

Creative Team Interview

—Composer, Julian Hamilton

Can you tell us what originally drew you to explore music?

I can remember being about four years old, and my Nan had a piano at her house. I always used to love playing with it to see what notes I could get it to make, it felt like I was creating shapes and combinations out of the notes on the piano. I always have just enjoyed being around music, and when I started school I began to take piano lessons. Sometimes I loved taking them and other times I was really bored and hated taking lessons, but I'd always find a piece of music I really enjoyed and wanted to learn to play so I pushed through. Also, I was part of the school choir. I remember being in assembly at school one morning and we were singing a song, I just really enjoyed singing – and my friends said I should join the choir because they have heaps of fun. At first I just wanted to hang out with my friends and do something I enjoyed, so I did. It turned into a huge commitment and a really important part of my musical life. It was the cathedral choir so we used to sing in the Church about four times a week with a lot of rehearsals. It was such a professional, disciplined choir and taught me about the art of performance.

Crazy Times

Can you share with us some of your inspirations in music?

When I was younger I used to look to the other kids at school playing cool pieces of music, I always just wanted to learn what they were playing. I remember hearing artists like Elton John, Ray Charles and Billy Joel and wanting to learn how to play their songs. I also remember really loving hip hop and break dance music and cool robotic sounds that I would hear in movies. There were bands like *Kraftwerk* and electro hip hop acts from the US, so perhaps that has influenced how I now compose some of my music. Later, I studied at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and there I heard so many different types of music, I could immerse myself in styles I'd never really heard before. We studied Classical, Jazz, Electronic, soundtracks to film, in addition to looking at the history of music and technical aspects of music production. Other people I met there were like minded musicians and collaborators. I'm still making music with a friend I met there 20 years ago. My time there certainly influenced how I approach making music and the sounds I like to hear.

Resource Pack

What was it like to create the music for Crazy Times?

Creating music for dance work, I always find the trickiest part is at the beginning. There are often no set limits or frameworks to work within, unless the choreographer asks for something for a specific purpose. It can be anything from a string quartet to techno music, and anything in between. Antony approached me and asked if I would like to do music for this work, and of course I said yes. First of all I sent him a few different samples of music and tracks I had already been working on to get an idea of the direction he wanted to go in. I would produce draft versions of the music and Antony would give his feedback and ideas. We kept doing this until we had something we were both happy with. Sometimes it was difficult because tracks would develop in such a way that I liked them more and more but Antony found they strayed too far away from his vision for the work – other times I would say “I'm not sure I like what I've done here, but listen anyway” and then Antony would really like it. It really was a collaborative process.

How is it different creating music for dance?

It is really different – I'm part of a band and we already have a framework to operate in. We create music that usually will have lyrics or words and it will be 3-5 minutes long. Creating music for a dance work is really different. For example, the music for *Crazy Times* is almost 30 minutes long and it doesn't have any lyrics. In my band we're always trying to add more sounds and layers to make it more interesting, whereas, with a dance piece often the choreographer will ask you to make the music less interesting because it's there to support something else on stage and is not the main focus. If you imagine a beat that goes for ten minutes, and doesn't necessarily do much else, when it's by itself it can be a little boring but with when you put it with the movement, it's a perfect match.

How do you put together a song?

I use a software program called Protools. What is important to mention is that the program is just a method for recording the idea. It doesn't actually create music. The important part is what you do with the program - the dedication and focus you put into your ideas and the sounds you create and the time you take to identify what sounds good to you. I spend a lot of time recording melodies using synthesisers and making beats with drum machines, other times I play chords and melodies on the piano and then put it all together using the computer. I don't think it's really important what program you use, for example, I could've used the free program GarageBand to create the music for *Crazy Times*. I think of it in the same way as three different choreographers can use the same space but create three completely different dance pieces all with the same dancers – it's the same for me. Another thing I do is play on the piano with some ideas and record them using my iPhone, I use it like a writer uses a notebook, it's a really great tool for me to keep track of new ideas and music I might create whilst I'm improvising.

What would you like the kids who see Crazy Times to think about after they hear your music?

There isn't a hidden message or anything that I put in the music for listeners to get or unlock – there are no lyrics so there's no literal meaning. I would hope that children will be inspired or excited in some way to go home feeling amped about what they experienced, in the same way when I was a kid. I used to watch breakdance movies or sci-fi TV shows and get really excited by the music in those!