, impacted audience members who experienced various levels of transformative impact. As demonstrated in the findings, emotional engagement through a realistic portrayal, intentionally developed narrative, and music was critical in providing a transformative experience for the audience. This aligns with the existing transformative experience characteristics outlined in Chapter 1 (Pugh, et al., 2020, p. 548). These include *experiential value* by embracing a deeper appreciation for the experience of dementia, *expansion of perception* by witnessing and understanding other perspectives, *motivated behavioural changes* when interacting with someone experiencing dementia, alongside increased empathy for those impacted by dementia. The reported findings contribute to the existing theatre literature on post-show attitudinal and behavioural changes, particularly supporting the limited literature on the transformational impact music theatre can have on audiences.

Furthermore, three transformative enablers specific to documentary music theatre are identified from the findings. Firstly, *authenticity* which refers to the realistic portrayal of dementia. Secondly, *resonance* which captures audience identification with their own and others' lived experience. Thirdly, *music* which fostered emotional engagement beyond spoken text. These three enablers appear interconnected with the characteristics of documentary music theatre and warrant further discussion.

Authenticity as an enabler

A Box of Memories authentically depicted the experience of dementia, capturing the perspective of the person, the family, and the health practitioner. Employing documentary theatre practices facilitated enactment of real events and experiences



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within the narrative and characterisations of the musical. The portrayal of real-life dementia stories and experiences, alongside insights provided by *The Oakden Report*, most likely led audience participants to agree that the musical accurately and authentically depicted the experience of dementia. This aligns with documentary theatre literature, which states that the narrative should “tell authentic, credible, and diverse stories.” (Wilkinson & Anderson, 2007, p. 157). Whilst Martin (2010) notes that “there is no ‘really real’ anywhere in the world of representation” (p. 23), the positive response to *A Box of Memories* suggests that the audience accepted a version of reality. The majority (92%) of audience participants agreed that the musical realistically depicted the experience of dementia, the difficult challenges of managing complex clinical presentations of dementia and managing care within the health system. Audience participants expressed that the musical provided a “powerful depiction of the illness progression”, which was “critical” to them engaging with the narrative. The findings indicated that the degree of accuracy contributed to the audience’s level of emotional engagement. Steve Cosson notes that emotional moments in documentary theatre are “extra profound and extra moving because [audiences] are convinced they are real” (cited in Vieira, 2012, p. 38). Therefore, the implementation of documentary theatre practices in *A Box of Memories* facilitated authenticity, serving as a catalyst for a transformative experience.

Resonance as an enabler

The musical’s authenticity engendered personal resonance within the audience. Numerous responses acknowledged parallels with their own experiences, noting a significant level of personal identification with the work. Audience participants recounted specific memories and described personal experiences activated by watching the musical. The audience’s desire for a cast recording to repeatedly experience known musical themes denotes specific resonance possible from a musical score. According to



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Bogart (2021), “the most successful theatre experiences generate resonance as well as memories”, where audiences emotionally connect with what they are watching (p. 6). Resonance has been identified as a transformative enabler grounded in the cathartic power of dramatic reality (Bogart, 2021, p. 11; White & Hede, 2008). When an audience member resonates with an artistic encounter, they may experience a “profound effect on the body, the neural pathways and consequently one’s action In the world” (Bogart, 2021, p. 6; see also Chesner, 2019). Music’s affective power multiplies this effect. The level of resonance with *A Box of Memories* enabled participants to “connect” and “empathise” with the characters on stage emotionally and personally, “mirroring” audiences’ lived experience, resonating through both text and music, thus increasing the “susceptibility for transformation” (Gizlo, 2020, p. 52).

Furthermore, resonance leads to understanding the experiences of others in a personal way. This resonance:

demands...an effort at feeling-thought; a willingness to engage with another world, life, or idea; an ability to use one’s experience to try to grasp, or convey, meanings that reside neither in words, “facts,” nor text but are evoked in the meeting of one experiencing subject with another. (Wikan, 1992, p.463)

Whilst the majority (74%) of audience participants related to the experience of Soni’s character, most participants indicated that they expanded their perception by observing Jerem’s perspective as the doctor and Lizzy as the person with dementia. For instance, one audience participant reflected that whilst they personally resonated with Sonia, they “saw a totally new perspective, and it was from Lizzy’s point of view.” The participant was able to relate beyond their own self-identification in Sonia and “re-se” other” perspectives in a new way and with new meaning (Pugh, 2020). In this instance, personal resonance and resonance with the ‘other’ were experienced through *A Box of Memories*.



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This aligns with the notion that theatrical resonance should “do nothing less than challenge one’s own identity and assumptions about what it means to be human” (Bogart, 2021, p. 9). Empathy is described as the ability to perceive the emotions of others, “resonate with them emotionally and cognitively, to take in the perspective of others, and to distinguish between one’s own and others’ emotions” (Reiss, 2017, p. 74). It appears that the strong emotional response to the show led to subsequent resonance between the audience and the characters portrayed. The high level of resonance experienced through watching the musical was critical to audience members empathising with the characters on stage, including those characters who have been traditionally ‘othered’ or not seen as protagonists in theatrical representations.

Music as an enabler

Music was a critical element in the transformative experience of the musical because it intensified the emotional response. The survey only included one close-ended question regarding the effect of music on the narrative and character development and did not ask participants to comment on their experience with the music specifically. However, spontaneous commentary on the impact of music was threaded throughout the open-text responses. This is an important finding suggesting that music significantly influenced the audience response. The musical explored complex and challenging themes, yet many audience participants commented on how the music made these topics more “palatable”.

Literature purports that to generate transformative experiences; audience members need to feel “safe” and be “ready-to-receive” (Brown & Novak, 2007, pp.10-11; Gizlo, 2020, p.51). It appears that in *A Box of Memories*, the affective quality of music was crucial to fostering an environment in which audiences were open to learning and change. Listening to music is widely recognised as pleasurable, and studies have shown that this is closely related to intense emotional arousal (Chanda & Levitin, 2013, p. 180). Even



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opposite emotional valences (e.g., ‘happy’ or ‘sad’) can be experienced as pleasurable, and listeners often report that the most moving music evokes two or more emotions at once (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010; Ritossa & Rickard, 2004). *A Box of Memories* elicited numerous emotional responses, evidently intensified through the expressive response to music. Most audience participants (83%) indicated that the music was “crucial” to the story and that many would have had a different and less emotional experience without the musical score. Music appears to have enhanced the audiences’ connection between their own experience and that of the narrative on stage.

Further, the findings revealed that audience participants felt the music dramatized and elevated the story, deepened the character arcs and showed insights that might have not been conveyed through just dialogue. This is because music can infer meaning, deepen stories, “evoke emotion, feelings, time, place and provide all the sense ways that we know truth” (Schaefer, 2017). Neurological studies illustrate that music-evoked emotions can profoundly impact individuals, including beliefs, behaviour, activity, and attitudes (Koelsch, 2010, p 307; Steinbeis & Koelsch, 2008). By using music theatre as the underpinning theatrical form, the show was able to embrace the transformative potential of music and thus have greater opportunity to impact audiences’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. More specifically, studies have shown that the interpretation, connection, and emotional response to music can increase empathy (Greenberg, et al., 2015, p. 80; Eggermann, & McAdams, 2013). This would suggest that the inclusion of music was closely linked with reported findings of increased empathy for all characters. The emotional engagement stimulated through music was, therefore, essential to the audience’s transformative experience.

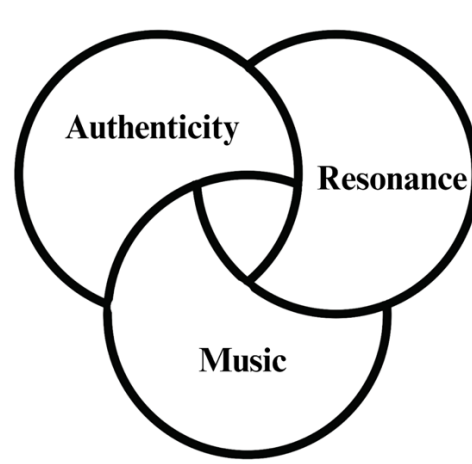


7.4 Summary

In contrast to literature, which argues that the act of ‘breaking out into song’ is unrealistic and purely for entertainment purposes (Johnson, 2021) these findings suggest that documentary music theatre offers an opportunity for transformative impact. Audiences suspended the disbelief associated with breaking out into song because of the emotional and personal resonance evoked by the music. Moreover, despite the characters singing about their experience - which is an unreal or artificial construction of theatre - audiences experienced this as real. This supports the premise that the integration of documentary theatre practices in the development of the musical can express real lived experience with legitimacy and authenticity. There is an evident interplay between these three enablers that contributes to generating powerful transformative experiences. This is shown in Figure 7.2. Although each enabler can independently evoke transformative responses in audiences, their collective influence may offer more effective impact on the audience. Documentary music theatre fosters authenticity, resonance, and music, therefore, enabling increased opportunity for transformative experiences.

Figure 7.2

Documentary music theatre transformative enablers model





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This model demonstrates the interplay of each enabler and how they collectively result in heightened transformative experiences. Whilst these enablers could be identified in other forms of theatre, they appeared in the findings as a direct consequence of documentary music theatre practices. The intentional blending of practices in the creation of *A Box of Memories* resulted in an authentic, emotionally provoking, and transformative musical theatre experience for audiences. Whilst this is the first study to explore the audience impact of a documentary musical, it demonstrates the significant potential of documentary music theatre as a catalyst for audience transformation.



CHAPTER 8

FINALE

Conclusions and New Directions

This artistic research study has demonstrated the proficiency of documentary music theatre as an innovative contribution to the music theatre canon. Through praxis, the study sought to develop a practical framework for future practitioners to employ when developing documentary music theatre works. The three stages of this study demonstrate that this novel and emerging genre can promote transformative experiences for the audience.

Chapter 1 established the rationale behind the research, emphasising the transformative attributes of theatre. It highlighted the significant impact dementia has on the Australian community and the need for alternative ways to generate awareness and overcome stigma. Chapter 2 described artistic research as the overarching approach that underpinned the study. Three stages – theory, practice, and evaluation – were established to examine documentary music theatre praxis from conceptualisation to evaluation. In Chapter 3, the literature surrounding documentary theatre and musical theatre was synthesized, and a new conception of the documentary musical was posited with a



practice inventory. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 implemented artistic autoethnography to describe the writing, rehearsal, and performance process of *A Box of Memories*. Both chapters illustrated how prevailing documentary theatre practices were used in the writing of this musical, with the goal of transforming perspectives, attitudes, and behaviours towards dementia. Chapter 6 described the audience perceptual study, providing context to the research and the viability of using documentary music theatre to educate and transform audiences. This was measured through a post-show audience evaluation survey. Chapter 7 collated the findings and reported the statistical data alongside a thematic analysis. This chapter also discussed the key transformative enablers evident from the results. Ultimately, this artistic research study rigorously demonstrated that (1) *A Box of Memories* positively transformed the audience's perceptions towards dementia; (2) the musical effectively employed documentary practices in a musical context, evidencing the utility of a new form of music theatre, *documentary music theatre*.

This chapter will summarise documentary music theatre as a theatrical genre and discuss key strengths and limitations within the study. It will also propose a documentary music theatre framework synthesised from each part of this doctoral study. The chapter will conclude with a personal reflection, capturing my own transformational experience whilst undertaking this artistic research study.

8.1 Transformative Attributes of Documentary Music Theatre

The study has demonstrated that documentary music theatre has significant capacity to heighten emotional resonance and generate opportunity for transformative experiences that can be “life-changing”; transforming attitudes and beliefs of oneself and the community (Bundy, et al., 2013, p.157). New and previously unexplored perspectives can challenge audiences to develop alternative connections and understandings. The



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extent to which these transformations are experienced is closely linked with the level of emotional engagement in the work (Hurley, 2010).

Music can generate, augment and influence audiences' emotional responses both consciously and subconsciously (Cespedes-Guevara & Eerola, 2018, p. 215). Music theatre incorporates song, musically narrating the voice to enhance audiences' emotional connection with the characters on stage (Blustein, 2020, p. 1). Music's melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic components can deliver multiple layers of meaning and expression (Almen, 2008). The hybridisation of music theatre with documentary theatre practices enables the narration of the literal through song (the affective and the emotional). This appears to augment the transformative impact of the experience, fostering new perspectives. Bentley (1965) stated that art is re-cognition, "it does not tell you anything you didn't know ... it tells you something you know and makes you realise" (pp. 53-54). In this sense, documentary music theatre has the capacity to make the familiar seem unfamiliar (reality through song), and the unfamiliar seem familiar (new perspective through increased affective emotional resonance). Audience members can critically examine and reflect upon what they typically take for granted (Bundy, 2013, p. 146). It is this juxtaposition that results in a new awareness and fresh perspective.

Martin (2013) states that "performance of the real can collapse the boundaries between the real and the fictional in ways that create confusion and disruption *or* lead to splendid...harmonies in the service of the creation of meaning" (p. 10). If the audience accepts and attests the truth value of the documentary work, the practitioner has succeeded. Balancing truth and creative interpretation to make reality "theatrical" is both necessary and vexed. When the balance is achieved, a documentary work may transcend narration and access the audience's inner reality and subsequent transformative



reception. This study evidenced the audience's attestation of truth in *A Box of Memories*. Therefore, the promise of documentary music theatre as a transformative theatrical experience is supported by this dissertation.

8.2 Strengths and Limitations

Implementing artistic research has enabled the study to draw upon numerous angles of inquiry, resulting in a nuanced, holistic, and robust research output. A key strength of this study is the implementation of theory, practice, and evaluative measures. Whilst many artistic research studies primarily focus on practice, this study foregrounded its proposition of defining a new theatrical subgenre in theory through critical analysis of existing literature. This was integral to ensure that the study demonstrated sound reasoning for hybridising the existing theatrical forms. By engaging in creative praxis in the development of *A Box of Memories*, a practical framework was verified through subjective (practitioner) and objective measures (audience evaluation). Specifically, the level of audience engagement in the post-show survey was more affirmative than expected. This provided valuable data in which the effectiveness of documentary music theatre to harness transformative enablers was evidenced.

Furthermore, the quality and impact of the show has garnered significant attention. Since its premiere in Sydney, the show has toured to the United States of America after being commissioned by The Greenhouse Project to open the 'Center for Innovation' conference in Pittsburgh in July 2023. Similarly, discussions with commissioning bodies from Canada and New Zealand have commenced with potential tours in 2024. This success is not only credited to the quality of the show and the performers but also because of the effectiveness of documentary music theatre as a transformative theatrical genre. The study demonstrates that documentary music theatre is an important adjunct genre to music theatre and can impact audiences and practitioners deeply.



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Whilst the study was largely successful, some limitations have been recognised, and further research is needed to explore the following:

(1) The survey received a positive response rate, however, further feedback generated from a season of performances would be beneficial and provide a larger sample size. Likewise, the post-show survey was designed to elicit audience responses within a four-week timeframe, and this did not consider prior attitudes or beliefs. Future scholars may consider incorporating a pre-show knowledge and attitudinal response survey as a comparative tool. This study did not address long-term impacts on attitudinal and behavioural transformations due to time constraints. A six to twelve-month follow-up survey could further examine the enduring transformative impact of the work.

(2) *A Box of Memories* centralises dementia, which is an inherently widespread and emotionally provoking topic. It is unclear to what extent the emotive effect of the show was influenced by dementia being the musical topic. This could be further explored with a comparative study of another documentary topic set to music against these findings.

(3) This study suggests that the integration of music as an emotive elicitor leads to enhanced transformative experiences. Whilst this has been demonstrated in audience responses in this study, future researchers could consider a comparative study investigating the audience response towards a documentary play and a documentary musical to explore the augmented impact of music.

(4) Lastly, the research primarily targeted the conceptualisation, development, and performance of a documentary musical. There was some discussion about how documentary music theatre practice uses dramaturgy, directing, stage design, and costuming. However, this research did not focus on these elements, as they were mainly contributed by the Director and the production team. These theatrical elements and how



they are used in this context could be the subject of further research into documentary music theatre.

8.3 Future Possibilities

This artistic research presents documentary music theatre as a musical work defined by the integration of documentary theatre practice when conceptualising, writing, designing, rehearsing, and presenting the work. Practitioners should express clear social objectives with the intention to challenge or transform audiences' attitudes and/or beliefs. Documentary musicals should intentionally and carefully narrate documentary evidence, events, and experiences through the conventions of music and song. Whilst the form could be considered under the umbrella term theatre of the real, my recommendation is that documentary music theatre should be positioned as a sub-genre of music theatre. This is an important differentiation as documentary music theatre is intended to contribute to the academic legitimacy of music theatre and provide practitioners with alternative creative frameworks for devising new and socially focussed musicals.

Through praxis, this dissertation has critically examined the academic placement of the form, devised a tailored practice inventory, documented the creative process, and evaluated the outcome. By undergoing and reviewing this multimodal approach, a practical framework for creators developing new documentary music theatre works has been devised. The framework is divided into four phases: (1) Conceptualisation, (2) The writing process, (3) Staging and directing and (4) Evaluation.

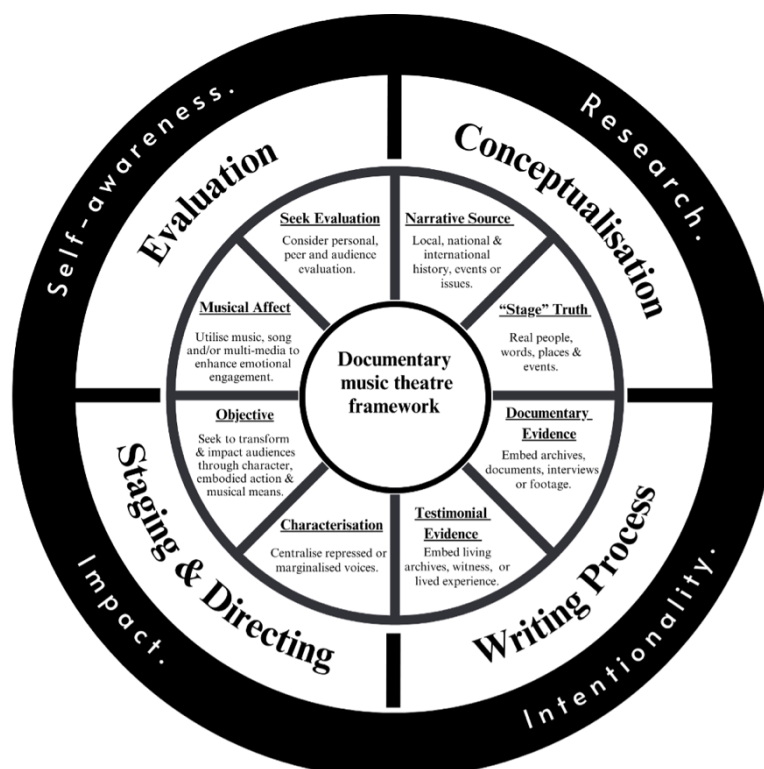


8.4 A Proposed Framework to Approach Writing Documentary Musicals

The final iteration of a developmental model for the creation of a work of documentary music theatre is presented in Figure 8.1. This is intended to be instructive for future practitioners. At the core of the framework is the practice inventory. These practices can be used throughout the creative process, which is divided into four phases (conceptualisation, writing process, staging, and directing and evaluation). Throughout each phase, the practitioners should also consider further research into the narrative topic; they should remain intentional with their creative choices (especially concerning how documentary elements are embedded); considerations of the intended audience impact should be discussed; and the practitioner should remain self-aware during the process. The framework is structured as a wheel to represent the cyclic nature of documentary music theatre but also to reiterate that the components are not static but rather cycle in and out of the creative process.

Figure 8.1

Documentary music theatre framework wheel





Conceptualisation

The conceptualisation phase of writing a documentary musical involves the initial development of the musical's concept, including its story, characters, themes, and overall tone. During this phase, the creative team will collaborate to address key documentary theatre practices. This includes identifying a social objective and selecting a real event and/or experience on which to base the narrative. This is preferably related to a contentious issue recognised in local, national, or international contexts. The creative team should outline clear transformative intentions whilst endeavouring to generate attitude and/or behaviour changes in relation to the chosen social objective. Following this, the team should engage in research by reviewing related archives and documents, conducting interviews and/or witness accounts from living archives. The findings will be used to define the plot and subplots, create characters and their relationships, identify the key themes and messages, and determine the music's and lyrics' style and tone. The conceptualisation phase aims to create a strong foundation for the musical, illustrating documentary music theatre practice that will guide the rest of the writing process.

Writing process

The writing process of developing a musical involves creating the show's book, music, and lyrics. This phase typically begins with the composer and lyricist collaborating on the music and lyrics for the show's songs while the librettist writes the dialogue and overall story structure. The lyrics and script should demonstrate the integration of documentary evidence and reflect real experience as identified in the conceptualisation phase. The use of verbatim should be considered an effective method for communicating the documentary elements. The writers should be cognisant to write in language appropriate to a real-life depiction of a character. It is imperative that the composers consider the way in which music operates as a transformative elicitor affecting the



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audience's emotional response. The chosen musical genre and style should complement the narrative context, with considerations of era, cultural background, and characters' realistic musical taste. The composer should also consider the intended audience demographic, crafting a musical pallet that will be accessible. The songs should serve the narrative.

Compositional intentionality should be demonstrated, considering the way in which music enhances experience, communication and emotional engagement with the audience and the characters on stage. This is reflected through the use of compositional tools and choices in regard to melody, rhythm, time, key, and tonality. The music should enhance the intent of the lyrics by providing aural meaning, transporting the audience to a realm that dialogue could not access. This should primarily be in relation to seeking augmented emotional engagement. This phase often involves numerous revisions, self-reflections, and workshops to refine the show's pacing, character development, and musical numbers. During this phase, the writing team may also work with a dramaturg or other creative consultants to help shape the show's overall concept and themes. The writing process phase aims to create a cohesive and engaging musical that effectively communicates its story and themes to an audience.

Staging and directing

The staging and directing phase of developing a documentary musical involves the physical interpretation and theatrical representation of the written material. This includes the selection of the creative team, casting, blocking, set design, choreography, lighting, and sound design. Whilst the primary practices of documentary theatre are addressed in the first two stages, further considerations can be made to enhance authenticity. The casting should seek to engage performers that have elements of personal lived experience and/or have a connection to the chosen narrative topic. The set could incorporate real



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images, footage, and personal items as props. The director should carefully consider how the staging, blocking and performance enhance the realism of the story without over-dramatizing the scene. During this phase, the director works closely with the cast and creative team to bring the written material to life on stage. The director is responsible for creating a cohesive vision for the production and ensuring that all show elements work together to tell the story.

Evaluation

Documentary music theatre establishes clear creative and social objectives; therefore, evaluation is helpful. Whilst not all documentary musical works will seek to examine audience impact for academic reasons, it is important to consider if the intended objectives were met. In reference to Martin's (2010) notion that documentary works should be validated through audiences attesting to the work's truth, it is crucial to explore audiences' responses and engagement. The audience evaluation will allow the creative team to assess if the transformative and social objectives were met as well as confirm the documentary claim. The evaluation phase should also consider self-reflection, turning to the creator's own individual assessment of process, artistry, and transformation.

8.5 The Promise of Documentary Music Theatre

Recent decades have demonstrated a fundamental shift in the musical's objective from pure entertainment to socially positioned artistic activism. From conceptualisation, writing, development, rehearsal, and performance, documentary music theatre disrupts the traditional music theatre-making process. This is due to the form's comprehensive creative process, from initial concept development to the final assessment. It is not merely a musical recounting of a real-life event; rather, it encompasses the deliberate



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and thoughtful application of documentary techniques throughout the entire process. Documentary music theatre offers a unique frame of practice to depict real stories, challenge societal stigmatisation, and revoice the other whilst carefully navigating audiences through transformative experiences. Within a society constructed upon the foundations of history, experiences, and personal stories, documentary music theatre emerges as a captivating genre that broadens the horizons of artistic expression, offering fresh avenues for influencing and transforming global audiences.



EPILOGUE

The story started with Lizzy, my grandmother, and her journey with dementia. After years of research, composing, and writing, I find myself reflecting on these humble beginnings. My family's personal experience with the illness— a small, finite perspective, became a universally resonant and encompassing, transformative piece of music theatre. Whilst I sought to impact audiences, I didn't foresee the personal transformation this would create in me as an artist and human.

A thread woven throughout the entire journey was vulnerability. My Dad had the courage to speak of his experience honestly and vulnerably, which led to a cascade of writing, composing, reliving, expressing, and presenting vulnerable, personal, and emotional experiences. These vulnerabilities were sensitively shaped and handled throughout the entire process by the creative team and cast. In many ways, we needed everyone in the team to look internally and ask, 'what if this were me?'. It's not easy being vulnerable, especially when it's filtered into creative work that is so outwardly judged by those who witness it. I struggled on numerous occasions with trusting myself to compose this story and had real moments of self-doubt. Yet the unique dynamic of writing with Dad and working with the entire creative team reminded me that all stories and experiences matter. This was instrumental in the transformative, honest, and real depiction of a life impacted by dementia.

In many ways, I am still in awe at how our vulnerability led to countless audience members expressing their own stories and vulnerabilities. These were a gift. I am profoundly moved to have played a role in their journey through grief and acceptance of dementia. It was a privilege to honour and give voice to people with shared lived experiences of dementia.



Act Three: *The Denouement* – Audience evaluation & finale

Throughout the project, I wrestled with artistic pressures and expectations, grappling with an established frame of theatrical tradition. Where once I valued critical theatre review as the pinnacle of success, I now deem success as the person sitting in row J, seat 11, experiencing real emotion, enjoyment, and transformation. Just like Lizzy, we don't know every story in the audience, and the person in every seat is valuable, and their life experience is worthy of being seen and heard. This experience has shown me that audiences want real and resonating stories, and they want to feel real emotions. When this occurs, the response is remarkable and infectious. One woman from the USA experienced the show in Sydney, and within ten months, *A Box of Memories* had premiered in America thanks to her persistence. In the USA premiere, we had audience members in tears thanking us, and we were inundated with personal testimonies of how profoundly the show had impacted them. This appears to be the journey and story of this work. People relate to shared retellings of authentic human experiences.

I can't help but notice a theme of three: three years of study, three acts in my thesis, three stages in my study design, the rule of threes in theatre, three characters, three set zones, three main transformative enablers of documentary music theatre and so on. Perhaps noticing this is of little value, or perhaps it reveals a longing to find meaning in things we often overlook. Nevertheless, the number three has long been associated by the Ancient Greek Philosopher Pythagoras with the birth-life-death cycle. I find this symbolism uncanny. Without digressing into a deeply metaphorical analysis of how I find meaning in this trifacta, I do wish to highlight how this cycle has impacted me artistically. *A Box of Memories* was a creative birthing. Through bringing the story to life with narrative, characters, and music, I found myself artistically resonating with the characteristics and transformations of Jeremy, Sonia and Lizzy.



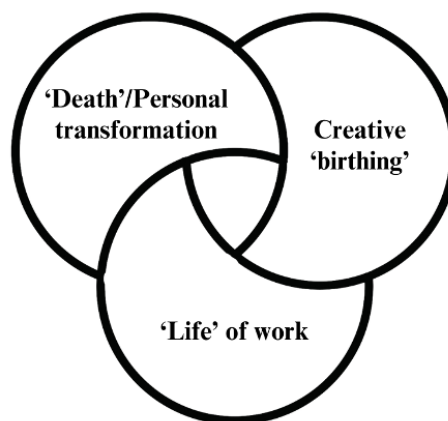
Act Three: *The Denouement* – Audience evaluation & finale

I resonated with Jeremy, taking the analytical approach to examining a situation within my doctoral studies. I resonated with Sonia, the caretaker, trying to juggle the responsibility of writing and producing the show whilst managing the team's various needs. I resonated with Lizzy, the person around whom the story evolved, and who instigated this project from a shared personal experience with my Dad. Just as each character encountered transformation, I did too. Just as the work kept transforming with each iteration, so did we all. I learned to lead my academic and creative work with compassion for myself. I learned how to navigate others' needs in a creative landscape, attending with understanding and leadership, and I learned the value of one's own voice and story. Through this experience, I surrendered to artistic transformation. I am not the same person as when I started this project. Just as the life cycle continues, I begin the next cycle in my creative endeavour profoundly altered by this experience.

The reflection associated with documentary music theatre practice enriched my self-awareness. I believe it is important to recognise the personal transformative impact that documentary music theatre may have on other practitioners. I have devised an additional visual example that captures the interplay of a creative birth-life-death cycle inherent in documentary music theatre practice (see Figure 8.2).

Figure 8.2

Documentary music theatre personal transformation cycle





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Beyond my artistic self, I feel a transformed perception of what it means to be human, to live a story, and the necessity to share that story. The experiences we have as people profoundly shape how we see the world, how we engage with it and how we live in it. No life story is the same, yet many intertwine following similar journeys, just viewed from a different lens. Perhaps this is because the human experience is inherently simple - we love, we laugh, we cry, we live, we die. Yet amidst this simplicity are our beautifully complex, richly unique *stories*. In the words of Art Bochner (2016), “air keeps us alive; stories give meaning to our existence” (p. 76). As we see Lizzy in the final moments of the show, already passed on, we remember that stories become more than history, more than documented archives, more than a musical narrative; they are the foundation of our experience being human.

This is our life, it is our song, it is our story.

- McKellar & McKellar¹⁹

¹⁹ Lyrical quote from *A Box of Memories* finale song ‘My life’.

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APPENDIX A

Ethics approval



Research Integrity & Ethics Administration HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Thursday, 25 August 2022

Dr Narelle Yeo
Conservatorium Admin; Sydney Conservatorium of Music
Email: narelle.yeo@sydney.edu.au

Dear Dr Narelle Yeo,

The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has considered your application.
I am pleased to inform you that after consideration of your response, your project has been approved.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.: 2022/570
Project Title: Documentary Music Theatre: Evaluating Audience Impact
Authorised Personnel: Yeo Narelle; McKellar Erin
Approval Period: 25/08/2022 to 25/08/2026
First Annual Report Due: 25/08/2023

Documents Approved:

Date Uploaded	Version Number	Document Name
08/08/2022		Survey
05/08/2022		Poster with QR code for theatre foyer
05/08/2022	Version 5	Creative Collaborator Consent Form
05/08/2022	Version 3	Interview PIS
05/08/2022	Version 4	Survey PIS
05/08/2022	Version 4	Creative Collaborator PIS
05/08/2022		Survey Email Invite
05/08/2022	Version 4	Survey Consent Form
05/08/2022	Version 5	Interview Consent Form
05/08/2022		Interview Email Invite
05/08/2022	Version 5	Interview Guide Questions
05/08/2022		Facebook Ad
05/08/2022		Instagram Ad
05/08/2022		Program Page with link to survey
05/08/2022		Validity Test Email Invite

For Noting

- Please ensure the version numbers and date in the footer of all public documents are updated and revise these any time changes are made to the documents. This allows identification of original, updated, and approved versions in IRMA and to facilitate any future requested modifications.

Condition/s of Approval

- Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal.
- An annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.

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E human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
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ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A

- You must report as soon as practicable anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project including:
 - Serious or unexpected adverse events (which should be reported within 72 hours).
 - Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- Any changes to the proposal must be approved prior to their implementation (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate *immediate* risk to participants).
- Personnel working on this project must be sufficiently qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or adequately supervised. Changes to personnel must be reported and approved.
- Personnel must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation, as relevant to this project.
- Data and primary materials must be retained and stored in accordance with the relevant legislation and University guidelines.
- Ethics approval is dependent upon ongoing compliance of the research with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, applicable legal requirements, and with University policies, procedures and governance requirements.
- The Ethics Office may conduct audits on approved projects.
- The Chief Investigator has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research and is responsible for ensuring all others involved will conduct the research in accordance with the above.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

Please contact the Ethics Office should you require further information or clarification.

Sincerely,



Associate Professor Helen Mitchell
Chair
Conservatorium Review Committee (Low Risk)

The University of Sydney of Sydney HRECs are constituted and operate in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2018\)](#) and the NHMRC's [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#)

APPENDIX B

Validation recruitment



[Date]

Dear [NAME]

Erin McKellar
emck4003@sydney.edu.au

Dr Narelle Yeo
Room 4007, C41
Sydney Conservatorium of music
The University of Sydney
Conservatorium Road
Sydney NSW 2000
+ 61 93511343
Narelle.yeo@sydney.edu.au

I am a Doctoral student at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of Sydney under the supervision of Dr Narelle Yeo. My artistic research study involves the writing of a documentary musical and subsequent audience evaluation. The creative component of my DMA is musical titled *A Box of Memories*, which endeavours to shift perspectives towards dementia. The musical is opening HammondCare's International Dementia Conference. An optional post-show survey will be provided after the show. The post-show survey is designed to understand if and how audience participants encountered transformative experiences from viewing the show.

I am seeking experts in the field of dementia to validate and offer feedback on my post-show survey questions before it becomes open to public participants. As a professional in dementia related work your knowledge and expertise would be greatly valued.

If you are willing to partake as a participant in the survey validation process, please let me know and I will forward you more information.

Kind regards,
Erin McKellar (doctoral student)

Supervisor: Dr Narelle Yeo

APPENDIX C

Survey and Information sheet

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION STATEMENT

Welcome to the research study:

Documentary Music Theatre: Evaluating Audience Impact

Before we get started please read the Participation Information Sheet provided below.

ABN 15 211 513 464

Dr Narelle Yeo
Chief Investigator Dr Narelle Yeo
Senior lecturer at Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Room 4007
Building 41
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 93511343
Email: narelle.yeo@sydney.edu.au
Web: www.sydney.edu.au/music/

Documentary Music Theatre: Evaluating Audience Impact**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT
SURVEY****(1) What is this study about?**

You are invited to take part in a research study investigating the portrayal of dementia on stage using documentary theatre. You have been invited to participate in this study because we are interested in knowing your audience experience and how the musical impacted your views on dementia. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

- Erin McKellar is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctorate of Music Arts at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision Dr Narelle Yeo, Senior Lecturer at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

The study is an online post show survey and can be undertaken at your convenience. Initially, you will be asked to answer demographic questions, to gauge your age as well as your knowledge and experience with dementia. You will then be asked to respond to a series of questions relating to your experience as an audience member viewing *A Box of Memories*. Your answers will remain anonymous.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

The survey will take up to 15 minutes to complete.

(5) Who can take part in the study?

This study is open to anyone who attended the September season of *A Box of Memories*. This is fair and inclusive research. We are interested in the impacts of as many audience members willing to partake.

(6) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by exiting the online questionnaire. If you feel distress from any questions, you can skip the question or terminate the survey. The survey provides contact detail for emotional support if you require.

Submitting your completed survey is an indication of your consent to participate in the study. You can withdraw your responses any time before you have submitted the survey. Once you have submitted it, your responses cannot be withdrawn because they are anonymous and therefore we will not be able to tell which one is yours.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study. However, due to the nature of the topic being centred around dementia, this may evoke an emotional response.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study.

(9) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

The demographic information you provide at the start of the survey will be used to organise participants into age, knowledge and experience with dementia. You will not be asked to provide any personal details unless you would like feedback from the finding. This information will remain anonymous. The information you provide in response to the survey will be used to evaluate the musicals audience impact. The results will be published in my student doctoral theses, with potential for journal publication and conference presentations. The data will be kept confidential and findings will remain anonymous. The data will only be used for the purpose of this research project.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be individually identifiable in these publications.

(10) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study. However, unless they have seen the show in September, they cannot participate.

(11) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Erin McKellar will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact:
Erin McKellar (doctoral student)
Email: emck4003@uni.sydney.edu.au

(12) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by answering the relevant question in an online survey. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

(13) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney [*INSERT protocol number once approval is obtained*]. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

- **Telephone:** +61 2 8627 8176
- **Email:** human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
- **Fax:** +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

This information sheet is for you to keep

I have read and understand the Participation Information Statement

☐ Yes

☐ No

PARTICIPATION CONSENT

Participation Consent

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney now or in the future.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that my survey responses cannot be withdrawn once they are submitted, as they are anonymous and therefore the researchers will not be able to tell which one is mine.

- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

- I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

☐ I consent

☐ I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Trigger Warning

Discussing the topic of dementia may evoke an emotional response. If you find any questions distressing, you may skip the question or exit the survey.

If you need further support please contact:

Dementia Helpline

Free call: 1800 100 500

Webchat: dementia.org.au/helpline/webchat

Email: helpline@dementia.org.au

Or Lifeline

Free call: 13 11 14

☐ Continue to survey questions

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Part 1: Demographic Questions

The following questions will be used to categorize the participants and better understand the findings. Your answers will remain anonymous.

What age range do you fit into?

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-49
- ☐ 50-64
- ☐ Over 65

What gender do you identify as?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / Gender non-conforming
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Do you know or have you known someone experiencing dementia?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Unsure

If yes and if you feel comfortable, please indicate their relationship to you.

Do you work in the health sector?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what is your role and is this role related to dementia care?

A Box of Memories Questions

Part 2: 'A Box of Memories' Questions

This section will include 9 questions relating to your experience of viewing 'A Box of Memories'. There is no right or wrong answer, we

want to know what your personal experience was as an audience member.

1a. 'A Box of Memories' shares the multiple perspectives of dementia's impact, including Lizzy the person experiencing dementia, Sonia, the daughter dealing with impact on family and Jeremy, the doctor managing the clinical care.

Who is the protagonist in this show? (Protagonist: The person who the story is central to)

For question 1a, 1b and 1c you may select multiple answers.

- ☐ Lizzy (Mother)
- ☐ Sonia (Daughter)
- ☐ Jeremy (Doctor)

1b. Who do you relate most to?

- ☐ Lizzy
- ☐ Sonia
- ☐ Jeremy

1c. Who do you see as the antagonist in the show? (Antagonist: The opponent)

- ☐ Lizzy
- ☐ Sonia
- ☐ Jeremy

- ☐ The health system
- ☐ The disease

2. A Box of Memories helped me empathise with people living with dementia.

Neutral

No, not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Yes, very much

3. A Box of Memories showed me a different perspective or view on dementia that I had not previously considered.

Neutral

No, not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Yes, very much

4. 'A Box of Memories' realistically depicted the experience of living with dementia.

Neutral

No, not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Yes, very much

4a. If you have experience with dementia (for example, person living with dementia, family member or health practitioner) can you please comment on why you selected your answer.

5. Were you emotionally affected by this show?

Neutral

No, not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Yes, very much

5a. If yes, do you think this will change how you relate to those experiencing dementia based on this experience? Could you please explain your answer.

6. Lizzy had a degenerative condition. Her character began to sing and speak less during the course of the show. Did you still see her as central to the drama as this occurred?

Unsure

No, not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Yes, very much

6a. Could you please comment on why you selected your answer.

7. Documentary theatre portrayals authentic real-life characters in a theatre context. What is the contribution of the music to your experience of this story?

The music did not impact the story or my experience in a meaningful way

Neutral

The music was integral to narrative and character development

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

8. Can music theatre improve social awareness of dementia?

No, not at all

Unsure

Yes, very much

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

9. If you have any further comments on your experience viewing 'A Box of Memories', please write below.

Survey Findings

If you would like to receive result feedback from the survey please leave your email. If you do not wish to received a summary of findings please click next.

Powered by Qualtrics

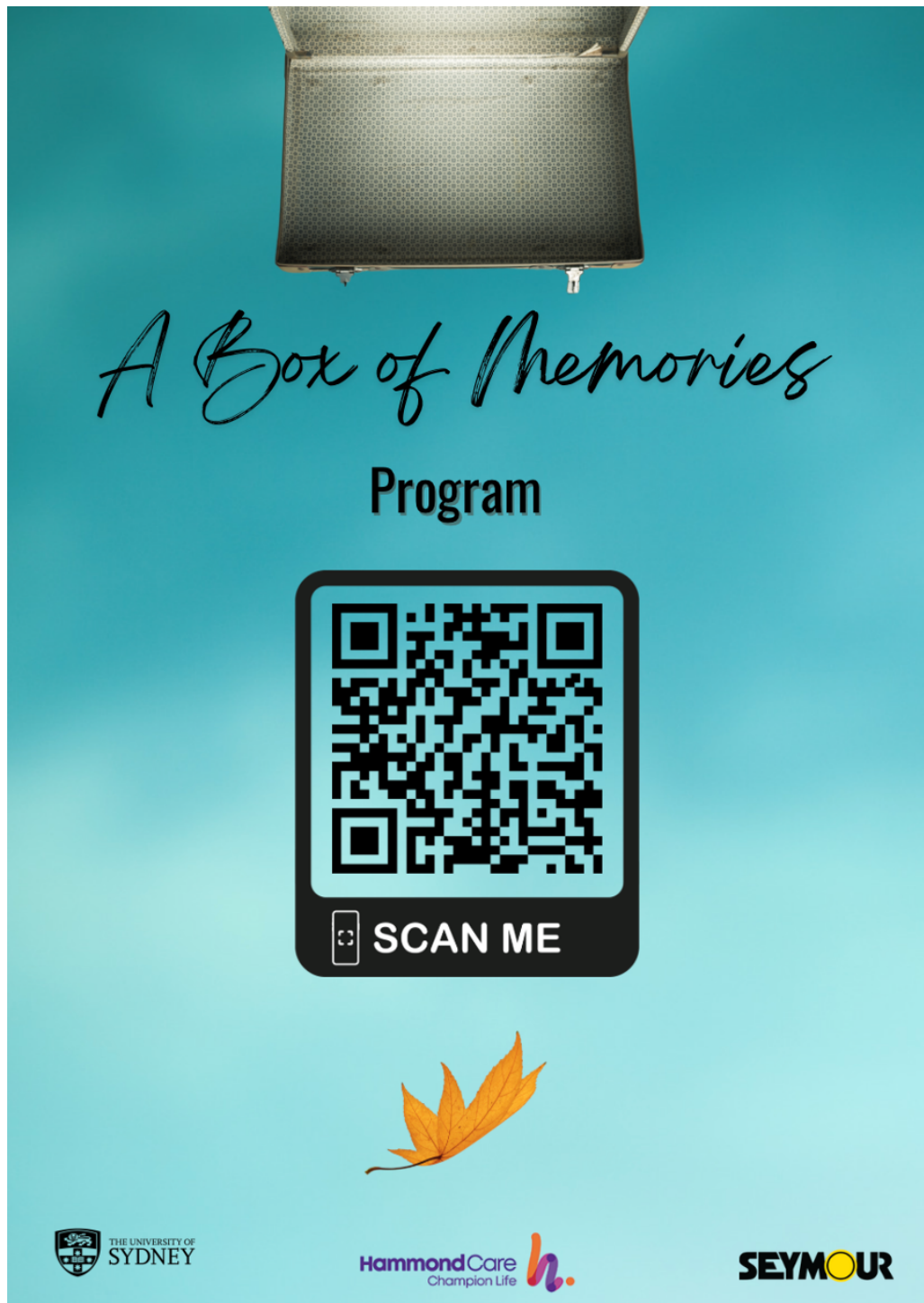
APPENDIX D

Performance Poster



APPENDIX E

Performance QR Code Flyer



TAKE PART IN OUR RESEARCH STUDY



POST-SHOW SURVEY

WE WANT TO KNOW HOW THE SHOW IMPACTED YOU

Research undertaken by Erin McKellar and Dr Narelle Yeo
For further questions please contact:
emck4003@sydney.edu.au



APPENDIX F

Performance Program



ABOUT THE SHOW

Leading into HamondCare's International Dementia Conference, 'A Box of Memories' is an intimate musical in one act. It presents perspectives on what it means to live with dementia, from diagnosis through to the end-of-life. It follows the story of Lizzy, a woman in her seventies, experiencing changes in memory and at the beginning of a life-impacting diagnostic experience; Sonia, Lizzy's daughter, in her forties, frantically busy with work, family and struggling with what is happening with her mother, and unsure of what to do about it and Jeremy, a specialist doctor who becomes engaged with Lizzy's care from diagnosis until the end-of-life. The topic is confronting, but the work is heartfelt and seeks to humanise an issue around which there continues to be considerable societal stigma.

Dementia is the second leading cause of death in Australia, and the leading cause of death for Australian women. This is seldom talked about and is a discomfoting topic for many. This poignant, humorous and insightful musical shares Lizzy's story, illustrating the experience of many people living – and dying – with dementia: an experience of changing function, relationships and identity. People with dementia frequently experience being invisible and dehumanised within health and social care settings – and in society more broadly. Yet, we believe that seeing the person rather than the illness, and finding their story is the key to caring for the person with dementia with dignity. Further, dementia not only effects the person but the entire family and the people who provide care for them.

'A Box of Memories' both entertains and informs the audience. We will only get better at understanding and working with dementia if we get better at talking and singing about it.

The workshop premiere in the Adelaide Fringe 2022 was a raving success with a sell-out season and Best Theatre Award. Since then, we introduced director and dramaturg Dr Narelle Yeo to workshop and develop the show into this staged production.

SCENE & MUSICAL NUMBERS

- 1: Prologue - Look For The Silver Lining
- 2: Another day
- 3: What's happening to me?
- 4: Just three words
- 5: What's happening to me? (Reprise)
- 6: ABC(D)
- 7: Silver memories and golden moments
- 8: On the hotline
- 9: Falling
- 10: Back on the hotline
- 11: Vitamin H
- 12: Woman in the window
- 13: The demand
- 14: The dance
- 15: What if this were me?
- 16: I need a G&T
- 17: It takes time
- 18: How to decide?
- 19: Silver memories and golden moments (reprise)
- 20: A box of memories
- 21: Epilogue - My life

CREATIVE TEAM

**ERIN
MCKELLAR**



**DUNCAN
MCKELLAR**



We are a daughter-father creative duo. Erin is currently studying her Doctorate of Musical Arts in Music Theatre Composition, at the Sydney Conservatorium . Duncan is a old age psychiatrist and former classical pianist. Duncan was a member of the Oakden Review panel, with the South Australian Chief Psychiatrist, which became a land mark in Australian health and aged care history and triggered the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

This musical holds particular salience for us not only because Duncan works as a lead psychiatrist caring for those who are living with dementia but also because his mother, Erin's grandmother, lost her life to younger onset dementia. This experience has informed Duncan's passion as a doctor to see greater awareness of the issues experienced by people living with dementia. As a young female composer, Erin also see the musical as an exciting opportunity to share real stories that are too often overlooked and not talked about enough.

'A Box of Memories' brings together Duncan's creative and clinical experiences, in collaboration with Erin's musicianship, skill and songwriting.

DIRECTOR

NARELLE YEO



Dr Narelle Yeo is a Stage Director of Opera and Music Theatre with credits in the USA and Australia and the Program Leader of the new Music Theatre degree at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Narelle began her performing career in the USA in opera, theatre and music theatre, performing over 40 roles including Mrs Manningham in *Gaslight*, Sharon in *Masterclass*, Cio Cio San In *Madama Butterfly*, Leonore in *Fidelio*, Mrs Johnston in *Blood Brothers* and Guenevere in *Camelot*. She has soloed for the San Francisco Symphony, Goshen Bach Festival, Theatreworks, the Sydney Opera House, Sydney Town Hall and Carriageworks. A faculty director at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music prior to her appointment as a director at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Narelle has directed hundreds of opera scenes and over 30 shows in opera and musical theatre in Australia and the USA. Recent directing credits include the Brisbane Festival and the *Strut and Fret Speigeltent*. A pioneer of new works, Narelle has premiered five Australian new works of music theatre and opera in the last five years.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

"Every leaf sparks bliss to me, fluttering from the autumn tree." Emily Dickinson's romantic description of the soft fall of an autumn leaf beckoning winter evokes the bliss of the turn of seasons, the mid-point in the slowing down of nature into the whites of winter. The experience of dementia often begins in soft autumn, but can resemble the certain slant of light, the shape and snow cover of winter:

"There's a certain slant of light,
On winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes."
Emily Dickinson

"A Box of Memories" is a cathedral tune to this beautiful, sometimes fractured journey through winter. This is a new kind of music theatre: Documentary theatre elements inform a fictionalized story, punctuated by a lyrical pop-influenced score. This work weaves different perspectives of dementia for all those involved in the pathway from autumn into winter and beyond, as familiar as the unveiling of a box of old memories. The McKellar's work reminds us that, even in the deep snow, there is life, beauty and meaning. It has been a pleasure to work with Erin and Duncan to dramaturg and direct this innovative and moving exploration of the slow departure of a loved one. We hope to express one possibility of this experience through Lizzy's own fading eyes, and the eyes of all who are blessed with sharing her journey.

LIGHTING DESIGNER

TOM KITNEY



Tom Kitney is a Lighting Designer, Digital Innovator, Theatre Maker and Inventor based in Adelaide. Over the last decade Tom has worked internationally across a plethora of projects, developing specialities and combining practices to further his creative development and his artistic potential. As a champion of technology, Tom's artistic practise involves combining lighting, sound, videography, photography, carpentry, electronics, and design into both live and digital performance, events, and installations. In 2018, Tom was nominated for an Off-West End Award (OFFIE) for Best Lighting Design for 'Lifeboat' at the Brockley Jack Theatre, London. Hartstone-Kitney Productions' new digital/live hybrid art form: Black Box Live (WINNER - John Chataway Innovation Award 2021 and 2020/2021 Independent Art Foundation Award for Innovation from the Adelaide Critics Circle) - is the current technical culmination of Tom's combined, expansive theatrical experience.

THE CAST



SONIA

LAUREN HENDERSON

Lauren Henderson is an Adelaide-based singer, composer, actor, educator and mother of two beautiful boys. A versatile musician known for her eclectic tastes in jazz, R&B/soul/hip hop, folk, music theatre and pop, she has had the pleasure of working with artists such as The Idea of North, Joe Chindamo, Nelson Dialect, Matthew Sheens, James Muller, Gian Slater, Michelle Nicolle, Anita Wardell, Anna Goldsworthy, Robyn Archer and The Lost and Found Orchestra (creators of STOMP!). Lauren has an acting degree with honours from Flinders Drama Centre. Lauren currently lectures in jazz voice at The Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide and is passionate about helping people find their voice.

Her accolades include:

Helpmann Academy Vocal Jazz Award (2013)

Downbeat Student Music Award (2013)

Top twenty semi-finalist in the Theolonius Monk Competition for jazz voice (2015)

Freedman Jazz Fellowship Nominee (2016)

Winner of the National Jazz Awards - voice (2020)

Lauren is currently completing her qualification to become a certified Estill

Master Trainer under the mentorship of Naomi Evers and in 2019 her band

Boomskully, released their debut E.P.

THE CAST

LIZZY

KATHIE RENNER



Kathie Renner is an Australian singer-songwriter who eschews stylistic boundaries to create new contemporary songs. Currently based in Adelaide city Kathie has toured Europe and the UK many times showcasing her song catalogue with her former group, Vincent's Chair. She has also released 6 studio albums of all original material. Comparisons are often made to Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon and Sting, and while they are certainly her main influences, she has always sought to follow her own path; to create her own style.

In addition to writing for herself she has also collaborated for other artists. In recent years she has worked with the first all-female pop group with disabilities in the world, The Sisters Of Invention, to write new material for their 2021 Adelaide Cabaret Festival performance, "You Ready For This" which garnered great reviews for its ground-breaking work.

At present she is writing and recording her third solo album with her new band, The Search Party, with acclaimed drummer and producer, Ben Todd (Cirque du Soleil)

Kathie is very excited to be a part of a brand new musical "A Box Of Memories: A Musical" and will be playing the role of Lizzy, a woman in her seventies, experiencing changes in memory and at the beginning of a life-impacting diagnostic experience.

THE CAST



JEREMY
MATHEW NOBLE

A passionate Music educator and performer, Mat teaches Music at Concordia College as part of his role as Director of Music there.

In addition to being a fervent advocate for Music education, Mat has been a professional singer since 1992, most notably taking on the role of 'Judas' in Mayfair Theatre's "Jesus Christ Superstar", as well as performing on stages with artists including: Tommy Emmanuel, James Morrison, Don Burrows, Grace Knight, Silvie Paladino, Paul Grabowski, Paul Kelly, Vika and Linda Bull, and Darlene Love. He sings regularly with Adelaide bands Supernova, The Motown Connection, Every Breath (the music of Sting) and Blackjack.

Mat Noble will be playing the role of Jeremy, a specialist doctor who becomes engaged with Lizzy's care from diagnosis until the end-of-life.

SUPPORTING ROLES

STAGE HAND (AUDLEY MCORDERLY)

DUNCAN MCKELLAR

CHOREOGRAPHY

LILI FORSYTH

DANCERS

**LILI FORSYTH
JASMINE ARGYROPOULOS
BROOKE BOGATEZ**



THE BAND



DAVID GOODWIN
PIANO



SHIRIN LIM
VIOLIN



DYLAN PAUL
BASS

THE BAND

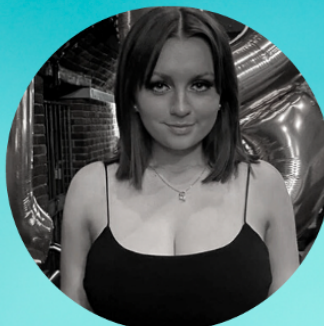
LEWIS TODD
DRUMS



TYLER VENTER
GUITAR



IZZY NORMAN
BACKING VOCALS



ERIN MCKELLAR
BACKING VOCALS



TAKE PART IN OUR RESEARCH STUDY



POST-SHOW SURVEY

WE WANT TO KNOW HOW THE SHOW IMPACTED YOU

[Click here for the link](#)

Research undertaken by Erin McKellar and Dr Narelle Yeo
For further questions please contact:
emck4003@sydney.edu.au



A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSOR



HammondCare is dedicated to
serving people in need and is a
leader in complex dementia
care.

THANK YOU!

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE SHOW

**IF YOU HAVE FOUND ANY CONTENT IN THE SHOW
DISTRESSING**

PLEASE CONTACT:

Dementia Helpline
Free call: 1800 100 500
Webchat: dementia.org.au/helpline/webchat
Email: helpline@dementia.org.au

Or Lifeline
Free call: 13 11 14

STAY UP-TO DATE WITH THE SHOWS PROGRESS AND FUTURE SHOWS



FOLLOW

@ABOXOFMEMORIES.MUSICAL



CONTACT US

aboxofmemories.musical@gmail.com

APPENDIX G

A Box of Memories Song List and Timestamps

Song 1: Another day (Timestamp: 1:24)

Song 2: What's happening to me? (Timestamp: 5:55)

Song 3: Just three words (Timestamp: 9:03)

Song 4: What's happening to me? (Reprise) (Timestamp: 11:19)

Song 5: ABC(D) (Timestamp: 12:56)

Song 6: Silver memories and golden moments (Timestamp: 17:05)

Song 7: Falling (Timestamp: 21:45)

Song 8: Vitamin H (Timestamp: 25:25)

Song 9: Woman in the window (Timestamp: 28:17)

Song 10: The demand (Timestamp: 30:35)

Song 11: David is that you? (Timestamp: 32:35)

Song 12: What if this were me? (Timestamp: 35:55)

Song 13: I need a G&T (Timestamp: 40:07)

Song 14: It takes time (Timestamp: 45:50)

Song 15: How to decide? (Timestamp: 50:30)

Song 16: Silver memories and golden moments (reprise) (Timestamp: 55:42)

Song 17: A box of memories (Timestamp: 58:50)

Song 18: My life (Timestamp: 1:02:00)

APPENDIX H

A Box of Memories Performance Credits

The show

Music: Erin McKellar

Lyrics: Duncan & Erin McKellar

Libretto: Duncan McKellar

Dramaturg: Narelle Yeo

Director: Narelle Yeo

Production Team

Producer: Erin McKellar

Set design: Narelle Yeo & Duncan
McKellar

Lighting: Tom Kitney

Stage Manager: Narelle Yeo

Cast

Lizzy: Kathie Renner

Sonia: Lauren Henderson

Jeremy: Mathew Noble

The Orderly: Duncan McKellar

Dancer 1: Lili Forsyth

Dancer 2: Jasmine Argyropoulos

Dancer 3: Brooke Bogatez

The Band

Music director: Erin McKellar

Piano: David Goodwin

Drums: Lewis Todd

Violin: Shirin Lim

Guitar: Tyler Venter

Bass: Dylan Paul

Backing vocal 1: Erin McKellar

Backing vocal 2: Izzy Norman

Content

Photography: Robert Catto

Videography: Jarrad Salmon

Consent has been provided from all
individuals in any footage used
within this dissertation.

Sponsors

HammondCare

The University of Sydney

APPENDIX I

A Box of Memories Original Timeline

