SHAUN PARKER & COMPANY

Presents

HAPPY AS LARRY

Choreographed and Directed by Shaun Parker
Composed by Nick Wales and Bree Van Reyk
Design by Adam Gardnir
Lighting by Luiz Pampohla
Dramaturgy by Veronica Neave

Image by Branco Gaica

“Shaun Parker’s ‘dance’ hit is so cutting edge it actually wanders off the edge of any single-word definition....Parker is a genius.” The Daily Telegraph

“Brilliantly choreographed, flawlessly and joyously performed, and thoroughly entertaining from start to finish.” Australian Stage

Education Resource for Stages 2-6
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1. ABOUT SHAUN PARKER

Shaun Parker is an Australian choreographer and director who makes and tours work all over the world. After studying for a science degree he rediscovered dance, having loved it as a teenager. He went on to train at VCA (Victorian College of the Arts at Melbourne University) 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, Australian Dance Theatre, 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], and for Outstanding Achievement in Youth and Community Dance (for The Yard).

As he and his company prepare to take his piece Happy as Larry on tour, we ask him a few questions to find out what he thinks about life, the universe and being happy….

Hello Shaun. What makes you happy? When were you last happiest?
Spending time with my daughter: reading books, going to the beach, taking her to see theatre shows, listening to her stories. I was last happiest hearing my daughter make up stories based around four pictures she found on a card. She joined them together and linked them into a story. I love the fact that she made up a strategy to join the four pictures together into a tale. Very creative and great initiative!

What ingredients do you need for a happy life, well lived?
Living in the moment and always doing your best no matter what you do. Giving time and respect to everyone you meet. Listening to people and understanding their point of view. Eating healthy food, lots of exercise, and working hard on your passion in life, but also making time for yourself to have fun as well.

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 daddy-a dolphin!

When did you last belly laugh? Why?
Watching an episode of The Office. The dry, sarcastic and slightly uncomfortable situations are hilarious as well as intellectually astute!

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 millions 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 (hemiphlegia, 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, father, brother and sister 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 electronica, 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 written by Claudio Naranjo.

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!

**Trainers or Birkenstocks?**
Trainers!

**Cats or dogs?**
Dogs. Although I love Burmese cats – amazing temperaments and they make loving companions. Apparently ferrets make very loyal pets as well!

**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.

**What has life taught you so far?**
That the meaning of life ‘IS’ life! And that it is up to you as an individual to spread good will, and to create your own positive world around you and others.

**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.

**What’s next for Shaun Parker?**
I am working on a new production that investigates what makes humans the ‘same’ despite the complexities of the history of man. We are reflecting on creation of life from the Big Bang Theory, Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, the notion of Genetic Identity, and the archetype of man.

10 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 3 things do you always take on tour with you?
My laptop.
My yoga mat.
My oil burner.

And lastly….how would you define fun?
To be intellectually challenged, to be moved to tears, and to laugh uncontrollably with friends and family.

Shaun got into dance as a youngster by chance, “Well it sort of came about by accident,” he recalls. 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.”

Recalling his journey into dance as a teenager, it seems fitting here to ask some of the next generation of dancers and dance makers in this country to interview Shaun about his work. We invited a group of young people to pose some burning questions. Here’s what they asked him.

**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.

**Happy as Larry incorporates various types of dance/movement (e.g. ballet, contemporary and breakdance). As a choreographer how do you go about combining the different dance genres within the piece?**
My nine dancers are all contemporary dancers, but many of them have additional movement skills unique to them! Four of them are proficient breakers including locking, popping and strobing skills. One of the dancers is a basketball player. The basketball is part of their language, and helps them to discover and learn, in an abstract and metaphorical sense, more about happiness. The roller-skater was a speed skater in high school, and it is through his skates that he wants to challenge his fears and skate again – fast and dangerous. The Chalk Artist uses the chalk to control the theatrical space, and to lead the other characters in the work through a number of ‘happiness’ pursuits! His chalk becomes a subtle narrator throughout the 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 extensive 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.

**Can you tell us what your inspiration was for creating a piece around happiness and how it manifests itself within human beings?**
I feel that life in our modern world is sweeping us along so fast; so fast that we sometimes forget what happiness means to us. Does the preoccupation with money, success, career, real estate, keeping up with digital media communications, and keeping up in general, take up all of our time such that we have no time to be happy anymore? Has quality time with family, friends, colleagues and even with ourselves been put on the back burner? I was really feeling that perhaps we don’t know how to be happy anymore? I researched the ENNEAGRAM which is a personality model of nine fundamental personality traits. My dancers and I studied it extensively and physicalised various behavioural and emotional concerns of the different personality types. This was a process that informed us about how different people experience, process, and search for happiness. It also investigated how our own personality or ego structure shapes, drives and confines our individual perception of happiness.

**What are some of the challenges that you have faced with the combination of types of dance you opted for?**
I was always challenging us to discover ‘why’ we are using different styles. That is a very big question….‘Why are the characters using that dance style, and what does this mean for them and their observation, struggle or celebration of happiness’.

**What and/or who inspires you to create work?**
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 Cherakaoi, 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 next few years, physically and creatively?**

*Happy as Larry* will tour for the next three or four years to Europe, Asia, and additional tours within Australia. I want to re-work and tighten some of the scenes in the piece, yet also allow the performers to grow naturally within their roles.

**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 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 funding application writing skills are very helpful indeed!
2. ABOUT HIS COMPANY

Shaun Parker & Company is currently in its infancy, despite Shaun having toured his work for many years as an independent artist. In 2011 the company were granted funding to operate annually, giving them the opportunity to work out of a small office space and have access to studios in the theatre complex where they are based. The company is still project-based, meaning that the cast and crew are contracted per show or tour. In the future they hope 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.

Here is a list of the original creative team of Happy as Larry from Sydney Festival 2010:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director, Choreographer</td>
<td>Shaun Parker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer</td>
<td>Marguerite Pepper Productions (MPP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramaturg</td>
<td>Veronica Neave</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shaun works closely with Olivia Ansell, his full-time producer. Shaun describes their relationship like this: “For a small company like ours, Olivia is the absolute glue that holds everything together. She ensures that my creative vision is ultimately realised. I really need her there to make stuff happen, she supports, guides, helps me make decisions. She is my sounding board, and pretty fundamental to the success of the company.”

Here Olivia explains her role and how she keeps the show on the road!

**Olivia, can you tell us how you came to be a producer?**

I have a background in performing and education, I was a dancer for ten years and I self-produced so I know the pressures on both sides of the stage, which is helpful. I was also a programmer for a venue, which has been extremely useful knowledge to have when I’m liaising with venues for our tours. One day somebody suggested I produced other people’s work, so I moved into producing and I love it. No two days are the same!

**What does being a producer actually mean?**

I look after the welfare of Shaun and the company, and make sure the tour goes according to plan…that everyone gets on the plane! The wellbeing of the artists we work with is very important, so that is always pretty high up on my list, without them there is no show! For *Happy as Larry* I have recruited the production team, helped Shaun cast the dancers, and am overseeing all the marketing and finance for this piece.

**How do you balance Shaun’s creative needs with the practicalities of touring his work?**

I try to make sure that everyone including Shaun is happy through the tech and get in – I try to overlay everyone’s duties so stuff is happening simultaneously, this means being smart and savvy with the overall schedule!

**What drew you to join Shaun to become his producer for this Happy as Larry tour?**

When I first saw the piece in its early days I walked away uplifted…it was funny, sad, dark. Often I’m left with questions after I’ve seen a piece. Not this time. I felt replete. The story, the set, the score…the beautiful way in which the performers gently tell their stories. The whole piece totally enthralled me. When the opportunity arose to come on board I jumped at it.

**What is the most stressful part of your job?**

On tour definitely! I have to troubleshoot to make sure we can still stick to our schedule and get the show up on time. There are always stresses you can’t predict – such as the time the laundry in the theatre was out of order so I had to take all the costumes across town in a cab
to get them clean. Or the time the whole company contracted food poisoning before an international flight. Yes, that was a pretty stressy day!”

**What is the best part of your job?**
Being close to the artists and working in a highly creative environment. It’s so energising being close to creative, like-minded people. I also love the audience and their sense of anticipation, then their response afterwards. Those two elements are the best part of my job.

**What three things do you always take on tour?**
A first aid kit. Copies of everyone’s passports and visas. Painkillers!

**What makes you happy?**
Laughter…

For *Happy as Larry* Shaun has assembled an eclectic group of performers to work with. For him these people are highly valued. He explains:

“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, rework…in order to give them the opportunity to go deep into the material, and have real authenticity with it. Although the dancers 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.”

Here we talk to **Miranda Wheen**, about working with Shaun, and being in *Happy as Larry*:

**Miranda, could you describe working with Shaun from a performer’s perspective?**
“In the early stages of working with Shaun I feel my role as performer/collaborator/devisor is to bring as much as I can to the creative process. A tiny little seed of an idea might become a whole scene or an important theme in the work, so you can’t censor yourself; nothing is too small or too ridiculous. Shaun will often zero in on a few key ideas that he wants you to specifically work on and it’s my role, as performer, to offer suggestions, alternatives and solutions. As a performer I spend time fleshing out my role for myself, but I must keep an eye on how Shaun is constructing the whole work, as the show gently shifts and changes, so does my relationship to the narrative and to the other characters. When it comes to performing the show Shaun requires us to be in peak physical condition. Whilst we take dance and yoga classes as a company we are ultimately responsible for keeping ourselves fit and healthy.”

**How would you describe Shaun’s movement style in three words?**
“Stylistic, variable, ballistic.”

Happy as Larry is a fabulous fusion of so many styles of movement. Which ones take you most out of your comfort zone?
“I guess the thrash metal movement of the final scene is furthest from my comfort zone, I’m usually pretty fluid and soft. Funnily enough I really enjoy that scene. I guess it’s a bit therapeutic thrashing out your irritations every night. There is also a brief Krump moment in the ‘Dance Off’ scene, the one with the mish-mash of dance moves, that I really have to dig deep to find.”

What is the best thing anyone has ever said to you about Happy as Larry?
“That the show is truly accessible and fun, while at the same time challenging audiences by making them consider interesting philosophical questions.”

What is your recipe for happiness?
“Eight hours sleep a night, an empty dance studio to fill, the zing of hard working muscles relaxing in a hot bath, good friends with good food, and chocolate every single day.”

3. HAPPY AS LARRY

“Happy as Larry is brilliantly choreographed, flawlessly and joyously performed, and thoroughly entertaining from start to finish. I literally sat on the edge of my seat.”
Australian Stage

“For people who come to see Happy as Larry...I hope it makes them happy to be human, on some level glad to be alive. I make my work for those people. I love sitting and listening to people chatting as they leave. They come into the theatre from work all busy with mobile phones and a day of work behind them. When they leave they look different. I can feel there has been a shift in the atmosphere. This is why I do what I do. They are a good reminder of that...”
Shaun Parker

Choreographic Process
Shaun began the first stage of the creation of Happy as Larry in November 2008 - a three-week research period - during which he explored the Enneagram, which he had studied for
many years previously. The Enneagram is a psychological system that maps nine personality types: The Perfectionist; the Giver; the Performer; the Tragic Romantic; the Observer; the Devil’s Advocate; the Optimist; the Boss; and the Mediator.

“At the beginning, that’s all it was – a research period to see where it went. At that stage I had no idea that it would emerge as a piece about happiness. However I must admit, the idea of happiness had been feeding into my thoughts in a broader sense. Then on Day 2 of our research time, one of the performers touched on something that stuck with me. She was exploring face manipulation and how she could manually place her features in different ways to show various emotions. It dawned on me then that happiness can be elusive for some people; that they may smile with their features but not really know deep happiness. A question came to me then – happiness...what is it? So I left that question bubbling away under the surface, I didn’t want to constrict myself by saying there and then that I would make a piece solely on the idea of happiness. I didn’t want to narrow the creative horizons. I didn’t mention it to the dancers either. I just let it alone...but gently through the rest of our research period I started filtering in questions and thoughts about happiness. I’d set tasks like ‘Dance as if your body is happy’ and ‘Turn off fun’. By the end of those three weeks, five of the personality types within the Enneagram model had crystallised in my mind.”

For footage of this research period see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXqKSRb30k&feature=related

There followed a six-month break when Shaun had to fundraise in order to see the piece into its next stage of development. During this time Shaun edited all the footage from the research period. “We had footage of 70 little scenes from that period. 16 of them were to end up in the final piece. During this editing period it became clear to me that happiness was to be the thread running through the work.” Later that year Shaun regrouped the performers and they started working in earnest to create Happy as Larry.

There are nine performers in Happy as Larry, each playing a different character. Shaun explains how he uses them to explore his theme of happiness, “I wanted to see how these different people inhabit the idea of happiness, and unhappiness and everything in between... Before we began I asked all of the performers to read books and literature on the Enneagram. I wanted them to have some background knowledge on psychology and behaviour. Then we pretty much put the books down and let that information filter down for each of them. At certain points in the creation period I would ask them to bring something into the studio. For example one day I had asked them to each bring in an object that represented happiness to them. One of the performers brought in her basketball, which ended up becoming integral to the piece. Her character’s personality type emerged as Type Five, the Observer, and you’ll see in the piece that she often hangs back and watches the action, but the ball is her mirror on the world. There is a tiny moment in the work when she’s spinning the basketball on her fingers and observing it. For me that represents her character watching the happiness of the world. The basketball is the globe and she’s observing it from a distance.”

Movement style
Happy as Larry combines a fusion of dance styles that segue seamlessly into one another. From ballet to breakdance, urban street style to Astanga yoga, physical contemporary dance to roller-skating. Whilst Shaun and the performers all have a strong contemporary dance training, they each also bring other styles and knowledge into the mix. The piece reflects this beautifully. Shaun explains further, “I must admit that early on I knew I wanted elements of street culture in the piece. Two of the dancers had fantastic breakdance skills, which we explored extensively and I was very interested to see how street culture could inform the
Shaun used the nine Enneagram personality types as a foundation for the characters we meet in the piece. Miranda explains how this worked in reality:

“...My personality type in Happy as Larry is the ‘Mediator’. The mediator feels happiest when they have made someone else feel happy. There is a bittersweet quality to the mediator, as they cannot seem to generate that same degree of happiness from within themselves. My character first emerged from a task where Shaun asked us to dance in a way that made us feel good. The movement that I performed had a quiet, no-one-watching, dorky, in-your-bedroom, feel to it. This, for me, became symbolic of the mediator’s inability to fully realise her own happiness. As the show itself began to take shape I was able to map out the relationships I had with the other characters in the show – calming the seducer, steadying the roller skater – these interactions gave potency to the mediator’s solo moment where there is a gentle sense of yearning to break free. When finally she does give way to her emotions she rubs out the sun, her own happiness perhaps. In some ways my character is very similar to me, and these are the elements I draw on to give truth to my character, in other ways we are very different and this is where imagination becomes an important tool for a performer.”

Design Process

Happy as Larry has a revolving blackboard wall as the central part of the action. This set idea came about from another of the dancers bringing an object into the studio. It was Dean (mentioned above), one of the performers who is also a chalk artist - his love of chalk art informed the addition of this blackboard into the piece. Here Shaun explains further, “Dean found these tiny little blackboards, like something you might use in a classroom. He started drawing portraits of each of the 9 dancers and the characters that were emerging. It was such a beautiful and simple idea...and in my head these little blackboards became one massive blackboard. His character evolved into the Tragic Romantic, he narrates the other characters’ worlds on the blackboard, sometimes he predetermines their actions, and he turns their pain into something else. Originally we played around with the idea of dusters for the performers, so they could rub out the chalk. But it quickly became apparent to me that this wasn’t true to the work. It’s not about erasing and nor is it intended to be a psychology lesson. I said to the dancers ’The chalk has to stay there the whole time. It’s an imprint, and a record of this hour together in this space. It is a hieroglyphic remnant of the experience of the individuals in this theatrical chalk world.’ The chalk, the basketball and the roller skates became key elements of the piece very early on. I’m lucky that this clarity came early, it’s not always like that for me – it’s a process that you have no control over. But for Happy as Larry there were clear signposts for me all along the way. On that level it sort of designed itself!”

Soundscore

The piece is set to a vibrant electro-acoustic score, composed by Nick Wales and Bree van
Reyk. For Shaun, this sound score is a fundamental element of the work and not an add-on. “In those final weeks before the premiere, Nick, (who was also the Music Director for Happy as Larry), and I would stay in the recording studio until the early hours, just trying to get the score right. With the fusion of electro-synthesised sound and acoustic work, you can’t have too much of one or the other. If you have too much acoustic sound I feel you can start to attach emotional states to the sound, which then gives the piece a different vibe. And similarly if you have too much electro sound in the score, you end up with a headache! For me the two styles of music represent the polarities of happiness, the male and the female, the yin and the yang. They have such different energies. It was important to get the perfect balance in this score, as the music element of the piece is so fundamental for me. I really wanted to craft the music in the same way I did the movement, so a lot of work went into that process. Yes it’s true, those last few weeks before the premiere I didn’t get much sleep! I would go straight from the rehearsal studio into the recording studio, but it was worth it in order to create this sonic experience for the performers and the audience….it had to be integral to the work, totally connected to it.”

Costume
The costumes in the work are pedestrian and colourful – trainers, t-shirts, shorts and skirts. They both catch the eye and yet are unobtrusive. Shaun describes how the costume design took shape. “For Happy as Larry I knew by about week three of the devising process that I wanted hyper-colour characters in a black chalkboard world. That phrase came into my head one day and it didn’t leave. I really wanted that contrast to be visually clear. The costume choices were then easier to negotiate because I had a clear vision in my head of all these performers in primary colours in their chalkboard world. I like this colourful element in the piece, it is very child-like for me. The simplicity of children – they are able to make their own happiness playing with a stick in the dirt…I wanted to capture that on stage.” So whilst the work has a very happy go lucky feel to it, everything in it is very carefully planned. “I’m not content to leave ends undone, it feels too loose for me. I think that my job is to crystallise moments in the piece, not leave it too freeform. I want there to be a purity there. No wishy washy stuff!”

The End of the Process
The final weeks of production were the most challenging for Shaun, as he juggled finishing the work, the score, the design, managing all his collaborative relationships, and trying to sleep in between.

He recalls, “Yes, in those last two weeks I was getting about 4-5 hours sleep a night. It’s not enough but it’s what was available to me! Usually I find it easy to keep everyone content through the creative process, but those final few weeks before a premiere it’s harder. Previously, it’s a very collaborative operation, everyone’s idea counts, but in the final push to complete the work I have to make tough decisions, what bits stay in, what do I take out. The work starts to tell me what it needs. It’s always challenging to keep everyone happy in this final week or two. For me it’s about finding ways to nurture the company in this period. It can end up feeling very exposing. Good communication is vital. And a healthy dose of humour!”

Happy as Larry had its premiere at the Sydney Festival in January 2010 and was critically acclaimed. It has been in demand ever since and is scheduled to tour internationally for years to come.

“It’s smiles all round – on stage and in the audience. You have to welcome a dance piece about happiness.. delightful.”
Sydney Morning Herald
4. IDEAS FOR CREATIVE TASKS

Warming up Ideas
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, 2 contemporary classes, a contact improvisation duet class, and 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 ballet classes provide a solid base for the technique of the legs and core strength.”

Creative Tasks using the Enneagram as a stimulus
The 9 fundamental personality types of the Enneagram are:
Here Shaun sets you a selection of solo, duet and group tasks based on each personality type. These are the same tasks he set the dancers in the creation process for *Happy as Larry*. These tasks are best suited to students with some prior experience of improvisation.

**TYPE 1: THE PERFECTIONIST**
Task 1: “Transmit precise information.” Duet or Trio Exercise.

Task 2: “Monitor someone else’s actions.” Duet Exercise.

Task 3: “Attention to detail. Create a movement piece based on this.” Solo Exercise.

**TYPE 2: THE SEDUCER**
Task 1: “Physicalise being indispensable to another person.” Duet Exercise.

Task 2: “Section off parts of yourself.” Solo Exercise.

Task 3: “Authenticity. Create a movement piece based on this.” Solo Exercise.

Task 4: “Different ways of being loved.” Duet Exercise.

**TYPE 3: THE PERFORMER**
Task 1: “Impress someone with physical tricks and hidden talents.” Solo Exercise.

Task 2: “Different types of body intimacy.” Duet Exercise.

Task 3: “Happiness Disorder. Create a solo movement piece based on this.” Solo Exercise.

**TYPE 4: THE TRAGIC ROMANTIC**
Task 1: “Dance as if the body is sad.” Create a solo piece based on this.

Task 2: “A push and pull habit of attention.” Create a solo piece based on this.

Task 3: “Physical Abandonment.” Duet or Group piece.

Task 4: “Create an abstract picture of happiness.” Duet, Trio or Group Piece

**TYPE 5: THE OBSERVER**
Task 1: “Private Happiness. Create a scene based on this.” Solo & Group piece.

Task 2: “Invisibility. Create a scene based on this.” Solo & Group piece.

Task 3: “Compartmentalise your body. Create a movement piece based on this.” Solo Exercise.
TYPE 6: THE DEVIL’S ADVOCATE
Task 1: “Move towards a goal, in fits and starts. Create a movement piece based on this.” Solo Exercise.

Task 2: “Protect yourself. Create movement based on this.” Solo Exercise.

TYPE 7: THE OPTIMIST
Task 1: “Dance as if the body is happy.” Solo Exercise.

Task 2: “Escape into your imagination. Create a scene based on this.” Group Exercise.

TYPE 8: THE BOSS
Task 1: “Control and manipulate someone else’s actions.” Duet Exercise

TYPE 9: THE MEDIATOR
Task 1: “Have a physical conversation. Create a movement duet based on this.” Duet Exercise.

Task 2: “Help someone. Create a movement duet based on this.” Duet Exercise.

Other Related Tasks

Task 1: “Create a movement phrase or physical vignette to crystallise one of the personality types.”

Task 2: “Consider all of the personality types. Bring in an object, and by using that object, create a movement piece that crystallises one of the personality types.”

Task 3: “Create a list of songs about ‘happiness’. Choose one, then create a movement piece inspired by that song.”

Creative Tasks using images from Happy as Larry as a stimulus
Look at these 3 images.
Image 1
• What is happening?
• Can you make this position with a partner?
• What things do you have to think about when working with weight, balance and another partner?
• Have a think about which personality types these two dancers might be, and then translate that into your own still image. Alternatively, choose 2 different personality types and explore different weight bearing moments based on the two types and how they might behave differently in a moment of balance/off balance like this.

Image 2

• What is happening here? Is she trapping him? Or is she stopping him from falling? Decide on a narrative here. It may help to think about what these
characters’ personality types are, in order to decide on the nature of this particular moment.

- Can you make this position with a partner?
- Can you create other positions that convey the same idea?
- Think about using different levels, like the dancers in this image, and about how you might ‘trap’ your partner. You don’t always have to use your arms – think of other ways you can block a your partner’s movement using different parts of your body.

**Image 3**

- What is happening here? How are the holding each other’s weight?
- Can you make this position with a partner? What do you need to take into account when working with weight and balance in a duet?
- Can you create other moments of contact like this? Think about other surfaces of your body that could provide safe places of weight bearing. Try your back, your thigh, the side of your body.
- Now link up the shapes/movements you have created in response to images 1, 2 and 3. Decide what order they should be in, and about your intention and what you wish these moments to show or share…
- Practice it a few times. Now add some transitional movement – how does each image flow into the next? Here you might use any of the material you created from Shaun’s tasks on the previous pages.
- Keep running through your phrase, refining and honing it. Don’t always be satisfied with the first version of a movement you devise – often by repeating it over and over again; new things will emerge for you. If it’s difficult, work through it! If you make an error, don’t necessarily think of it as a mistake – it could be the beginning of something interesting…. This is how professional dancers work every day in the studio when they are creating work.
Music Stimulus Tasks
The full score is available from iTunes. Please download to undertake the following exercises.

Task 1 – solo and duet work based on a music stimulus

Listen to this sound byte with your eyes closed

BOUNCE_THAT_BALL_SBYTE.mp3

As soon as it is over, listen to it again. Now write down the 1st three objects or emotions that come into your mind. Share these with a partner and discuss your reactions and responses to the music.

Talk about why the music made you think about these things, or feel a particular emotion. Discuss this with each other. Now take these 6 words and put them in any order that feels right for both of you, and make a note of it.

Working in a space on your own make a short movement for each word in turn. You might want to keep the music playing on a loop to provide you with a constant soundscape, and also to keep inspiring your movement creation. Once you each have a phrase of movement based on your 6 words, practice it and make sure you are happy with what you have made.

How can you challenge yourself further? For example, does your movement travel? Do you use different levels in space? Have you thought about how this extract of music, and these words of response inspire different dynamics within your phrase?

Re-join your partner and show each other your phrases. Discuss how they perhaps look very different despite using exactly the same music and words as your stimulus. Or maybe they look really similar? Talk about why this might be.

Now try dancing your 2 phrases in very close proximity to each other. Find moments of connection where you might have contact with each other, or other moments when one of you might provide a push or a pull – some momentum to fuel your partner’s movement. Work on your phrase together allowing each other to offer ideas. The best duets often are made by dancers who listen to each other and are willing to try each other’s ideas!

Task 2 – improvisation work using a music stimulus

This task is ideal for groups who have previous experience of improvising.

Listen to this soundbyte with your eyes closed.

TSK_TSK_SOUND_BYTE.mp3

What instruments do you hear in this piece of music? What type of music would you call this – can you categorise it as a specific musical genre?

See if you can describe the emotion of this extract of music – does it have a relaxed feel to it? Or maybe it’s more punchy and angry sounding? Talk about this with your peers – do you think it’s important to label music like this, or does it not really matter what it ‘is’?
How does this extract of music make you want to move? Everybody find a space in the room, and sitting or standing, close your eyes. Playing the music on a loop, start to respond to it, trying to stay true and honest in your physical reactions to it. Work small at first, find the essence of the movement this music inspires within you. Be aware of other dancers surrounding you in the space, so work within your own ‘bubble’ trying not to make contact with anyone else.

Keep going with this task, opening your eyes when you feel confident – once you have your eyes open you will be able to move in a bigger way without fear of hurting anyone else!

Once everybody feels they have their own movement vocabulary inspired by this music, clear the space and set yourself up with a few rules for group improvisation sharing:

- Everyone starts ‘off stage’ standing or sitting around the edge of the space
- You can leave or enter the space at any time, and dance in response to the music, drawing on all the ideas and responses you came up with during your solo improvisation work with your eyes shut
- Try to have time in the space moving, but also time around the edge, watching and enjoying the other dancers’ work – in other words don’t be a ‘space hogger’!
- If you wish to, you can pick up on the other dancers’ movements, perhaps echoing them within your own movement
- If you come into contact with another dancer, don’t ignore that, it’s a real moment…so see what happens. Does this connection become a pause, a moment of rest? Or does it provide one of you with a stimulus to move in a different direction?
- If you enter and leave the space a few times within this task, challenge yourself not to do so in the same way every time – for example, if you walked in the first time, try a different means of travel the second time
- Agree a time frame for this group improvisation, perhaps somebody in the group or your teacher is responsible for calling ‘time’ after 10 minutes. When you hear this, start to think about ‘winding down’ your movement over the next 2 or 3 minutes, either leaving the space or coming to a place of rest in the space
- Allow this task to finish organically rather than stopping abruptly when you hear ‘time’ called
- All come together to share your thoughts and experiences of both dancing and observing
- You may want to try it again, creating your own additional rules and guidelines. One thing is for sure, in a task like this, no two times are ever the same!

5. IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION BASED ON THE THEMES IN HAPPY AS LARRY

Some of these questions can be used to gather contextual information before coming to see the piece. Other questions are reflective, for use afterwards.

Happiness

Happy – adjective: feeling or showing pleasure or contentment
Discuss what happiness means to you. How would you define it? If you had to devise a recipe for happiness what would you include in it?
Now talk about the piece in relation to the theme of happiness. Did it make you happy to experience it? On the subject of happiness Shaun says,

“One person’s perception of happiness is very different from the next. We’re very lucky in the Western world; we have many things very easy. For others on the planet, just getting food for their family and sharing it together, is what makes them happy…not whether they have the latest gadget or whatever…”

Research images and photographs that depict happiness to you. Bring them in and share them with the group. Generate some discussion around the image of happiness. This was a task Shaun gave the performers when making *Happy as Larry*.

Here is a question from Shaun. “I’d like to know what the piece made you feel? As our next generation of arts viewers and makers, I’d love to remind you that you are allowed to feel…and to have an instinctive reaction to what you see on a stage or in a gallery, rather than to be a passive observer. What did Happy as Larry make you think about? What did it make you feel?”

On the subject of sadness Shaun says, “A lot of people come to me after seeing the show and say they cried. It sounds odd that one should cry in a show about happiness, but it’s part of the human condition, to accept our frailties and still try to love ourselves. There is a moment in the piece when one of the characters discovers the sun on the blackboard, then she accidentally rubs it out. There is sadness there for me."

Was there any sadness in the piece for you? Where did you find these moments? Can you talk about why they felt sad or poignant to you?

“This piece is not self therapy, it’s not about me….but there are certain scenes that deeply resonate with me…” says Shaun.

Was there a particular scene that you remember well? Why did it resonate with you? Could you identify with the character at that moment?

**Personality types**

Do some research on the Enneagram. What is it? How might it be helpful and to whom? Look at these 9 personality types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type 1: The Perfectionist</th>
<th>Type 6: The Devil’s Advocate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: The Giver</td>
<td>Type 7: The Optimist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: The Performer</td>
<td>Type 8: The Boss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4: The Tragic Romantic</td>
<td>Type 9: The Mediator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5: The Observer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** it is important to number each type because sometimes the actual description of the type alters slightly from author to author. For example, Type 2: The Giver is also called The Seducer, and Type 3: The Performer is sometimes called the Achiever.

Could you describe each personality type in one sentence that makes sense to you? E.g. Type 7: The Optimist – they want to see the best in everything and everyone…

At first glance what type would you say you are? Why? How would you describe your type generally?
Imagine a challenging situation – stuck in a lift, missing a train, being late with a piece of work. Talk about how each personality type might deal with such a situation differently.

Think about these types in relation to the piece. Could you make some suggestions as to which characters were portraying which personality types? For example the ballet girl? The basketball player?

The chalk writer – what personality type do you think his character was? Why do you think this? What was the purpose of his writing and marking on the blackboard? “For me...he became Larry in the piece....” recalls Shaun.

The roller-skater character – what personality type would you say he was? Shaun says of this character, “Here’s this guy, he’s in his 40s, maybe he has a family, needs to pay the mortgage…but he wants to feel what it is to fly again, not to be ground down by the pressures of life. He wants to feel the freedom of those skates again. He wants to tackle his fear front on!” Does that help you discover what type he might be?

Shaun says of the piece “I don’t want it to be a lesson in psychology, but if it gets you thinking about what kind of person you are, what makes you happy, how you deal with life, then I’m glad.”

Do you think psychology has a part to play in making art - dance, theatre, music, visual art?

**Design**

*The Production Manager comments: ‘The set is a huge 7 metre long box that doubles as a chalkboard that is also completely mobile on its own wheels. There is an amazing web of balloons that sits over the top of this and frames the entire piece as well as being an integral part of the performance. These two shapes dominate the otherwise blank, black canvas of the stage...’*

This big revolving blackboard around which the action takes place….what did it represent to you?

There were a few other objects used in the piece – can you remember what they were and what they were used for?

What did these objects mean to the characters? What did they mean to them in their pursuit of happiness?

**Movement style**

There are numerous dance styles in *Happy as Larry*. Can you make a list of all the ones you remember?

Watch this extract of the piece: [http://happyaslarrytour.co.uk/the-show/#video](http://happyaslarrytour.co.uk/the-show/#video)

How many different styles can you spot? Go though it scene by scene and try to identify which genres you see.

Were there any dance styles that stood out for you? Why?
Music
The sound score for *Happy as Larry*, composed by Nick Wales and Bree van Reyk, involves both electro and acoustic elements.

Discuss the sound world of the piece – we know that Shaun worked very hard to make it integral to the work. Talk about how this worked for you.

Choose 2 different styles of music, and think about how they might work together to create a sound score. Discuss why they might compliment each other, or make a contrast.

6. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

http://www.happyaslarrytour.co.uk/
UK tour website including extract of the piece

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28MAjRSrmaA
interview with Shaun Parker

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXqKSRb30k&feature=related
footage of research and development phase in the creation of *Happy as Larry* (working title Ennea) – selected scenes

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Y1ZJfKEIHI
The Yard – Shaun Parker’s work for teenagers. Interview and footage.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qySVrYCKp38
Sydney Festival Director Lindy Hume introduces *Happy as Larry* shortly before its premiere

http://www.vca.unimelb.edu.au/
VCA at the University of Melbourne, where Shaun and some of the performers trained

*Happy as Larry* soundtrack available to buy on iTunes

Choreo

Choreo chronicle of Shaun Parker’s work

2005 *Blue Love* Sydney Opera House, Sydney.
2005 *Divine Harmonies* Tasdance, Tasmania
2007 *This Show is about People* Sydney & Melbourne Festivals
2008 *Love Instalment* Sydney Dance Company, Sydney
2009 *Tenebrae III* The Song Company, Sydney
2010 *Happy as Larry* Australia/NZ Festival Touring Circuit
2011 *The Yard* Seymour Centre, Sydney
2012 *SPILL* UK TOUR, Dancechange & IDFB
2012 *Trolleys* UK TOUR, Performed by C-12 Dance Theatre

Related articles and reviews of his work

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Company Facebook Page:

Company Twitter account:
@shaunparkercomp

Enneagram - General reading
http://www.enneagram.com/enneagram.html
This website outlines Helen Palmer’s work on the Enneagram. It outlines each type in point form, and has a short YouTube link talking about each type. It also has a personality test you can take. Recommended by Shaun, it is in his opinion the most simple and concise explanation on the web.

The Enneagram – Understanding Yourself and Others in Your Life by Helen Palmer

Advanced reading on the Enneagram (For teachers & advanced students)
http://www.claudionaranjo.net/index_english.html
http://www.claudionaranjo.net/

Character & Neurosis – An Integrative View by Claudio Naranjo

Shaun Parker - Workshops
All workshops will be taught by Shaun Parker or current company members, and consist of a contemporary warm-up, followed by repertoire from *Happy as Larry*.

Workshop A - *Creative process and repertoire*
Involving a short contemporary dance warm-up, followed by a series of task based improvisation exercises that best describe and give examples of Shaun's creative process for making work, and help participants explore how they might develop their own practice, followed by learning some repertoire from the show and a post workshop discussion.

**Suitable for:** Age 14+ however workshops can be specially tailored for ages 12 and up
**Level of experience:** Beginners with some experience / Intermediate
**Maximum Numbers:** 30

Workshop B - *Contemporary technique class*
A highly physical contemporary dance class, based on the agile, free flowing and acrobatic dance style that Australian dancers and dance makers are so widely identified and recognised for. The workshop will fuse initial yoga, release and stretch techniques into dance warm-up exercises, developing into contemporary dance exercises and a series of short technical phrases and an acrobatic allegro progression across the floor, incorporating repertoire from the work.

**Suitable for:** Age 18+ [Professional dancers and those studying dance on full time vocation courses]
**Level of experience:** Intermediate to Advanced
(Please note: This workshop can be tailored to a less experienced level upon request)
Maximum Numbers: 30
Workshop duration is a maximum of 2 hours inclusive of warm up and Q+A /discussion at end of the workshop.

The workshop program has been devised by Shaun Parker and the workshop program will be led one dancer from Shaun Parker & Company. The name of your workshop leader will be confirmed to you in advance of your workshop.

Workshops can be tailored for particular requirements and are generally suitable for students aged 14+ as well as older students and professional dancers. However advance notice of the intended participants must be provided to ensure maximum suitability and benefit.

To book workshops: please contact admin@shaunparkercompany.com or 02 9351 1941

Acknowledgements
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Andrew Lang [www.anglepd.co.uk]

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