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CANADA
THEATRE

MOTEL

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CAUTION

ARE WE COOL NOW?

STUDY GUIDE

Thank you for participating in Western Canada Theatre's matinee programming! We would like you and your students to get the most out of your experience with us. Included in this package is some inside information exclusive to teachers and students, discussion questions, classroom activities, and online resources. We hope you find them useful before and after seeing the show.

Please take a few minutes to review appropriate theatre etiquette with your students. While clapping and laughing are most appropriate for the theatre, whispering, talking, and excessive movement during the show is distracting to others in the audience and our actors on stage.

Audience members are encouraged to get comfortable, remove coats, use the washroom and turn all electronic devices OFF before a show begins. Please remind your students that texting is not allowed during the show.

Remembering theatre etiquette makes the show more enjoyable for everyone!

Are We Cool Now?

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Production Personnel

Cast

Ben Elliot	Man
Penelope Corrin	Woman
Michael Turner	Guitar, Bass
Kris Ruston	Percussion
Brandon Melanson	Guitar, Bass (May 2)
Sean Schneider	Percussion (May 2)

Creative Team

Amiel Gladstone	Director
Ben Elliott	Musical Director
Lauchlin Johnston	Set and Lighting Designer
Cindy Wiebe	Costume Designer
Lucy Pratt-Johnson	Stage Manager
Christine Leroux	Apprentice Stage Manager

Western Canada Theatre Staff

Daryl Cloran
Lori Marchand

Artistic Director
General Manager

Administration

Ron Thompson
Marilyn Zuke
Catrina Crowe
Bryce Herman
Alexis Tuytten
Terri Runnalls
Sylvia Gropp

Financial Manager
Associate Financial Manager
Marketing & Communications Director
Fundraiser and Marketing Consultant
Special Events & Fund Development Coordinator
Education Coordinator
Special Events and Administration Assistant

Production

Ross Nichol
Heather Cant
Gal Minnes
Brian St-Amand
Cindy Wiebe
Andrew Wallace
Jungyeon Ji
Darren John
Roya Mole

Production Manager
Associate Artistic Director
Production Technical Director
Sagebrush Technical Director
Head of Wardrobe
Head of Carpentry
Head of Properties
Technician
Technician

Facilities

Heather Regan
Jean Choi
Allison Clow
Phyllis Mader
Carling Ryan
Melissa Thomas

Client and Audience Services Manager
Volunteer Coordinator
Guest Services
Guest Services
Guest Services
Guest Services

Kamloops Live Box Office

Janet Riggs
Judy Day
Geraldine Penny

Box Office Manager
Box Office Staff
Box Office Staff

Behind the Scenes: The Creators



Text: Amiel Gladstone

Amiel Gladstone (born 1972) is a Canadian playwright and director. A graduate of the University of Victoria, Gladstone is a founder of Theatre SKAM, an alternative theatre company in Victoria, BC, and is the former Artistic Associate at Caravan Farm Theatre and the Belfry Theatre. Gladstone's plays have been produced across

Canada, as well as in New York, Philadelphia, Colmar, France, and Bucharest, Romania. He has worked as a director or playwright for numerous companies, including Vancouver Playhouse, Arts Club Theatre, Touchstone Theatre, Alberta Theatre Projects, working on plays by people such as Veda Hille, Bill Richardson, Sean Dixon, Morris Panych, Melissa James Gibson. He currently lives in Vancouver.

Gladstone has also worked as a voice director for the English adaptation of several Japanese anime TV series, including *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Mobile Suit Gundam*.

In 2007, Coach House Books published a collection of Gladstone's plays, entitled *Hippies and Bolsheviks and Other Plays*.

Amiel Gladstone's Plays

Smalltown: A pickup Musical

East O' the Sun, West O' the Moon

We Three Queens

The Black Box

Lena's Car

The Wedding Pool

Hippies and Bolsheviks

My Three Sisters (an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*)



Music and Lyrics: Dan Mangan

Daniel Mangan was born on April 28, 1983 in Smithers, BC. Raised in a household where instruments were always available, music became an obvious pastime for Mangan and his two siblings. He was influenced by his parents' record collection, especially the music of Nick Drake and the Beatles. At sixteen, Mangan started a band called Basement Suite with some classmates and played gigs at local community centres. He released his

first album while attending the University of British Columbia.

Dan Mangan is a two-time JUNO award winning and two-time Polaris Music Prize listed musician and songwriter. He lives in Vancouver, British Columbia with his wife and son. With the help of Jesse Zubot, Mangan scored *Hector And The Search For Happiness*, a feature film starring Simon Pegg. Dan has also infrequently been a contributing writer for some publications such as Huffington Post Canada and The Guardian (Arts section).

Mangan is currently working with artists John Walsh, Gordon Grdina, Kenton Loewen and JP Carter, Jesse Zubot and Tyson Naylor. His musical endeavors now include the above artists and they are known as Dan Mangan and Blacksmith. Their album, *Club Meds* was recently released.

Dan Mangan's Albums

EP's

All At Once (2003)

Roboteering (2009)

Radicals (2012)

LP's

Postcards and Daydreaming (2005)

Nice, Nice, Very Nice (2009)

Robots vs Indie Queens (2010)

Oh Fortune (2011)

Sold (2012)

Club Meds – Dan Mangan and Blacksmith (2015)

Synopsis

Set in the modern day, *Are We Cool Now?* Is about the relationship between a man and a woman. The story is intermixed with songs written by British Columbia musician Dan Mangan. We are taken on a road trip of the lives of two people in their early 30's. They meet, they fall in love, but find that life takes them to different places. The story captures the uncertainty of relationships, the what ifs, and the feelings of deep love.

The characters are highly relatable characters due to their actions and their dialogue within the play. The woman is eager to explore the world, while the man is pulled home due to a family illness.

Are We Cool Now? reminds us how we long for a sense of home, but cannot wait to explore the world.

An Interview with Amiel Gladstone

Western Canada Theatre was able to catch up with Amiel Gladstone while he was working on *Are We Cool Now?* While in the middle of another draft, the playwright was able to answer some questions.

Q: What came first, the music or the words? Did you wish to always write a play of this nature and was inspired by Dan Mangan's music? Or did you hear his music and thought it told a great story that you wanted to share with others?

Dan's music came first. For a while I have wondered if there was any way to create the feeling of a concert in a live play? That feeling we get when watching a great band – it has an emotional weight to it, without narrative – was there a way to that in theatre? My friends and I enjoyed Dan's music, so I thought this feels like the perfect content to put this idea on stage. Then the songs themselves are so evocative of someone trying to find their way in the world, full of road trips and longing, the story just kind of emerged from that.

Q: Did you have any conversations with Dan Mangan to determine which songs to use in the play? If so, did he share with you his feelings on his songs and you blended that with your writing, or did you listen and make your own inferences? Why did you choose those particular songs?

I talked to Dan a few times about which songs would fit. I just made my own choices. In fact for the most part I didn't want to know what Dan felt the songs were about so that I could not be swayed by that. These songs all fit into the story quite naturally. I knew if we were trying to force a song in because we loved the melody or something, but the lyrics weren't quite right, then it wasn't meant to be in the show.

Q: Why did you strategically choose to leave them nameless?

*It is funny, there seems to be a trend to not name characters right now – see the Broadway musical *Once* for instance. The truth is, there were no names in the songs. It felt like adding names added something that wasn't a good fit.*

Q: In the music chosen for the play, there are many references to travel. Songs often reference home, or getting back, or leaving or referring to where you've come from. Some include directions and some refer to a home base. It seems that this physical traveling must relate to the emotional traveling that the characters are experiencing. Please speak to a couple of these ideas. Why is home base and remembering where you came from so important in this script? What role does traveling play both emotionally and physically? What does having a home base and venturing out mean to you?

I travel so much for work, so the feeling of coming and going, and questions about home are big for me. I long for a house with my books, and yet I feel the pull of seeing as much of the world as possible. There's the combination of the safety of being at home and the risk of being out in the world. There are questions of identity. Am I my city? Am I my stuff? Am I the people who are around me? I think these are all really big questions that we all start having in our 20s when we start to make adult decisions and figuring out who we are, or who we want to become.

Q: I really enjoy the dialogue that your characters use and how that contributes to a real sense of familiarity for me. They seem to talk how we actually speak in day-to-day conversations. Did you make a conscious effort to have it appear that way?

I try to write dialogue that both has a quiriness, but feels like the way we speak. I want it to feel okay in the actor's mouths – that they can make it relatable so we feel like we know them.

Q: The characters seem very relatable. They seem to have a sense of uncertainty with their lives and choices. It feels very honest. Do you see yourself in these characters? How and why?

I remember my 20s as a feeling of very extreme highs and lows. Some of that felt scary. Some of it was very boring. I was trying to use my own feelings of uncertainty and joy that I felt in my own life at that time.

[Look for more comments from playwright Amiel Gladstone throughout the study guide!](#)

Activities in the Classroom

Activity #1 – Music as Inspiration

Curriculum Connections

Drama	Historical and Aesthetic Context
Arts Education	Social and Cultural Context
Language Arts	Oral Language, Reading and Viewing, Speaking and Listening
Music	Thoughts, Images and Feelings

The music of Dan Mangan inspired playwright Amiel Gladstone to create *Are We Cool Now?* On the following page is an excerpt from the script (song followed by dialogue). Print it out and distribute it to your class. Have a discussion about the connection between the song and the dialogue. Some questions to pose are: Why would the playwright choose this song to end the show? How do the song and dialogue compare to one another? Once you have had a chance to discuss this, share with your class the information below.

Gladstone chose *Basket* as the final song because it “encapsulates so much of what the play is about”. Below is an explanation from the playwright of how the song connects particularly with the final spoken scene in the play.

AG: “[Basket encapsulates] ... different points of view in terms of time, the passionate feelings, the deep love, the ideas of ‘What If,’ the danger of nostalgia, and, yes, the hopefulness against cynicism. It’s a song with all the big ideas in the play, and it felt clear that it should be at the end to leave the audience thinking about those things.”

(Excerpt from Are We Cool Now?)

We are young
We have years ahead maybe
We might fall in love
Fall apart
Fall apart

Before it ends
Well we should try to start
So I'll go but I'm telling you I don't wanna go
Could be stuck here and happy
So there's a puzzle I work on endlessly
And I've got the sides and all the corners

But there's a space
Yeah there's a space
So I'll stay but I'm telling you I don't, I don't wanna stay
So I'll brace myself against the wall and hope to god that I
Don't fall
My bones are worn, my hip won't hold

I used to be so young, how did I get so old?
Won't you take my cane and hold my hand
You're holding onto all I have
Just a basket full of memories
And I am losing more each day it seems

But if I can make it to the street
I'll steal a car or a bike whatever there is to steal
And it might get cold I just don't care
I'm going 'til I'm getting there
I'll ride my steed all through this town
'til I.....have looked I have found
Your peaceful memory

Won't you return to me?
Won't you return to me?

We are young
We have years ahead maybe
We might fall in love

W: You want to try?

M: To tell each other everything?

W: Yeah.

M: Sometimes I have the TV, radio and YouTube all running at the same time.

W: I can see you checking yourself in my sunglasses sometimes.

M: I did not come from an athletic family.

W: I keep losing sunglasses and gloves and scarves.

M: I check my phone more often than I want.

W: You aren't good with money.

M: I was excited about getting an apartment with you.

W: We don't like the same kind of pillows.

M: I don't really know how the internet works.

Blackout

Is there a song that inspires you?

Have your students each choose a song that is important to them. Have them listen to the song several times. Have them answer the following questions:

- How does this song make you feel? (happy, sad, melancholy, angry, thoughtful, frustrated, thankful, playful, energized?) Why?
- What is the song about? This can be literal or can be what the student believes it is about. Have them write a paragraph synopsis of what they believe the meaning of the song is.
- Ask students to create a short scene that depicts what they believe the song to be about. This will be simpler if they choose a small amount of characters, as the dialogue can become tricky with many characters. This should also be kept to under a page or two.

To set this up have a class conversation about how to sum up feelings into dialogue between two people. Use the above excerpt of the play and quote from playwright Amiel Gladstone to guide you. A reminder that the scene does not need to be set up, but rather can begin in the middle of things. Dialogue can be literal (pulled from the song), but can also be up for interpretation.

- Have the students find a partner or put them into small groups. Have them share their short scenes with one another. Students can read aloud or off of their papers. Have the group guess what the scenes may be referring to. Have the presenter withhold the name of their song and reveal it when the activity is complete. You can also have pairs perform or read the scenes for the class.

Activity #2 – Innovative Theatre in British Columbia

Curriculum Connections

Language Arts	Reading and Viewing
Music	Context: Self and Community
Social Studies	Identity, Society and Culture
Drama	Exploring, Drama Forms

Are We Cool Now? does not follow regular theatrical conventions. The characters break down the fourth wall and speak directly to the audience and the music is a character in itself, often drifting into the play as background ambience or being the centre of attention.

This is not the first time that our playwright has taken on unconventional theatre. Amiel Gladstone has been a part of several innovative theatre groups. He was a founding member of Theatre SKAM in Victoria, as well as an Artistic Associate at Caravan Farm Theatre, to name a few. Both of these companies are known to produce works of theatre that enjoy using a unique environment to portray their stories. These environments are integral to their theatre pieces and give the audience a unique theatrical experience.

Have your students research innovative theatre in British Columbia. There are many groups, artists and companies that have definitely looked at theatre from a different perspective. Below are a few companies to start their search, but they certainly will find more!

Theatre SKAM
Caravan Farm Theatre
PUSH Festival
Theatre Replacement
Boca del Lupo
The Only Animal
Newworld Theatre
Vancouver Theatresports League
MACHiNENOiSY

Put students into small groups for research. Have them learn the background and beginnings of these companies. Have them report back to the class on the company, as well as some of the

types of performances that they have done. Your class will be intrigued by the honest and daring work of these artists!

Discuss the ideas brought forth. Encourage a discussion around the experimental theatrical choices. Below are a few questions to get things started.

- What performances do you wish you could have seen? Why?
- Why do you think the company chose to portray their story in this unique way?
- Is this piece risky? Why? What are the artists risking by performing in this unique way?
- What do you think the artists are trying to say by going against the “norms” of theatre?
- Why is it important to have artists doing this type of theatre? What does it mean to our community and culture?

COOL NOTE!

Western Canada Theatre has produced a small theatre festival over the past two years called the **High Wire Festival**! It is three nights of daring theatre where the audience can expect to be challenged and surprised! In this season, the High Wire Festival welcomed *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit* by Nassim Soleimanpour. In this play the actor does not receive his/her script until they walk onstage!! Talk about dangerous theatre!

Activity #3 – Traveling Through Life and Song

Curriculum Connections

Language Arts	Oral Language, Speaking and Listening
Arts Education	Exploring and Creating, Drama Forms, Strategies and Skills

Travel is a major theme in *Are We Cool Now?* The play (including the songs by Dan Mangan) speak often of leaving home, driving, traveling abroad, time and remembering where you came from. The theme of travel is metaphoric. The characters physically travel in the script (to Europe, Toronto and Vancouver) while their relationship, as well as their individual characters, are on a personal emotional journey.

Have your students choose a song from the script. Most of the songs within the script can be heard at www.last.fm/music/DanMangan. This activity will be more effective if the students do it on their own. Each student will choose a song from the script, listen to it and decide what the theme of the song is. This could be a literal theme or one that they feel from the song. The theme does not necessarily have to be what Dan Mangan intended, but the student must be able to justify their reason for choosing their theme.

Have the student write down their song and theme. Ask them if they can relate to the theme they have chosen. Why do they relate with it? Or perhaps, why don't they relate to it? Have them listen to the song several times before the activity and then again once after the activity. Has their feelings for the song changed? If so, how? Do they feel closer to the song now that they have connected themselves to the song? Do they feel like they understand the song better now?

We asked playwright Amiel Gladstone what he felt was the main theme of the play:

AG: Good question. At this stage, I'm not sure yet. There are obviously themes of love and loss, finding oneself, becoming an adult... with a new play it's something that becomes clearer as we get into rehearsals and sharing with an audience.

Activity #4: Post-Show Discussion

Drama	Defining, Recognizing and Analysing, Reflection, Discussion and Critical Analysis
Communications	Comprehend and Respond, Engagement and Personal Response
Language Arts	Writing and Representing, Oral Language, Speaking and Listening

1. Discuss the play with your class. What did they like, what did they find challenging? Why? Ask for specifics to generate a more intense conversation.
2. Did you relate to either of the characters in the play? How?
3. How did you feel about the music in the show? Had you heard of Dan Mangan prior to seeing the play? How did the music make you feel? Did you feel like the music fit well with the content of the play?
4. Discuss the theme of leaving home and beginning a journey. Discuss the metaphor of physically leaving a location and leaving a phase in your life emotionally. How are they the same? What would you encounter on both of these journeys? What do you learn?
5. How does this play fall into the category of innovative theatre?

Resources Used

Gladstone, Amiel. Are We Cool Now? 2015

www.amielgladstone.com

www.amielgladstone.word.press.com

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www.danmanganmusic.com

www.last.fm/music/Danmangan

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