

CONSTELLATIONS

BACKGROUND RESOURCES

CONTENTS

1. About the Production
2. About the Writer
3. About the Play
- 4 & 5. Interview with Nick Payne
6. Interview with Lucy Cullingford
7. Practical Activities
8. Scene Study
9. Further Reading and Education at The Royal Court

These resources are intended to give teachers and students a detailed insight into the creative process behind developing and staging *Constellations*. Through interviews, production notes and rehearsal techniques, they demonstrate how the writer, director and cast worked in collaboration to create the show. We aim to provide useful information and opportunities to help students discover the unique world of the play for themselves.

ROYAL COURT
DUKE OF YORKS THEATRE

Constellations

by **Nick Payne**

Constellations had its premier at The Royal Court Jerwood Downstairs on Friday 13th January 2012

Constellations had its premier at The Duke of Yorks Theatre on Friday 9th November 2012

by **Nick Payne**

Marianne **Sally Hawkins**
Roland **Rafe Spall**

Director **Michael Longhurst**
Designer **Tom Scutt**
Lighting Designer **Lee Curran**
Composer **Simon Slater**
Sound Designer **David McSeveney**
Casting Director **Amy Ball**
Assistant Director **Sam Caird**
Production Manager **Tariq Rifaat**
Movement Director **Lucy Cullingford**
BSLBT Consultant **Daryl Jackson**
Fight Director **Kate Waters**
Stage Managers **Rhiannon Harper, Bryan Paterson**
Stage Management Work Placement **Amy Burkett**
Costume Supervisor **Iona Kenrick**

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY:

“Payne announced himself as a dramatist of rich humanity, vitality and promise. Here he makes a quantum leap with a work that can stand comparison with Tom Stoppard, Michael Frayn and Caryl Churchill at their best”
 **The Telegraph**

“Michael Longhurst's superb production features two performances that are miracles of timing as they dart in and out of knowing inverted commas and effect subtles glissade between beautifully calculated in-on-the knowingness and nakedly unfeigned feeling”  **The Independent**

The town's new hot ticket **New York Times**

A pitch-perfect production **The Daily Telegraph**

Funny, tender, and startlingly original **Time Out**

I would bet that before long it will join the ranks of Arcadia and Copenhagen as a classic. **New Scientist**

WRITER - NICK PAYNE



Nick Payne won the prestigious George Devine Award in 2009 with his play *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet*. This was produced at the Bush Theatre in October 2009, directed by Josie Rourke and was produced by the Roundabout Theatre Company in New York in Autumn 2012 starring Jake Gyllenhaal. Nick was a member of the Young Writers Programme at the Royal Court and made his debut at the Court in September 2010 with *Wanderlust*. He is currently under commission at the Donmar Warehouse, the Royal Court and Manhattan Theatre Club.

"So you've these two theories that are completely at odds with one another. Relativity covers the sun, the moon, the stars while quantum mechanics takes care of molecules, quarks, atoms- that sort of thing. We've effectively asked the same question twice and come up with two completely different answers"

- Marianne



"There are three different kinds of bees. The drones, the workers and a single, solitary queen. The workers are all women. Their job is to forage for honey, pollen, etcetera. Their lifespan is potentially anywhere between five weeks and six months. And then they die. Drones exist solely to have sex with the queen. Each hive tends to have around a hundred drones. Once they've deposited their sperm, their penis gets ripped off and they die. Honeybees have an unfailing clarity of purpose. Their lives are often intensely

short. But in a strange sort of way, I'm jealous of the humble honey bee and their quiet elegance. If only our existence were that simple. If only we could understand why it is that we're here and what it is that we're meant to spend our lives doing"

- Roland

ABOUT THE PLAY:

"I think what I enjoyed most was exploring the amazingly varied ways the play seems to be able to be done. Doing that with such inventive and creative actors was incredibly exciting to be a part of"
Sam Caird, Assistant Director

'Nick Payne's 'Constellations' is a romantic comedy mapping the relationship between a quantum physicist (Marianne), and a beekeeper (Roland), from their first meeting, to their eventual parting.



Marianne's work has her exploring the theory of the Multiverse, the possibility that there are an infinite number of universes with sometimes only slight differences to our own. The play's structure reflects this as the audience sees several different versions of each scene played out, sometimes successfully for Marianne and Roland and sometimes not so successfully, depending on the choices they make.'

Creating the Characters of Marianne and Roland:

A little over a week into rehearsal we had a visit from Professor Mike Duff. Professor Duff is the Chair of Theoretical Physics at Imperial College London and a fellow of the Royal Society. Nick was in conversation with him whilst he was researching the play. Professor Duff gave a presentation on the kind of work Marianne does. Also during rehearsal Sally, Nick and Mike visited Dr Kathy Romer at the University of Sussex in Brighton. Dr Romer is the Steve Benbow equivalent for Marianne. Nick spoke to Dr. Romer while he was researching the play. Her work is similar to that which Marianne does.



Dr. Lewis Thorne came in during the next week and spoke to us about Glioblastoma Multiforme, the brain tumor Marianne contracts during the play. Dr. Thorne works as a brain surgeon at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead, and at the London Brain Centre.

He kindly gave us some of his valuable time to ask questions about the diagnosis and treatment of the illness. We also had a visit from Chris Larner, whose one-man show 'An Instinct for Kindness' details the process of helping his ex-wife to an assisted suicide at Dignitas. Throughout the process we had visits from Daryl Jackson, a British Sign Language interpreter and translator, who helped devise a workable version of the scene in the play where Marianne and Roland are both deaf.

INTERVIEW WITH NICK PAYNE:

What sparked the idea?

It was probably about bees and bee keeping, I watched a documentary called Vanishing of the Bees, and it was about how bees are dying out in the US and how they are farming bees too intensively and that was the starting point. I sort of worried about how you could do bees on stage. So I decided not to go down the bee play route, so by chance I watched a documentary called the elegant universe by Brian Green and it was amazing. It was a history of contemporary theoretical physics and right at the end he touched on this idea of the Multiverse.

How did you bring the idea of Multiverse and Bee- keeping together?

Well I guess I like that the multiverse stuff was so theoretical, so I spoke to cosmologist. I asked her when you're at a party and you get asked what you do for living what do you say? And she said I study the origin

and fate of the universe and I thought that was a pretty amazing way of describing your job. I liked that Bee-keeping is a micro endeavour, it's very clear you're investing in a specific eco system and how you go about maintaining that. So I met a bee keeper who is an artisan bee keeper, so he is very careful about the way he works and how he makes his honey, it's a kind a job one man does on his own, he drives around London, visiting these hives looking after the bees. In one sense his job isn't theoretical at all but the cosmologist can be quite isolated,

Again I spoke to someone and they way they work is by analysing data from one tiny bit of the galaxy, so I felt like in a way both their jobs (the beekeeper and cosmologist) have different roles but they essentially work alone and they have to compartmentalise their work to get it done. I guess overall I just didn't want to let go of the bee stuff.

How did you find the form of the piece?

I guess I took the idea of multiverse and everything we do will exist in a massive ensemble of universes; it is theoretically simultaneous, so right now we're having this conversation, you're wearing a different jumper, I'm wearing different shoes and you're using a pen and paper instead of an I Pad. So it could be something tiny that is different, it's like a branch of tree that comes into existence when another possibility is theoretically possible. I thought it would be an amazing form for a play, so I wrote loads of material and edited it down. So I wrote maybe a third more than what was actually in the play and then cut it out.

Were they longer scenes or was it that you had more possibilities?

There were a few more possibilities, there was another chunk in their life, and in one version Marianne was pregnant, in another she couldn't get pregnant and another she was going to adopt but it felt like one step to many somehow in the play so it got cut out. There were one or two more universes. I wanted the story to be incredibly simple. I hope, if the form is difficult to get on board with, that the story wouldn't be at all. The rule I set was that is must be the first and last of everything, something I stole from Closer. It's the first time they meet, their first date, their first break up, they get married, and then she's very ill. So the idea was including the key bits of their life.



How did the cast find the ways to differentiate those strands?

Well they sort of effectively came up with a different set of given circumstances for each universe in the play. There were about forty five and they would come up with a different set of back stories that in some cases would be widely different and very similar and they effectively, Mike and the actors that is, did that for every universe in the play and it was mapped out on the walls.



How did you feel about that as a writer?

I always plan quite a lot so I had done a similar thing. I stuck stuff all over my walls and tried to work out what could be different in this world, but I love all that, so I tried to stay quite quiet when they undertook that process. I would only really say something if they came up with something that was widely off key, like saying that Marianne and Roland had different jobs or something. In the end, the actor has to make it their character.

Once you found the form, did you write it quickly?

I actually wrote most of it in Georgia, when I was working with the International Department at The Royal Court. I was really jet-lagged and I couldn't sleep, so I would work from two till four in the morning. The first bit in the play is really stupid when Marianne talks about licking her elbow but when I wrote it I was a bit woozy and at the time I thought it was really funny, from then I wrote the first draft in two weeks and then after that it took a period of months.

What would you like the audience to take away from your exploration of Marianne and Roland's different worlds?

With Constellations I found the theory really interesting, this was because in some ways I found it quite moving knowing that someone who had died could be living in a different universe. It felt romantic yet unnerving because I'll never know. There's a moment in the play in the biopsy section where all the situations are bad news where she is terminally ill, yet there is one where the tumour is benign. That is my favourite bit as she is completely fine; there was something about the finite of life. Her journey is about her expecting she is going to die, it changes her and their relationship. I was interested in examining the scope of Marianne and Roland's personality, because anatomically they are composed of the same elements, yet slightly rearranged in another universe, I didn't want them to be completely different as I could release the audience from any sense of emphasising with the causality of what they're doing.



What aspect of the play did you enjoy the most?

The actors. It's always so much fun. Rafe is really funny as is Sally. Also the design, it's the first thing I have worked on where there was nothing about the play that necessarily meant there was a design feature that had to occur, there didn't have to be a kitchen, there didn't have to be a chair, I love what Tom did and how imaginative it was, how releasing it was, I didn't imagine anything like that. Also Lee the lightning designer he has a background in dance so he was great in lighting bodies and movement, instead of faces, which was great. I loved how releasing the play was for everyone else and that in a way, they could do whatever they felt was imaginatively accurate and interesting rather than having to be literal about it at any point and that goes for the actors too, they could make their own choices.

INTERVIEW WITH LUCY CULLINGFORD, MOVEMENT DIRECTOR:

When you first read *Constellations*, what excited you about the play?

I think all the different possibilities and all the different choices that you could apply to different ways of playing the scene. It was a script that was open to interpretation so it was up to us in the rehearsal room to make choices which way the actors would play a scene. It's really nice to explore a relationship, boy meets girls, boy breaks up etc. The layers of the piece were quite complicated and mathematical and it took me a while to separate a specific universe, it was very layered and textured.

Could you describe the initial ideas you and Mike had about the plays different universes?

In the beginning we were trying to wonder about how much movement the play could take, whether it would be effective to look at the idea of two atoms moving in space and what the space would dictate, there was another question as to how the geography of each space could be anchored for the actors.

How did the ideas change during the rehearsal process?

When we started with the text, I guess it grew by what the actors brought to it and how they interpreted it. We began to piece things together through them and their process. Things just evolve when it comes to movement.

What work did you do with the actors to help them differentiate from one universe to another?

We looked at how we could make each universe shift clear for the audience and what the language and vocabulary could be to make that happen. Mike wanted to locate each section in a kind of specific context so then it was about working with the actors to unpick the intentions from each scene and what choices that made in terms of the characters and if those physical shifts suited the intention of the scene the characters motivation through the scene.

What will help people understand the plays unique form and what did you find challenging about that?

The opening gesture of each shift or universe paints and locates the audience as to where they are in the play; I hope that gives people an idea of where we are in the story. My biggest challenge on this play was choices. There could be infinite choices. There were many different layers and tempos that went along with defining the different versions of their characters. The challenge was finding the shades of the characters and making sure the space was animated and dynamic enough to tell the story as well as space.

What did you enjoy most about the play?

Life. I love how close to life it is, you can relate to both characters in the play, we bumble along in our life's, meet people, it's a reflection of how we see our self's. It gets you thinking about whether this is happening in several different locations at once.

Interviewed and Transcribed by Ben Summers

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES:

In the rehearsal process the creative team worked with the actors to explore the text and the different Multiverse in which it is set. They experimented with changing the focus, level and tension in each new world.

As a warm up activity explore the notion of tension using Jacque Lecoq's Seven States of Tension. Using the space around you, walk around being aware of the way your body moves to display different states of tensions. Once you have played around with each tension, appoint a group leader to randomly call out any given state from 1 to 7 to discover different movements and the way the body responds to the transitions between each tension.

Seven States of Tension

1. Exhausted or catatonic.

The Jellyfish. There is no tension in the body at all. Begin in a complete state of relaxation. If you have to move or speak, it is a real effort. See what happens when you try to speak.

2. Laid back

The "Californian" Many people live at this level of tension. Everything you say is cool, relaxed, probably lacking in credibility. The casual throw-away line – "I think I'll go to bed now".

3. Neutral or the "Economic"

You are totally present and aware. It is the state of tension before something happens. Think of a cat sitting comfortably on a wall, ready to leap up if a bird comes near. You move with no story behind your movement.

4. Alert or Curious.

Look at things. Sit down. Stand up. Indecision

5. Suspense

Is there a bomb in the room? The crisis is about to happen. All the tension is in the body, concentrated between the eyes. There's a delay to your reaction. The body reacts.

6. Passionate

There is a bomb in the room. The tension has exploded out of the body. Anger, fear, hilarity, despair. It's difficult to control.

7. Tragic.

The bomb is about to go off! Body can't move. Petrified. The body is solid tension.

SCENE STUDY:

In relation to the text, apply the technique of *Seven States of Tension* to the following two scenes. How can you use different states of tension to show the difference in multiverses? Decide on different states of tension for Roland and Marianne and apply them to each scene. Keep the character the same but establish a different way of exploring the universe in which it is set. Remember that the world changes but the characters remain the same. Also try experimenting with changing the levels and focus in each scene.

SCENE A

Roland. I'm Roland.
Marianne. Marianne.
Roland. Shame about the rain.
Marianne. Nothing worse than a soggy barbecue.
Roland. So are you, are you a friend of Jane's or-
Marianne. No, Jane, yeah. We were at college together.
Roland. Right.
Marianne. Yourself?
Roland. My wife used to work with Jane.
Marianne. Your elbows, try licking them.

SCENE B

Roland. I'm Roland.
Marianne. Marianne.
Roland. Shame about the rain.
Marianne. Nothing worse than a soggy barbecue.
Roland. So are you, are you a friend of Jane's or...?
Marianne. Who's Jane?
Roland. Jane's the- She's the lady having the barbecue?
Marianne. Oh, right, Christ, no. I was just walking past and I saw a load of free booze and sausages. I'm joking.

FURTHER READING:

For this section of the pack please find documents for further reading.

Quantum Physics, String Theory & Related Media Links:

The theory of everything by Michael Duff in the New Scientist. 2nd June 2011 Edition.

The popular physicist Brian Greene has adapted his work *The Elegant Universe* to television, in three parts. These are available. Brian Greene's work was influential to Nick Payne's thinking in writing *Constellations*.

http://www.ted.com/talks/sean_carroll_distant_time_and_the_hint_of_a_multiverse.html

A very easy to understand theoretical physicist called Michio Kaku, who is recognizable from lots of TV physics docs speaks about the Multiverse here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZiROWO6iVs>

In relation to the character of Marianne please find the relevant links to her condition in the play. During rehearsals for *Constellations*, the cast and director watched a documentary on assisted suicide by British author Terry Pratchett. <http://www.favupload.com/video/6468/>

EDUCATION AT THE ROYAL COURT

The Royal Court is a centre for excellence and innovation in theatre-making, and the Education Department aims to stimulate and inspire students of all ages, encouraging learning and participation in every aspect of the theatre's work, from the process of writing plays to pioneering rehearsal room techniques.

We offer a wide-ranging programme of work designed to open up and de-mystify the craft of making theatre. Royal Court Education activities include:

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Royal Court in a Day Study Day

Drama School in a Day Study Day

Performing Arts Business Study Day

A full description of all education events can be found on the education page of the Royal Court web-site, www.royalcourttheatre.com. If you would like more information, please e-mail Lynne Gagliano, Education Associate, at lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com or phone 020 7565 5174.

The *Constellations* Background Pack compiled and written by Ben Summers, Royal Court Education Assistant and Sam Caird, Assistant Director for *Constellations*. Original Production photos by Simon Kane and portrait photos of Sally Hawkins and Ralph Spall by photo by Johan Persson © 2012.

