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1. Introduction

The Choreographic Workshop provides secondary dance students with the unique opportunity to develop their choreographic skills under the guidance of industry professionals. Led by Artistic Director Shaun Parker and his dancers, the practical workshop introduces choreographic tools and tasks taken from the Company's production The Yard. Students will experience new ways to generate interesting movement material that can be used for solo, duet and group formations. This process will investigate dramaturgy also. In other words, what can abstract movement say about the human condition? What does the choreography mean?

This pack has been designed to provide you with the background information on Shaun Parker & Company and The Yard and will provide an overview of the workshop you will participate in. It will also include additional processes to consider, as well as extra exercises and choreographic ideas that you can work on back at school.
## 2. Curriculum Links

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3. About Shaun Parker & Company

Shaun Parker and Company is one of Australia’s leading contemporary dance companies; it is an innovator and pusher of boundaries. Its work takes place on the stages of major international festivals as a result of its artistic and dramaturgical rigour but resonates just as strongly in public spaces, regional Australia and among high school students. The work is widely accessible and has broad appeal and its intrinsic relationship to music is a particular feature.

Currently in its fifth year of operation, the Company is based in the Arts Bunker, located in the Seymour Centre theatre complex on the University of Sydney campus. The Company is still project based, meaning that the cast and crew are contracted per show or tour. In the future the Company aims to expand and have their own premises and studio, an education officer and management team, with all the performers on full-time contracts. All this would allow the company to have four or five of Shaun’s major works on the touring circuit at one time.

The Company has toured to Germany, Serbia, Austria, Ireland, The Netherlands, France, Belgium, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, USA and across Australia.

The Company provides extensive workshops and mentorships for young dancers and choreographers, including its TRIGGER program for fresh dance graduates, and its CAPTIVATE program in high schools.
4. About Shaun Parker

Shaun Parker is an Australian choreographer and director who makes and tours dance work all over the world. After studying a science degree at Monash University, he rediscovered dance, having loved it as a teenager. He went on to train at VCA (Victorian College of the Arts) and has been in work ever since, as a choreographer, dancer, physical theatre performer and counter tenor. Shaun has performed with numerous companies including Sydney Theatre Company, Meryl Tankard Australian Dance Theatre, Force Majeure (Sydney), Sasha Waltz (Berlin), Company ALIAS (Geneva) and Meredith Monk (New York). He is the recipient of many awards including the prestigious Australian Dance Award for Best Independent Production [for This Show is About People], Outstanding Achievement in Youth and Community Dance (for The Yard), Green Room Award/Shirley McKechnie Choreographic Award (for AM I), the Argus Angel Award (for Trolleys in the UK), and the 2015 NSW Creative Achiever Award.

Choreo-chronicle of Shaun Parker's work

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5. Introducing the dancers

Daniel Bernal

Darryl Bernal

David Mavisa

Jason Reyes

Libby Montilla

Shaun Parker
6. Background on Shaun Parker's choreographic process

The tasks that will be taught in the Choreographic Workshop come from the making of The Yard, choreographed by Shaun Parker in collaboration with the dancers. One way that Parker generates movement material is to devise movement tasks for the dancers to explore. Another way is to devise conceptual and storytelling tasks that are presented to the dancers. With both of these processes, Parker then shapes, crafts, extends and layers the chosen responses, whilst at the same time working on the dramaturgy of the scene. i.e. What does it mean? How is it affecting the viewer? This process takes place over many weeks and Parker constantly reviews each scene, as well as considering the overall arch of the full production.

Description of The Yard
The Yard was choreographed by Shaun Parker in collaboration with dance students drawn from a wide range of schools in Western Sydney: from Emu Plains to Granville, Castle Hill to Mount Druitt. With each student selected for their capacity to work with ideas as young collaborators rather than simply dance the steps, Shaun has fused contemporary dance and street styles into an exciting and robust contemporary dance theatre work.

Drawing inspiration from William Golding’s Lord of the Flies and its analysis of human behaviour, The Yard extrapolates these themes and breathes new life into them by way of the Australian school yard. Ultimately finding unity in the diversity of culture, gender and ethnicity that pulsate in the school yard. The Yard is taut with both the tension and humour of conflicts played out every day even as it celebrates the extraordinary in the ordinary. Nick Wales provides an arresting electro-acoustic score for the performance.

Shaun began the first stage of the creation of The Yard as a series of workshops and dance classes. After one month of this process, Shaun was very impressed by the ideas that were emerging and decided very quickly that a full-length dance work was emerging. Shaun then created a one-hour full-length work called The Yard, which was presented at the Seymour Centre in Sydney to critical acclaim and then toured across Australia.

Movement Style
The point of departure for The Yard was the real-life, personal experience of the dancers in the school yard. Parker would work with the dancers with these stories and concepts and physicalise them into dance and movement vignettes, always considering the dramaturgy of the scene at the same time.

The choreographic style incorporated the following forms, both pure dance and sport movement, all layered and crafted to create theatrical scenes:

- Break dance
- Locking
- Popping
- Strobing
- Krumping
- Contemporary dance
- Ballet
- Gestural motifs
- Tutting
- Soccer skills
- Basketball skills
- Scooter riding
- Pogo stick jumping
- Table tennis skills
- Acrobatics
Design
The Yard takes place in an Australian schoolyard. Shaun Parker designed the set that features a large steel slide and a steel bench. He wanted to keep the design simple, creating a metaphoric schoolyard that could exist anywhere. This design provides the theatrical canvas for the ideas of the work to take place.

Music
The Yard is set to an electro-acoustic score, composed by Australian composer Nick Wales. For Shaun, this sound score is a fundamental element of the work and was created especially for The Yard. Nick is a classical violinist and an electronic composer and his music utilises carefully crafted electronica with acoustic instruments such as piano, violin and harp. Nick has also composed the music for Shaun’s other works AM I, SPILL, Trolleys, Love Instalment, TUT and HAPPY AS LARRY.

Costume
The costumes in the work are real school uniforms taken from the schools from which the students come. Shaun wanted the different school uniforms to represent different ‘tribes’ and groups within The Yard. The idea of forming tribes is also apparent in William Golding’s novel The Lord of the Flies.

Warming Up
Before you start these creative tasks it is important to warm up properly so that you can work safely.

Shaun explains how his company warm up every day: “Our company always undertakes a 75-90 minute warm up at the beginning of every rehearsal. A basic week would include a yoga class, two contemporary classes, a contact improvisation class and sometimes a ballet class. We find the Astanga yoga a very powerful style of yoga that is extremely suitable for dancers. Likewise, Iyenga yoga provides a very good yogic base. Our contact improvisation classes ensure that our partnering skills are finely tuned. Our contemporary classes include floor work to develop skills moving into and out of the floor, as well as a number of spine, arm and leg exercises. Our classes provide a solid base for the technique of the legs and core strength.”
7. Workshop Descriptions

These are all tasks that we used in The Yard and focus on generating choreographic movement material as well as conceptual scenes that tell a story.

A: Duos - Buckle and Curve
In this task, choose a partner, and begin to generate movement material that is instigated by the movement principles ‘buckle and curve’.

A buckle movement could be considered as any movement where the joints or parts of the body break down or deconstruct. A curve is considered as exactly that, where any part of the body, or multiple parts of the body, trace a circular pattern in space.

As with any duet, the dancers’ bodies will interact and affect each other, causing a further cause and effect, which in turn will lead to new choreographic possibilities.

For inspiration, consider some of the following ideas:
- What happens when the bodies interconnect?
- How can you use momentum?
- How can you stay true to the original task but still maintain freedom within the movement?
- Who leads the movement at each key point in the choreography?
- Are there moments where both are driving the movement?
- Have you utilise all of your body parts and joints?

B: Group - Buckle and Curve with Manipulate, Shift and Glide
In this task, get into small groups of 5 or 6, and begin to generate movement material instigated by the ‘buckle and curve’ principal. However this time, allow the movement concepts of ‘manipulate, shift and glide’ to drive the movement as well.

To manipulate could be considered as moving or manipulating another dancer’s body or limbs. It could also be considered as manipulating parts of your own body. To shift is to transfer your own body weight or someone else's body weight. To glide is to create with your body or limbs, a gliding motion across the space, almost like a painter’s brush stroke.

As with the duet, cause and effect moments and movement patterns will emerge, however this time it will be more complex, with many bodies interacting.

Here are some hints and extra ideas to consider:
- Perhaps start with one dancer, who sets the choreography into action.
- Listen with your body, very carefully about what body information is passed onto you.
  Eg. How is someone else manipulating you?
- Create small sections, and then go back over them, such that everyone knows the order and trigger points of the choreography.
- Keep authentic to the task objectives: ‘buckle, curve, manipulate, shift and glide’, yet still retain a freedom in the movements’
- Make sure the group is ‘all on the same page’ when consolidating each section.
- Think about variations of dynamic, including speed, stillness and accents, both staccato (short and sharp) and legato (flowing).
C: Group - Conceptual/Dramaturgical scene
In this task, get into small groups of five or six and discuss any incidents that have happened to you at school that have had a big impact on you. Take these stories, and then physicalise them into a movement scene, creating a short group work that describes this event in movement and dance.

Devices and hints:
- Use any form of movement or dance style within your work. It can range from ballet, contemporary, funk, hip hop, break-dance, krumping, tutting, acrobatics or even Irish dancing!
- Have a clear objective that everyone understands within the group.
- Sometimes it is useful to have a series of ‘trigger points’ or ‘chapters’ within the work. This is quite often called ‘structured improvisation’.
- Some movement sections will be tightly choreographed, whereas others may be improvised around an idea.
- Feel free to use any of the props in your scene: BMX bike, soccer ball, basket ball, pom poms, scooters or pogo stick.
8. Ideas for further choreographic development

Solo – Buckle and Curve
Using the Buckle and Curve duos that you created in the workshop, now perform the identical movement again but this time without your partner! Try and keep the movement as close to the original as possible. Now - take this further and develop your solo by adding a spin or jump or by extending the original movements to their maximum length and capacity. Play around with incorporating the spine into the movement as well as full limb extensions within the choreography. Occasionally, break the original movement rule and add in your own ‘motifs’ within this. Work hard at making it ‘your own’ and it helps to keep revisiting the solo to allow it to develop and sit comfortably on your body.

Other movement styles
The Yard draws on a variety of movement styles from both contemporary and street culture. New street forms such as Tutting, krumping, shuffling, jerking, locking and popping are utilised.

Task
Choose one of the above movement forms and research this style on the internet. We have provided a hint on one of the styles below:

Tutting
Tutting is utilised within The Yard and features the individual styles of each of the dancers. Tutting is the special use of very quick and intricate hand gestures and has recently emerged as a popular style in street dance. There are several types of Tutting: Boxing, Hand Tutting, and Finger Tutting.
9. Suggestions for discussions

Many socio-political themes were investigated in The Yard including:
• Life in the schoolyard
• Group behaviour
• Loneliness
• Bullying
• Power
• Resilience
• Cultural differences
• Competition
• Survival

Additional Reading:
Teachers and students may wish to read and discuss William Golding’s The Lord of the Flies. Can you see any themes of The Lord of the Flies within The Yard? Discuss.
10. Q & A with Shaun Parker

We ask Shaun Parker a few questions to find out more about his own life:

Where did you grow up?
I was born and grew up in a small country town called Mildura, which sits on the Murray River in North West Victoria.

So, what was life like in the schoolyard you grew up in?
Life was fun for me in the schoolyard. I loved sport, yet I also loved music, drama and dance. Playtime involved soccer, football, monkey bars, handball, 4-Square, rehearsal for school plays and musicals. It also involved intense interaction with others, including competition, one-upmanship, fun, tricking each other, chasing each other, and at certain times, struggling for survival!

What were you like as a teenager? Every parent’s dream or nightmare?
A bit of both really – like every teenager. As a child becomes an adult and begins to find their own feet there is bound to be teething problems, self-analysis, collision, rebellion, and celebration. I was always an individual thinker, so I suppose that was challenging for others and even for myself in many ways, particularly in a small country town!

What did you want to be when you grew up?
I remember wanting to be many things – a lawyer, an actor, a speech pathologist, a teacher and a businessman.

What have you learnt about life along the way?
That the meaning of life is life! And that it is up to you as an individual to spread goodwill, and to create your own positive world around you and others.

When and where do you find peace of mind?
I love yoga class. I love swimming at Coogee Beach in Sydney and taking my daughter for swims as she clings to my back. She calls me a dolphin!

What most depresses you about life/the planet/people?
It is very challenging to think about how war still dominates certain areas of our planet, and governments spend billions of dollars on weapons and war, when there are people starving and living in such poor areas. It is difficult to think that money has become so important in our modern life, when we could all be much happier living a simpler life.

What terrifies you?
Not being able to protect my daughter if she is in danger.

What keeps you awake at night?
Thinking about my daughter who has a disability (hemiplegia, which is a mild form of cerebral palsy) with her left arm and leg. Hoping that the treatment and physiotherapy we provide for her is working accordingly. Hoping that she will have a happy future and be able to achieve her dreams.

What is your most treasured possession?
Photographs of my mother and my family and friends, and of all of our amazing adventures we have had together.
You are stranded on a desert island. What music do you take? And which book?
What luxury! I’d take my composers’ music (Nick Wales & Bree van Reyk), Sia, some cool electronic and some Café del Mar compilations. Also Kronos Quartet and some baroque music by Handel, Purcell and Monteverdi. Book – I’d take The Prophet. And further studies on the Enneagram delving into psychological aspects of personality types. Am I allowed a luxury item? In which case my art house DVD film collection.

I’m a celebrity….get me out of here! Love it or loathe it?
Accept it as a part of life, loving it sometimes and loathing it at others!

Cats or dogs?
I love dogs. Apparently ferrets make very loyal pets as well! Although I also love Burmese cats – they have amazing temperaments and they make loving companions. We used to have one and it used to follow me to the shops and run behind me as I rode my bike…very much like a dog.

Urban city dweller or countryside lover?
Creative projects in the urban city….and country retreats for a break!

How do you want to be remembered?
For creating works of art and dance that make people feel happy to be alive and to enlighten them in some way! To help them understand life beyond their day to day happenings. For creating new opportunities for young artists and their artistic pursuits. For being a father that provided the atmosphere for my daughter to gain the most out of her life.

If you could say something to somebody that you never had the chance to – what would it be and to whom?
Pina Bausch – thank you for creating a whole new set of possibilities for dance!

Who do you owe the most to and for what?
My mother and father for giving me life and for working so hard to provide myself and my brother and sister with care and with opportunities.

Ten years from now, where are you and what are you doing?
I will be in Sydney with my dance company creating new works and touring past works. I will be studying film part time as my long term desire is to direct feature films which are driven by dance and which feature dance in their narratives.

Favourite smell? View? Colour?
Smell – the sea salt breeze.
View – watching my daughter smile and laugh.
Colour – the range of ‘blues’ in the world.

What three things do you always take on tour with you?
My laptop.
My yoga mat.
My oil burner.

How would you define fun?
To be intellectually challenged, to be moved to tears and to laugh uncontrollably with friends and family.
11. Article & Interview with Shaun Parker

Shaun got into dance as a youngster by chance. “Well it sort of came about by accident,” he re-
calls. As a child Shaun had a severe stutter, which had led to therapy (singing and drama lessons)
however he had never tried dance classes until, aged 13, he watched his sister performing in a
local dance school performance. Afterwards he started “pulling off the moves” as he describes it,
turning double pirouettes and drawing the attention of the teacher. “She sort of recruited me, so
that’s how I started.”

**How would you describe your style of working as a choreographer?**

I work very strongly with dance, music and theatre. I believe the three elements are intrinsically
linked to create a new dance work. When combining these genres, I am very particular that every
aspect is used for a reason and particular to each character’s dramaturgical journey. Through ex-
tensive improvisation and experimentation, we create scenes using these dance genres and then
mould and ‘fine-tune’ them to align with the conceptual aspects of the work.

The Yard incorporates a variety of dance styles (ballet, hip hop, etc) which includes a ‘street’ style
that is practised, and has been developed by largely ‘untrained’ Western Sydney school students.

**As a choreographer how do go about combining such styles within a piece?**

I work very much with individual qualities of each performer, building on their strengths, and
 teaching them new skills throughout the creative process. We always start with a concept or a
narrative first, and then layer the movement styles into each dance scene.

**Can you tell us what your inspiration was for The Yard?**

The Yard was inspired by the William Golding’s novel The Lord of the Flies. I extrapolated the
thematic elements of this novel and placed them within the theatrical world of an Australian play-
ground. The themes observe the nature of human behaviour, and in a more crystallised sense,
 the behaviour of teenagers within a school yard. The investigation of such themes also comment
 on society as a whole.

**What are some of the challenges that you have faced with the combination of classical and
street styles of dance?**

I feel that with any movement style the challenge can be with ‘intention’. Why does one move
in a certain way? How do they react in the theatrical space with others? What is the purpose?
What narrative are you working with? Once I establish these facets, the theatrical scenes seem
to fall into place. Likewise, I see the performers respond in an honest and authentic way.

**What and/or who inspires you to create work? Who are your favourite choreographers?**

I am inspired by the human condition within our modern society. What makes us tick? How can
we understand ourselves better? How can we expand human consciousness through shedding
light on some of the various aspects of human nature? I aim in my work to make people think,
feel, laugh and cry. My favourite choreographers are Pina Bausch, Lloyd Newson, Alain Platel,
Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, and Hofesh Shechter. My favourite film directors are Lars von Trier, Quentin
Tarantino, and the Cohen Brothers.

**Where do you see your work heading in the next few years, physically and creatively?**

There is talk about touring The Yard internationally within the next few years and this will likely
involve taking Australia teenagers overseas and working with teenagers from low socio-economic
areas from different countries. This will be a truly wonderful project – the integration and creative
process involving teenagers from different countries. I can envision it being a vital cultural
exchange.
How do you feel about your life in dance and theatre?
I can’t think of doing anything else… I live it, it’s part of where my creative powers come into play, working with others, the excitement of creating a new piece out of nothing, and thinking, “Okay, how do we carve a new world for these ideas.”

What type of dancers are you drawn to?
I’m always drawn to dancers who look like normal people. They are living, breathing artists, not just technicians. For me they are more than dancing bodies. I think of them as performers and co-devisors – much of my work in its early stages comes from play and improvisation. Were it not for their generosity of spirit at this stage of the creation, we would have no piece. I see my role as to shape, guide, layer, rip apart and rework… in order to give them the opportunity to go deep into the material and have real authenticity with it. Although they can pull off amazing dance steps in many different genres, they also have a depth, an ability to stand still on a stage and carry a whole scene. They may not always come with a ‘perfect dancer body’ in terms of technique, but this means they have a depth to them, as they’ve not been reliant purely on technique to get them by. They are all incredible individuals – all strong personalities and free thinkers. I am magnetically drawn to this type of performer.

What advice would you give to young people who are looking to form their own company?
I think dancers should dance as long as possible. Learn from master teachers and choreographers, whilst gradually doing work of their own. I also believe good business and grant application writing skills are very helpful indeed!
Describe what The Yard is about for you?
The Yard for me started as another school dance commitment that allowed me to extend my level of training. More rehearsals on a weekly basis allowed me to keep busy during the week. As it progressed it was all about trying new things, trying dance-theatre to choreograph, and to learn about a combination of yoga and Pilates. As rehearsals broadened to different schools, The Yard became more about being a part of a family. We were all from such different dance worlds, yet became so close as friends. Some days we spent over twelve hours together between travel, rehearsals and performing in The Yard and this experience extended to be not just about a passion for dance but about a family who had a shared passion for dance.

What is your favourite moment in the piece?
In the performance of The Yard, my favourite moment would be the final scene: collapsing to the power of the paper aeroplane. The strongest concept, for me, is portrayed in this scene -"people are unaware of the power and consequences of a single action". I feel that this is imperative to be incorporated because of the rippling effect one person's action can have, particularly in the schoolyard. Whether it be a complement, a rumour or spiteful words, a punch, a kick or a kiss, the effect each has can be immense, greater than that known to the instigator.

What's life like for you in your schoolyard?
School life for me differed as time progressed. Initially we started off in cliques, (the smart girls, the pretty girls, the pretty and smart girls, etc), and our friendship groups never spoke to the others. It was like a strict law and code of behaviour. As we got older the competition arose, we all wanted to be the prettiest, smartest and most talented group and so rivalry was at a peak. Cat fights, vicious arguments all the time (year 9 and 10 were the worst), but as senior years approached, so did everyone's maturity and realisation of how ridiculous we were as teenage girls. Everyone became friends and it’s almost as if no-one ever had any major disagreements. Now our school life depends on the time of year; there is exam time when everyone is too stressed to take notice of what's going on; the build up to exam time; a time where everyone takes their stress out on everyone else which results in drama that is soon forgotten; and the time in between. That’s just our year though. As a Year 12 student you see a lot of what’s going on and feel like you should be privileged. You watch the corridors as the seniors walk by and see the Year 7s being fearful of them not moving, not daring to sit on the back of the bus or sit on a year 12s table. We watch as the Years 9 and 10s argue over boys and laugh to ourselves.

Could you describe working with Shaun from a performer's perspective?
Working with Shaun has been a great experience. It is not him just throwing choreography at us. He gives us concepts to develop through movement and workshops and encourages us to explore our artistic side. He has taught us about discipline and the necessity of technique, strength and stamina and assisted us in building up all three. He extends his assistance to dance life beyond The Yard, giving advice on what training we should undertake and potential career paths, all whilst encouraging us to be confident in being creative.

How would you describe Shaun’s movement style in three words?

What part of this tour/show takes you the furthest out of your comfort zone?
Having to do hip hop and street style of dance because it is so far removed from my contemporary training. It has been good to experience it as it broadens my ability and versatility as a dancer.
What is the best thing anyone has ever said to you about The Yard?
The best thing that anyone has ever commented on is the local raw talent that allowed the show to come to life. People I know were amazed by the level of talent that had been creatively collaborated into one piece.

Libby Montilla
What's your favourite moment in the piece?
The tribal scene and the ending with the paper aeroplane.

What was life like for you in your school yard?
Life in the schoolyard was very chilled; different cliques, different people, different races. Everyone was different, some were nice, others were rough.

Could you describe working with Shaun from a performer's perspective?
Yeah, it’s great. Shaun gives us an opportunity to use our own styles and his creative ideas make our styles work together.

How would you describe Shaun's movement style in three words?

What is the best thing anyone has ever said to you about The Yard?
‘Your skills are outstanding.’

What’s your take on The Yard’s look at the Australian schoolyard?
Seeing individuals on the yard, facing racism, bullying, friendship, and lo

Jayson Reyes
Jayson, what's your favourite moment in the piece?
Almost everything but the tribal scene at the end is what touches me the most

Could you describe working with Shaun from a performer’s perspective?
I would describe Shaun as well prepared in his set programs, very creative, brilliant, smart, versatile.

How would you describe Shaun’s movement style in three words?

What is the best thing anyone has ever said to you about The Yard?
That it’s very creative, well performed, emotionally powerful, incredible stunts, and that the dancing is amazing!
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