Edward Scissorhands
Devised, Directed and Choreographed by Matthew Bourne

Dec 12–31, 2006
Ahmanson Theatre
HOW TO USE THIS DISCOVERY GUIDE

This Discovery Guide is designed to help you understand and interpret the production of Edward Scissorhands, a work of dance theatre that provokes audiences to think about the relationship of music, gestures and other forms of non-verbal communication to storytelling. To create his version of Edward Scissorhands, Matthew Bourne drew from Tim Burton’s film of the same title. Like the film, Bourne’s production uses humor. However, it differs from the movie in that it conveys the story and emotion through movement and music rather than dialogue.

Objectives of the Discovery Guide

- Become acquainted with choreographer Matthew Bourne
- Critically and creatively engage with dance theatre as a form of storytelling
- Understand the process for creating dance theatre
- Create a piece of dance theatre from music that inspires you
- Write a theatre critique of Edward Scissorhands that you can send to P.L.A.Y.

The Discovery Guide provides a range of activities that promote critical discussion about dance theatre as a form of storytelling and the role of the outsider. The Discovery Guide also offers various exercises and theatrical vocabulary that will lead you through the process of creating your own dance theatre piece. Like Matthew Bourne, you will focus on music and movement to tell a story.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary words are in bold type. Definitions are located within each section.

DISCOVERY GUIDE CREDITS

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Sam Archer, Edward Scissorhands, PHOTO BY BILL COOPER.
Once there was a boy named Edward...
There's a bit of Edward in anyone who's been different at some point in their lives, particularly growing up during their teenage years. I remember those years. I had interests that nobody else at school had or knew about. I was into movies, old movie stars, musicals, dancing—things I would never talk about at school. I think everyone has that in some way. So, yeah, there's a little bit of me in Edward as in all of us.

—Matthew Bourne, interview
Exercise: Selecting the Song

Matthew Bourne is inspired and moved by music to create his works. What music moves you? Choose a piece of music to tell a story of your own. Because you will be spending a lot of time with this music, select a piece that resonates strongly for you and is something you love listening to. The music you choose should be instrumental, music without lyrics, because words in songs already tell their own story. Some instrumental styles of music to consider include jazz, classical, techno, lounge/chill, ambient, new age and various styles of ethnic music. You may already be familiar with instrumental music from some of your favorite CDs.

Select a piece of music. Close your eyes and listen to it at least twice. Describe the elements of story that you hear within it.

Title and artist: _______________________________________________________________________

Describe the mood of the music: _______________________________________________________________________

How does this music communicate its emotion(s)? (e.g. aggressive rhythm, crying violins, playful piano, urgent drumbeats, dancing saxophone, excited slide whistle) _______________________________________________________________________

What location does the music suggest? (e.g. A beach or city street? A factory or cafeteria?) _______________________________________________________________________

Who do you envision as the character(s) experiencing the emotions? _______________________________________________________________________

What is he or she (or they) doing while experiencing these emotions? _______________________________________________________________________

It is the music that initially draws me to a project. I study the music by listening to it again and again. By the time I start to choreograph a new work, I will have listened to that music every other day for at least a year. So I must love the score I am working with and feel the need to communicate that love to an audience.

—Matthew Bourne, Interview

Vocabulary

Instrumental: Without lyrics; used to describe music
Subtext: A hidden level of meaning found in interactions between characters and subtleties of language and behavior
If you have seen the original Tim Burton movie Edward Scissorhands, you have a strong sense of the plot. Matthew Bourne adapted to create his dance theatre piece of the same title. Bourne’s Edward Scissorhands diverges from the film in several ways. The play begins with the image of a boy hit by lightning while playing outside with scissors. His grief-stricken father, an inventor, creates a new boy he calls Edward. He then gives the boy hands made from scissors, the object his son loved to play with. Soon after completing Edward, the inventor dies tragically. Hungry and alone, Edward wanders into town looking for food. He is discovered by Mrs. Peg Bogs, who warmly welcomes him into her home. When Edward sees a photo of her beautiful daughter, Kim, he falls deeply in love. In his new suburban home, Edward sees his reflection in the mirror for the first time and only then realizes his difference from others. While he craves acceptance from the community, he most longs for their genuine love and inclusion.

Edward’s scissorhands serve as a metaphor for his physical and emotional isolation. While the scissorhands make Edward an outcast, they are also the very quality that makes him special, an artist even. Edward can carve ice-sculptures and craft intricately detailed topiary. Initially, he is accepted by members of the community curious to learn more about him. But when Kim’s jealous boyfriend plays a prank on him, the resulting events turn people against Edward.

Exercise
Edward Scissorhands is a fairytale that evokes powerful emotions, such as desire to belong, or fear of those who are different. It challenges us to examine the ways in which we do — and do not — accept people we think are different from us. It asks us to consider how we define and value these differences. For each of the stories below, identify a moral, message or challenge in the story. Then describe who in the story feels different and why.

Sleeping Beauty: Moral/message/challenge:
Who feels different and why:

Cinderella: Moral/message/challenge:
Who feels different and why:

Pinocchio: Moral/message/challenge:
Who feels different and why:

Little Red Riding Hood: Moral/message/challenge:
Who feels different and why:

Hansel and Gretel: Moral/message/challenge:
Who feels different and why:

Beauty and the Beast: Moral/message/challenge:
Who feels different and why:

Vocabulary
Metaphor: Something used to represent something else; a symbol
Plot: The roadmap of a story, the incidents and events that direct a character’s journey
In creating my version of Edward Scissorhands, I wanted to know why Edward existed in the first place and about his journey into American suburbia: how people treat him, what he learns about them and what they learn about themselves through meeting him.

—Matthew Bourne, Interview

Edward Scissorhands, Photo by Bill Cooper.

CenterTheatreGroup.org/education
I believe that if you watch a ballet such as Swan Lake again and again, you cease to hear the music, so tied it is to the same visual images. The experience can become very numbing unless it is enlivened by an exceptionally riveting performance.

—Matthew Bourne, interview

From the Outside Inside:
THE CREATIVE HISTORY OF MATTHEW BOURNE

IN NEARLY ALL OF HIS DANCE THEATRE PIECES, Bourne explores how his adaptation might help audiences see an old story with fresh eyes or hear familiar music with new ears. He choreographs dance movements that encourage new thinking about the story and a deeper critical understanding. For some, this marks Bourne as an outsider. For others, this willingness to challenge conventional ways of thinking about dance is what makes him a visionary and a leading artist in the world of dance.

Matthew Bourne’s Swan Lake is the longest running ballet in history. In Bourne’s adaptation, male dancers play the role of the swans, which are traditionally played by women. Bourne wanted to draw attention to the physical strength of the swans as well as to their beauty and grace and, in doing so, also complicate the dramatic tension in the story: if the prince is not drawn to the swans for their female nature, what, then, do the swans represent? This artistic interpretation was cause for both controversy and critical acclaim in the world of dance.

Exercise: Setting the Story

For Edward Scissorhands, Bourne was moved by both the original film score by Danny Elfman and the character of Edward to create his own adaptation. Because the music so powerfully communicates Edward’s journey, Bourne felt the story could be told without dialogue.

Return to your music. What story does your music tell? What you hear might be just a scene or a moment from a longer story, or it may be the whole tale. Look back at the previous exercise on fairytales. Listen to your music again. Refer to page 5 and review your notes on the location, emotion and character(s) suggested in the music. Do your initial imaginings lend themselves to an adaptation of one of the fairytales? Continue listening to your music. Write the story for your music. In creating your narrative, feel free to borrow elements from fairytales, as well as your own experience and imagination. Use the space below for your notes.

Vocabulary

Visionary: A person with extremely creative vision whose foresight and imagination separate him or her from everyone else.
Exercise

Write an essay describing your performance. Be sure to include the following information: A synopsis of the story. Where is your story set? Who the story is about? How is he or she different or special? What visual metaphor will you use to express this difference? What will others find unique, exceptional or controversial about your piece?
When I first saw the film Edward Scissorhands, I was struck by the title character originally created by Johnny Depp. Edward is the ultimate “outsider” expressing himself through movement rather than words with much of his appeal being physical and emotional. He is not unlike a silent movie actor.
—Matthew Bourne, interview

DANCE THEATRE IS A FORM OF STORYTELLING that, combined with music, relies on movement as its principle language rather than lyric or dialogue. The dancers form a kind of moving canvas that paints a picture of the story. The famous choreographer George Balanchine defined ballet as “music personified” because he understood dancers as vehicles for bringing music to life.

In creating The Car Man, Bourne focused on the emotions expressed in the music of the classic opera Carmen and freely adapted the existing story. He set the piece in an auto body shop—hence, the playful title change to The Car Man. Bourne then worked to create a movement vocabulary (the movements that make up the choreography) based on the moving parts of an engine to fully incorporate the setting of the play into the action. This helps to illustrate the way that music and environment work together to generate a story told through physical movement.

Exercise: A play without words: Choreographing your scene:
Choreograph a moment from your story to be performed as dance theatre. Describe the moment you have selected and where it falls in the story (e.g. opening, climax, conclusion):

What is the character feeling at this point in the story (e.g. surprise, shock, outrage, fear, excitement, joy)?

How does the location you have chosen for your adaptation influence the kind of movement vocabulary you envision?

Describe the movement that will communicate the emotion to the audience:

How do the music and movement work together? For example, what part of the music will play as the actor makes a particular gesture?

Create 45 – 60 seconds of choreography. Share your dance theatre with the class.

Vocabulary
Climax: The pivotal dramatic event that leads to change or growth for a character
Movement vocabulary: The gestures and actions appropriate for the mood, location, characters and music of a particular work
As Matthew Bourne reminds us, one person’s outcast is another person’s visionary. We hope you enjoyed Edward Scissorhands and are inspired by this Discovery Guide to explore new ways of expressing your ideas, perhaps through dance theatre. We are always trying to improve our work and especially appreciate hearing from students. Critique the performance. Write to us with comments about the messages that inspired you, provoked discussion between you and your friends and anything else about the play you most wish to remember. We would also like to know what was uninviting or ineffective about the production of Edward Scissorhands and its Discovery Guide.

Write to us at:
P.L.A.Y., Center Theatre Group
601 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

It sounds obvious, but things really change when you dance. It’s not about re-doing the film so that people can see what they expected. I want people to be crying at the end. I want it to be funny. I want it to be surprising.

—Matthew Bourne, Interview

About P.L.A.Y.

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The junior high-schoolers of this world premier musical are trying to understand the barrage of contradictory messages thrown their way. This is their story, performed by teenage actors and an all-teen band. Saturday, Feb. 17, 2007, 2:30pm, Mark Taper Forum
Appropriate for all audiences

Twelve Angry Men
A lone dissenter holds up the jury in the case of a boy accused of killing his father. Sunday, April 1, 2007, 2pm, Ahmanson Theatre
Parental discretion advised

Sleeping Beauty Wakes
You think your parents are overprotective? A 21st century spin on the fairytale set to music by GrooveLily. Saturday, April 21, 2007, 2pm, Kirk Douglas Theatre
Strong Language. Parental discretion advised

A Waitress in Yellowstone
A contemporary musical fable about the hazards of doing the right thing. Saturday, June 30, 2007, 2pm, Kirk Douglas Theatre
Complex themes. Parental discretion advised

Have questions? Call audience services at 213.628.2772 or check out the parent guide on our Web site, CenterTheatreGroup.org.

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