

**TARRAGON** THEATRE

**MIDNIGHT**



**SUN**  
*by Maja Ardal*

**Starring**

**Paul Braunstein, Matthew Edison, Nicky Guadagni, Holly Lewis  
Jeff Madden, Kari Matchett and Graig Earle**

**Directed by Andy McKim & Patricia Vanstone Musical direction  
& sound design by John Roby**

**Set & costumes designed by Vikki Anderson**

**Lighting designed by Louise Guinaud**

**Choreography by Valerie Moore**

**Stage manager: Arwen MacDonell**

**Tarragon Theatre's study guide for educators and  
students**

## **About the Midnight Sun study guide:**

This study guide has been created so that your theatre experience at Tarragon is a fulfilling and engaging one. We hope that it will help create discussions, generate ideas and prompt many questions.

The Midnight Sun study guide was compiled by Marin Conaughty and Mary Wood in Tarragon's **OutReach** department.

Special thanks and acknowledgements to Maja Ardal, Katrina Baran, Tim Chapman, Michael Hodge, Urjo Kareda, Andy McKim and Kristen Van Alphen for their contributions.

The Midnight Sun study guide is divided into several sections.

1. **Themes and theatrical elements** in Midnight Sun.
2. **Pre show lesson plans** for your class grounded in the Dramatic Arts curriculum.
3. **Post show lesson plans** for your class grounded in the Dramatic Arts curriculum.
4. **Additional resources** including information about Canadian plays set in World War II and current newspaper articles about Midnight Sun.

**We encourage you to contact us should you have questions or comments at 416-536-5018 x243.**

## Discussion of *THEMES* in Midnight Sun

### Playwright's Notes:

While the story in Midnight Sun suggests that it was only Americans who occupied Iceland during the war, they were in fact preceded by thousands of British troops. The British troops arrived in Iceland in 1940, just ahead of Hitler, who had plans to invade. Winston Churchill was quick to act first, saying "Anyone who has control of Iceland has a loaded pistol pointed at Britain, the United States and Canada". German U-boats were regularly attacking supply convoys from North America, as well as merchant and military ships. After the U.S.A. was suddenly thrust into the war as a result of Pearl Harbour in December, 1941, Roosevelt quickly arranged with Churchill to relieve the majority of British troops stationed there.

Iceland was a non-military nation under the rule of Denmark (they claimed independence in 1944). The war brought Icelanders into the 20<sup>th</sup> century swiftly and dramatically. The people found themselves in a situation that called for increased fish shipments to Britain, and this escalation of the fish industry brought sudden increased wealth to the country. In a land predominantly accustomed to barter, cash now became a flowing and plentiful currency.

While the Icelanders were relieved that it was the Allies and not Hitler who were stationed in the country, they also saw a potential threat to their valued cultural uniqueness. The Prime Minister of Iceland made Roosevelt agree to a long list of promises of non-interference with the political system of Iceland. And among them was the promise that the thousands of American troops stationed around the country would in no way interfere with the everyday lives of the population. The gift-laden Americans represented a country that was known to young Icelanders mainly as the home of their beloved Hollywood films. Today there are many people in their 50s who are described as Kanabarn or American Baby. They were raised as Icelanders and most have never known their American fathers.

After the war, the threat of Communism replaced the threat of Hitler. Today there is an American air base in the south of Iceland.

This play also has some characters who are invisible to the audience. The Hudufolk (Hiddenfolk) are a population unique to Icelandic culture. They are seen by only a few clairvoyant people, and live in the cliffs of the mountains. While their origins are pagan, the most common explanation for them is that when God came to visit Eve's children, she did not have the time to wash them all so she hid the dirty ones. Their population grew and they are highly respected. They are not to be disturbed unless the humans warn them in advance, so they can hide in new homes until the trouble is over.

**The following thematic breakdown are possible discussion ideas for your class.**

### **Theme of America:**

Throughout Midnight Sun there are references about American culture. Like the Icelandic characters, we the audience have been introduced to American pop culture and we can recognize an idolatry towards its **music**, **movies** and perceived **wealth**.

For instance, Sissa consistently speaks quoting Hollywood films and the women of Strandvik make dresses like those of movie stars.

*"And when I become a woman, my beautiful soldier will fly into the sky with me over the rainbow, and into Hollywood"*

**Sissa** Midnight Sun

*"The only ones who really know how to love and be happy at the same time are our Hollywood soldiers. We'll be safe with them, won't we?"*

**Sissa** Midnight Sun

*"You are the most beautiful girl I've seen in my life.."* **Jim** Midnight Sun

*"Why do Americans say 'the most', always 'the most' and always 'the best'?"*

**Prila** Midnight Sun

As Canadians we could ask ourselves if –like the Icelanders- we are enthralled by American culture? What movie or television stars do we admire? What clothes, "labels" do we purchase? (or want to have?) What type of music speaks of that wealth, that lifestyle?

- **Prila's** mother **Hildur** does not understand the infatuation with American culture. Have you had similar experiences within your own family?
- Do you think that the Icelandic infatuation with American culture is a form of escapism because they are living in a war torn time? Or is it simply part of youth culture?
- Aside from war what other factors could *Midnight Sun's* characters be escaping from?
- In contemporary Canadian culture, through consumerism and obsession with American culture, do we experience escapism?

## **Image of Iceland and America**

### **A Discussion of Iceland's perceived image**

*Are there parallels Between Iceland and Canada?*

- Both are northern countries
- Just as Iceland has never had an army, Canada is perceived as a peacekeeping nation
- Iceland and Canada share similar economies such as fishing (especially in eastern Canada)
- Same outside, "other" view of America, or perhaps Canada has an inside view because of extensive American media exposure
- Similar experience of being "invaded" by American Culture
- Similar attitude (real or perceived) by some Americans who look condescendingly on Icelandic and Canadian culture

## **Coming of Age, Story of Youth:**

Midnight Sun is a play about young people and the issues they are confronted with while growing up. Most of the characters are in their early 20's (Prila, Kari, Petur and Jim Swing) and Sissa is 14. The characters deal with issues such as: *independence, sexuality, partnership expectations, life choices etc.*

As a parallel theme in Midnight Sun, Icelandic culture is at a crosspoint (like the young people) between centuries of tradition (their insular ways) and the explosion of opening themselves up to the world (through music etc.)

An example of the drastic changes that Iceland was going through is that when the American troops arrived in 1942 there were more Americans in Iceland than Icelanders! Remember that most of the troops were between 18-20 years of age!

### Some elements of coming of age:

- Sissa's confirmation, she is now perceived as an adult in the church and says "*that's when I'll be a woman*"
- Prila's first job at the telephone exchange is one where she is paid in money. She thus acquires a sense of independence and responsibility.
- Jim Swing has left home for the first time. He joins the American army in order to support his mother, brothers and sisters and at a young age Jim becomes head of his household
- Petur is preparing to go to Boston to pursue graduate studies

Are students today coping with similar coming of age issues?

### Communication tools within *Midnight Sun*:

Communication tools can be used to: *relay information as well as convince others of our beliefs.* In *Midnight Sun* several characters have a strong link with communicative tools:

**Jim:** Radio Announcer  
**Prila:** Telephone Operator  
**Petur:** Newspaper Reporter

As well, the characters frequently watch Hollywood movies at the theatre. These movies define what the characters wore (clothes for the dance), the style of the characters' speech, how they were supposed to fall in love. It created ideals of *beauty* and *love*.

- What new communication exists today that has transformed, enlarged our perception of the world (*World Wide Web, video conferencing, satellite television*)?
- How has it been received?
- What are the envisioned **benefits** (*economic growth, access to information, building relationships*) or **shortcomings** (*economic growth at what cost, is the information provided correct*)?
- Like the characters in *Midnight Sun* are we at a crucial point (through mass communication) between tradition and the explosion of opening ourselves up globally?

### Fairy Tale Element

- In varying degrees, some people in Iceland believe in a mythological and spiritual world
- This belief has been documented in various art forms (their literature, movies etc.)
- Sissa sees "hiddenfolk" and believes them to be a part of her natural world
- Why do you think Sissa is connected with this mythical world?
- There are references in *Midnight Sun* that **Kari** is a pied piper
- Towards the end of the play the Icelandic women go to the American dance. They are all lining up, are going away from the village and "their men"
- This reinforces the pied piper-like imagery
- The music (Jazz) has lured the women away much like the pied piper had lured the children of Hamelin away
- Are the women gaining their independence or latching on to new men?

## Sound:

Through its text and characters Midnight Sun brings to discussion many broad themes, scenes are played out in a multitude of settings and in a similar way sound is used to further drive and expand the world of the play within the theatre space.

For instance, although as an audience we never see the American army, its ships and aircrafts, their presence is felt through sound. It is through the sound of the ships and the aircrafts flying overhead that we believe we are witnessing a story set in American "invaded" Iceland. As well it is the sound cues of peaceful swan callings that transfer the audience to a beautiful isolated fjord where Sergeant Jim and Prila indulge in watching the midnight sunset.

Live music further plays an integral role as part of the sound design for Midnight Sun.

## Music

The role of big band music in the show is certainly layered. The music represents the American influence in Iceland as well as the coming of age and sexuality of the young Icelanders. Also, the music plays an important role as a moral builder for the troops and distraction from the fact that their lives are at risk while fighting a war.

Music allows the characters to open up to one another through its universal language as everyone has access to it through singing, playing and dancing. The music can be viewed as the commonality that brings Americans and Icelanders together. Together with the music they are able to escape the realities of a war torn country.

Music also serves as an integral conflict between the traditional Icelandic midsummer sun dance and the American troops planning their big band dance on the same evening. Music drives the personal character conflicts between Kari jazz player as he entices his former lover Prila to sing with him at the American dance which goes against his brother Petur's wishes.

## Set and Lighting Design

Usually, before rehearsals begins the designer meets 3 or 4 times (for a period of 4 to 8 hours) with the director (Midnight Sun is co-directed by Andy McKim And Patricia Vanstone). The designer and directors thoroughly discuss the play to ensure both parties share a similar vision of the play, and explore how this vision will be represented through scenic design.

There are many different locations in Midnight Sun and the set needs to be versatile enough to create an environment for each of these settings.

During Midnight Sun setting includes areas such as:

- a kitchen
- outside on the edge of a cliff
- an army radio station
- a dance hall

***It will be interesting to take notice of the following:***

- where on the stage certain scenes take place ?
- how scenes are blocked?
- how are outdoor scenes differentiated from indoor scenes? (one example is by the characters putting on and taking off of boots)

## Set Design

### Levels:

Different levels in the play help define the various set locations in the play. Often when music is incorporated in a play, levels lend themselves nicely to the design because there are so many levels of music that we hear that complement well with visual levels.

As well the curved edge of the stage connotes a clear separation from the audience and enhances an island feel to the set (perhaps the waves coming up against a shore). Iceland is an island which adds to its sense of being insular and isolated, like the actors on the raised, multi-levelled stage.

The floor was painted to look like hardwood. The wood gave the set an earthy feel, this earthiness perhaps allowing access to the hiddenfolk. Also the wood is a clear contrast to the grey rippled metal backdrop and sliding doors. The sliding metal doors created a hangar effect to the set representing that beyond lay the world of the American air force and the war invading the insular island. The vertical walls also suggest craggy cliffs typical of Iceland's topography.

### Lighting:

Midnight Sun takes place on June 21 the time of year when Iceland has almost 24 hours of sunlight. During this period the sun sets for 12 hours hovering just above and across the horizon.

The lighting designer thus has a huge challenge as they must light the stage equally. There is little opportunity to change the lighting in the show as the sun never sets. The challenge for a lighting designer is how to break up the monotony of colour.

- What lighting colours prevailed during Midnight Sun?

The lighting designer also had to light a show with no darkness to contrast. There are certain scenes that have been lit emotionally as opposed to realistically.

- Can you think of those scenes? (Sissa in the basement talking to the hiddenfolk, Hildur in her bedroom)
- The spotlight effect "Broadway look" is also used with scenes with Jim Swing and the big dance.

### Costumes:

When designing costumes the costume designer considers several elements as part of the costume creation.

## Research

- Through discussion with the director the costume designer will decide whether to make the costumes **period accurate**(for Midnight Sun, 1942 Iceland). The designer researches clothes of the period by looking through old department store catalogues (Sears or Eaton's), going to the Metro Toronto Reference library and accessing the picture archives or even looking at old family photographs if appropriate. Similarly if the costumes are contemporary designers look to current fashion magazines and stores for research.

## Looking at the script

- The designer also works from indications within the play's script. In reference to what she will wear at the Midsummer Dance Midnight Sun's Prila says, "*I'm going to be Rita Hayworth from 'Only Angels have Wings'*". Thus the costume designer watched the film "Only Angels have Wings" and designed Prila's dress accordingly. Similarly when Hildur says that she will wear her traditional dress to the dance, the designer would research and create a traditional Icelandic dress.

## Practical considerations

- Designers must also think practically designing costumes for instance that will allow the actors to move about the stage as required, costumes that remain effective under certain lighting, and costumes that can be created within the designers allocated budget. incorporate budget costs for creating costumes are especially considered. Designers produce a wardrobe for their characters

## Artistic choices

- The designer continues to study the script and looks for hints into the characters' personality and then makes artistic choices for the colour of the costumes, their shape, the fabrics to be used.

In Midnight Sun designed by Vikki Anderson, Sissa's costumes are very pale, almost exclusively white. Why do you think the designer picked white colours?

Petur's character wears slacks, jacket, a tie and vest. Why did the designer choose to dress him in conservative and formal attire? What may this indicate about his character?

**Pre show Lesson Plan 1**  
**Script Analysis in Midnight Sun:**

**Objectives:**

- *Demonstrate an understanding of subtext, motivation, and status in the development of a character*
  - *Interpret and present a dramatic text*
- Ontario Dramatic Arts curriculum

**Warm-up:**

- Lead the students in a physical warm-up to prepare them

**Activity:**

- Divide the students into **groups of two**
- Distribute minimal script from Midnight Sun faced down (please see attached scripts)
- Ask the students to decide who is character “**A**” and who is character “**B**” without looking at the script
- Once they have established the characters allow the students a few minutes to work on the scripts

**You can use several coaching techniques for the students to work through the script. Allow a few minutes after each direction for them to rehearse and pick one or two groups to present each one in front of the class.**

1. **A** speaks very calmly while **B** is very agitated
2. Ask them to pick **3** places to **pause** within the script
3. Ask them to practice the script with **A** yelling and **B** whispering
4. Perform it with **B** standing and **A** sitting down (and vice versa)

Ask the students to perform the minimal script and continue performing into an extended improvisation

- Did performing the text in different ways give you insights into the character?
- What were they?
- After the presentations the class can gather around and discuss the script:

Which gender were the characters? Two males? Two females? One male and one female? Why do you think that? Are there any hints within the script to support your hypothesis?

Looking at Midnight Sun's **minimal script**:

What is the nature of the characters' relationship? Why?

What will be an actor's challenges in performing this scene to an audience?

Can you envision what the lighting design would look like? Why?

Have you ever seen something extraordinary for the first time (*like being at the top of the CN tower or the first time going to the ocean*) What was it like? Ask the students to recreate a similar scene from their own lives.

**Extension Possibilities:**

- After seeing Midnight Sun the students can compare and contrast what their scene analysis with the performance they attend
- Were any acting choices the same? Did it give them a special insight into that scene?

## Midnight Sun Scene Excerpt

- A:** That sun is like a big ball of fire. Does it sit there all night?
- B:** Oh no. It will move over the ocean and go around to the east, then the sky will become like fire.
- A:** I haven't slept a wink since I got here.
- B:** Nobody does for all summer.
- A:** The guys in Raven Canyon are feeling kinda crazy. Like kids in a candy shop that never closes. You know?
- B:** This is normal. It is our gift, for getting through the winter of dark. Do you like it?
- A:** The colour of the sun! What do you call it?
- B:** Red.
- A:** The colour of your lips. You are the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life.
- B:** Why do Americans say "the most", always "the most" and always "the best"?

## Pre show Lesson Plan 2 Setting and Set Design

### Objectives:

- *Develop an understanding of the elements of scenic design*
  - *Demonstrate an understanding of the function of design, lighting, and sound in the communication of a drama*
- Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Introduce the idea of the Setting of *Midnight Sun*:

#### Discussion Ideas:

- Many peoples are often described by the geography of their country (*the mountains, cold weather, snow*)
- Sometimes the climate/setting defines people (e.g. Canadians and our cold winters)
- What does the weather give us as “**characteristics**”?
- What activities in our lives do we engage in because of the “Canadianess” of our climate i.e. *skiing, ice skating, hockey, maple syrup, winter carnivals*
- Midnight Sun takes place in **Iceland**:

#### Brainstorm a session on Iceland:

- Iceland is in the Northern Atlantic, an island with a small population
- Some view it as very isolated from both Europe and North America because of its northerly location
- Iceland has almost 24 hours of sunlight around the beginning of Summer (June 21, when Midnight Sun takes place)
- There are few trees in certain areas
- The weather is often cold
- Many sheep for wool
- Large fishing communities (like in the Maritimes)
- Bright sun
- The students may think about living in Iceland
- How would it feel to be far geographically from other countries?
- How would you be affected by having 24 hours of sunlight at certain times of the year and then none at all
- Are there any similarities with their lives here in Canada?

After brainstorming ask the students to divide into groups of 3.

#### Activity 1:

- Divide the students to divide into groups of 3
  - In groups the students make a collage using many different resources to represent the setting in Midnight Sun (remember setting usually encompasses **time, place** and **atmosphere**).  
Midnight Sun occurs in the small northern Icelandic community of Strandvik in 1942.
- ➔ images from magazines, newspapers
  - ➔ written words from articles, famous quotations
  - ➔ from nature (leaves, twigs, etc.)
  - ➔ fabric swatches
  - ➔ different paper

- ➔ card board boxes
- ➔ tin cans

- Each group presents their collage (design) to the class explaining their choices for the materials and how it reinforces the setting of Midnight Sun
- Students could have a written component submitted with their work to explain their design choices

### Activity 2:

**In the same groups. How would you physicalize the setting of Iceland in the set design?**  
(write this on poster paper)

- What colours would you use (for **lights**, **sets pieces**, and **props**) to represent the northern town in Iceland where the play takes place
- What would the set pieces be made out of (*metal, wood, plastics* etc.)
- What colours would the costumes be?
- What fabrics would you use for the following characters:
  - Prila 21, Icelandic
  - Sissa 13, Icelandic
  - Hildur early 50's Icelandic
  - Petur 2 1, Icelandic
  - Kari 23, Icelandic
  - Private Jim Bailey 23, American

### Activity 3:

Students refer to the **Tarragon Mainspace Groundplan** as a reference (*please see attached sheet*) for their own creation of a set design that takes place in Iceland and will have to represent many different settings:

- kitchen/main room,
- military radio station
- speech at a harbour
- rehearsal space for a band
- on a cliff overlooking the ocean
- in a basement
- a bedroom

**Pre show Lesson Plan 3**  
**Discussion of the Technical Elements of Midnight Sun**

**Objective:**

- *Demonstrate an understanding of the function of design, lighting, and sound in the communication of Drama*
  - *Demonstrate an understanding of audience perspective in the communication of a Drama*
- The Ontario Arts Curriculum

- The aim of this activity is to have students begin thinking about the **importance of technical elements** as part of a theatrical production.
- Assigning specific **roles** to students by creating a mock **press conference** will allow them to be more **engaged** in the classroom activity **and** the performance of Midnight Sun.
- In assuming the role of a designer, for example, they immediately will **look more closely** at the designer's artistic **choices**.

**Activity:**

- The press conference should be a **moderated event** where the journalists ask questions, the designers answer
- Students may be encouraged to come in costume as a journalist, or a lighting designer etc.

The first part of the lesson plan prepares the students for Midnight Sun and their responsibility while watching in role.

**Part 1:**

- Before the students attend the Midnight Sun performance assign each of them in a role:
  - several are **theatre critics**
- The remaining students assume the role of one of the following (in groups):
  - **costume designer**
  - **lighting designer**
  - **sound designer**
  - **director**
  - **set designer**
  - **musical director**
- Inform the students that when they attend Midnight Sun they must focus on their assigned **role**.
- For instance, the theatre critics (for the *Globe and Mail*, *London Free Press* etc.) need to think of what they would comment on the performance's **technical aspect**. What questions would theatre critics ask the designers, directors etc. about their choices (such as why choose a specific dress for Prila's costume)
- Similarly, the designers, directors etc. need to pay close attention to their designs while watching Midnight Sun. They need to think critically about the artistic choices that were made and why. How did these choices help reinforce the main themes (ideas of the play) and add to the telling of the story?
- All the students prepare for their role so that after the performance (back in class) a press conference is held where the theatre critics will direct questions to the designers, directors etc.
- The students should be encouraged to think of their own questions to ask the artists

*Some of the following questions may be discussed with the students before the show so they are able to focus their attention on their task while watching the piece:*

1. What do you think the set designer is trying to convey through the design? (what feelings of Iceland may be transferred, do these correlate with the main themes of the play?)
2. There will be several different 'locations' on the set. What elements differentiate one location from another? Are the designers successful?
3. How does the lighting designer communicate to the audience a difference between interior and exterior settings?
4. What do the costumes communicate to the audience about each of the characters? Do you feel that the costume choices were strong? Why? or Why not?
5. How does the music in the play extend the theatrical experience?

## **Part 2:**

Following Midnight Sun's performance a press conference is held with the theatre critics asking questions to the designers and directors.

### **Possible extension:**

- During the press conference appointed students transcribe the discussion
- The transcription is distributed to, or copied by each student
- They will have information about various directorial and design techniques. Students can then write an analysis about Midnight Sun and the role of its technical elements
- Students can be encouraged to address whether the design choices were powerful and should remember to always support their statements/ analysis with examples

## Pre show Lesson Plan 4 Music

### Objectives:

- An understanding of the function of sound in the communication of a Drama
  - Identify and explain the function of a variety of media (...music) in presenting a Drama
- Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Discussion of Music:

- The fundamental role of music in theatre productions
- The musical element in Midnight Sun serves a very strong role. The music transcends a typical musical presence (often that only occurs between scenes, at the beginning and at the end of a performance). Many of the characters in Midnight Sun sing complete songs that are accompanied by live musical instruments (piano, drums, bass, cornet).

### The Role of Music in a Theatrical Performance:

#### Tone:

- Music helps set the **Tone** of a Play
- The tone of a play is usually set at the **beginning**
- It allows for different worlds to appear
- For example, theme music from television shows help set the tone of the entire show (much like the theme of a story). The eeriness of the X-Files theme music sets the tone of this suspenseful, science fiction series.

#### Mood:

- Music helps form the **mood** of the scene
- The difference between mood and tone is that **mood changes throughout a performed piece**.
- For instance in classical music a minor key would generate a somber mood whereas a major key would emphasize a happier mood.
- Certain types of music like anthems also define a mood. Think of the music of *Oh, Canada* and how it generates a mood of pride. Similarly at hockey games music is used to generate a mood of excitement with a fast tempo and the raising of keys.

#### Transition:

- Music establishes **Transition** between scenes (mood of the scene that just ended)
- For example if a scene where an argument has taken place has just ended and the following scene is a festive party then the music is used to help **bridge the transition between scenes**.

#### Establishes Setting

- Music helps determine/highlight **time of day, type of weather**
- Certainly examples for this can be found in classical music such as Stradinsky's the Right of Spring or Vivaldi's The Four seasons

#### Character:

- Music indicates when particular **character** that **enter on stage**
- This can be well illustrated in silent movies.
- Typically horror movies have a type of music played when the evil character is about to appear.

#### **Activity 1:**

- Divide the students into groups of 4 or 5
- Distribute to each group a piece of music (1 minute in length)
- Each music piece should connote a clearly different mood, tone, feeling etc.
- The students are to create a story line that would **go with the music**
- Then the students would form 5 tableaux (that would represent the 5 pinnacle points of their story accompanied by the music).
- Each group presents in front of others their piece

#### **This exercise emphasises:**

- **Tableaux** (each character is clearly defined in his/her “arrested motion”)
- **Body movement** (smooth transition from tableau to tableau in conjunction with the musical piece)
- Looking at the **power of music** to highlight the **telling of a story**

**Post show Lesson Plan 1**  
**Big Band/Swing Influences on Midnight Sun**

**Objective:**

After studying the importance and function of different types of music in live theatre, discuss specifically the role of Big Band/Swing music in *Midnight Sun*.

Please see attached "Brief History of Big Band/Swing Music". Distribute to students and either assign the reading, or read out loud in class. Following the reading, start with the discussion ideas below.

**Discussion Ideas:**

- What was the political climate like in the US during the 1930s and 1940s that may have driven this form of music?
- Many individuals mentioned above are African American. Is this the first musical form primarily driven by African Americans? What influence, if any, is given to music on account of the color of the artist's skin?
- Music is oftentimes spoken of as a universal language. What do you think the message of Big Band/Swing music is? Is it a message that one could understand in Russia as well as in Canada, no matter what language is spoken?
- Why would war have an effect on music, and vice versa? There have always been musicians among enlisted soldiers, why would this be desirable during battle, as well as in preparation for battle?
- What affect does the big band music have upon the American troops? Why would this style be favoured among the troops?

**Discussion Ideas regarding *Midnight Sun*:**

- Iceland, at this time, was a very insular society. Big band music brought the voice of African-Americans to their homes. How could this have affected their view of themselves, and the world?
- Prila and Kari share a love of music – how does this affect their relationship, as well as Prila's relationship with Petur?
- The American's "Big Band Bash" causes much unrest and conflict within the town. What was the most inflammatory aspect of the party for the Icelanders? The music, the fact that only women were invited, the American influence over their town, etc.?
- If this play were set during the 1960s, for example, how would the music be different? How would the tone, mood, or emotion be affected?

**Activity 1: Musical Monologues**

1. Dividing students into groups of four or five, have each group pick an artist from the Big Band/Swing era. They may choose artists included in the attached research material, or they may choose someone not mentioned.

2. Once they have their chosen musician, they are to each write a short (2-3 min) monologue about their life. Each monologue should either cover a different time, event, or significant individual in that artist's life, thus giving the audience a wealth of information into his/her personality.
3. These monologues will be performed to the class. During the performance, the group should choose pieces of music to go with each monologue, so that the musician's gift to music may be experienced along with their personal history.

### **Activity 2: Theme Songs**

1. *Midnight Sun* shows the effect that music can have on individuals, as well as on a community. Assign each student to brainstorm on a specific type of music or piece of music that has had a profound effect on his or her lives. Emphasize that this can be from any point of their lives – from childhood lullabies to the music played at high school basketball games.
2. Have each student find that music - or a representation of that style of music if the actual piece is unavailable - and bring it in to class. The music will be given to the teacher, who will randomly play each piece, and the class as a whole will have the chance to guess which student is represented by each selection.
3. Once the class correctly chooses each student, that student will have the chance to explain what the selection means to them, what affect it had upon their lives, and why they decided that this would be his/her "theme song".
4. This activity is a great chance to discuss the assumptions that people are so quick to make about certain types of music (ex: classical music is just for high society, hard rock has a mostly male following, etc.).

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIG BAND/SWING MUSIC**  
**Excerpted from Bob Thomas ([www.redhotjazz.com/bigband.html](http://www.redhotjazz.com/bigband.html))**

The Jazz music of the Big Band Era was the culmination of over thirty years of musical development. What is it that made Jazz so innovative and different that it could literally sweep the world, changing the musical styles of nearly every country? And what is it about big band Jazz that makes the feet tap and the heart race with excitement?

**African Music and Ragtime**

The musical and cultural revolution that brought about Jazz was a direct result of African-Americans pursuing careers in the arts following the United States civil war. As slaves African-Americans has learned few European cultural traditions. With increased freedom to pursue careers in the arts and bringing African artistic traditions to their work, African-Americans changed music and dance, not only in the U.S., but all over the world. For after the war, African American dancers and musicians were able to create work that was not hidebound by hundreds of years of musical and dance traditions brought from the courts and peasant villages of Europe.

What was the European tradition? European music through the nineteenth century was melodically based, much of it with a square or waltz rhythmic structure.

What was the African tradition? Much African music has an organization which is based around rhythm and accent, rhythms and accents that may actually shift and move in relation to each other as the music progresses.

The big change that took place in music rhythmically was the shift away from the Oom-pah-Oom-pah (1-2-3-4) rhythmic structure. Oom-pah has a strong accent on "1." African musical tradition tends to count towards the accented beat so that an African may count 2 on the same beat a European would count 1. It is also typical of West African music to have rhythms of different lengths overlaid each other, creating shifting accents. Which is to say that by the late 1920's African-American Jazz music had developed a tradition where musicians put a strong rhythmic accent on "2" and "4" (oom-PAH-oom-PAH) and melodic accents anywhere BUT on "1."

**Ragtime**

The first popular musical trend in the United States produced by this African-European synthesis was Ragtime which first achieved popularity in the late 19th century. Ragtime musicians often used what are called "ragged" rhythms.

Ragged rhythms were African-influenced rhythms, syncopated so that the accent was "off" the beat (the first beat is "on" or "down"). Ragtime musicians also occasionally used what were called "blue" harmonies and notes. Blue harmonies and notes used notes that didn't fit into the European concept of melody or harmony. Some of the notes don't even exist in European musical scales -- these notes fit "between the cracks," as people sometimes said.

**New Orleans and Jazz Origins**

The New Orleans bands of the late 19th century from which Big Bands evolved were varied. Some were social bands that played popular songs and music for dancing; some played marches and rags for weekend picnics and parties. Others specialized in their own variations on work and blues songs.

Big Band Jazz, according to one historian, had its start in New Orleans in 1898 at the end of the Spanish-American war. Military bands returned to the port to decommission, flooding the city with used band instruments. And African-Americans interested in music quickly bought up

hundreds of these instruments and quickly began to form bands. Starting from square one, aspiring African American musicians taught themselves to play.

This had two results: unconventional playing techniques and unconventional rendering of popular musical tunes. The playing techniques led to new and interesting sounds entering musicians' vocabulary: trumpet and trombone growling sounds, wah-wah sounds, the use of odd household objects as mutes, and others. The unconventional rendering of popular musical tunes led to Jazz. An African-American playing a popular tune would play it adding some African musical traditions: different musical scales (which became traditional in nineteenth century African-American "blues" music) and different and complex rhythms.

Not bound by European traditions of form, these early Jazz bands played music that was, to put it mildly, loosely structured. A soloist or an instrumental section of the band played the melody (as they interpreted it) and the remaining musicians improvised the harmony and rhythmic embellishments. Many Jazz bands "arranged" their music by rehearsing it by "ear" many times until all the musicians were in agreement about what went where, when. These Jazz bands often changed personnel, sometimes on a weekly basis. This frequent changing also helped the evolution of Jazz, preventing bands from becoming hidebound and determined to have a particular style or sound. On into the 1930's change was the watchword of Jazz.

### **Jazz Enters the Mainstream**

As New Orleans progressed into the 20th century, traditional band music gradually changed, so that marches sometimes contained improvised sections, and solos and accompaniments sometimes sported occasional blue notes. Elsewhere in society it was not even unusual for conventional popular songs to display a few ragged "Jazz" rhythms!

But not for the first time, these musicians dreamed of fame and fortune. [Fame and fortune was something which eluded many African-American musicians and bands due to institutionalized racism in the music industry and society at large. It was not uncommon for a African American Jazz band to record a tune to no acclaim, have a record promoter pay little or no money for rights to the tune, and then for that tune be issued by a White band to national promotion and great acclaim.] Enter radio and the recording industry into the world of Jazz.

### **The First "Jazz" Recordings**

The first "Jazz" record "Livery Stable Blues", coupled with "Dixie Jass Band One Step" was made in 1917 by a White band from New Orleans called The Original Dixieland Jazz Band. The band was one of the first to bring the New Orleans style of Jazz to New York. After a music agent heard them in Chicago and brought them to New York, where, within weeks, they were a sensation. Soon after their first record Victor records signed them for several more. The music recorded by the band was nearly conventional with no blue notes and only a smattering of ragged rhythms. Nonetheless, the record sold over one million copies and had a profound effect on musicians and the public all over the U.S.

### **The First African American Jazz Recording**

As Jazz proliferated, many New Orleans-based bands began spreading out across the country, playing in Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, or hitting the smaller towns on the T.O.B.A. vaudeville circuit. The first Jazz record by an African Americans, was by Kid Ory's band recording under the name of Spike's Seven Pods of Pepper Orchestra. The songs "Ory's Creole Trombone" and "Society Blues" were recorded in Los Angeles in 1922. After 1923 the flood gates were open and African American Jazz became widely recorded. Early stars included other New Orleans musicians like King Oliver and Jelly Roll

Morton, a Creole musician who, in the early 1920's, recorded over a hundred of his own and other's Jazz tunes. Some of the records are solo piano, but many are of Jelly Roll with his band the Red Hot Peppers.

These early releases were great hits and record companies began recording nearly anyone who even claimed to be a Jazz musician. With records coming out by the hundreds, thousands of young people across the U.S. decided they wanted to be "Jazz" musicians. The Jazz music boom had begun.

But the enthusiasm for Jazz was not shared by everyone. Many in White middle America were concerned, and magazine and newspaper articles decrying the influence of African American music on society and the scandalous behavior, including dancing, it supposedly led to were not uncommon. But the social outcry little effect. Jazz had arrived and it was going nowhere but up!

### **The Roaring 20's and Fletcher Henderson**

As a decade of rebellion the Roaring 20's was made for Jazz. The young and the hip delighted in anything that was new and exciting. The more staid and uptight members of society thought Jazz decadent and amoral which gave Jazz, for some, extra appeal. But the exciting new rhythms and harmonies were ultimately the irresistible force behind society's acceptance of Jazz.

The first bandleader to achieve national notoriety was Fletcher Henderson who formed a band in the early 1920's. Originally his band was a dance band, playing waltzes and foxtrots. Over the course of a few years Jazz rhythms and blue notes became more and more prominent in the band's music. By the time the band took over at Roseland Ballroom and featured Louis Armstrong on trumpet, the band had become a Jazz band.

In 1928 Henderson lost his arranger and he tried his own hand at creating the band's charts. It turned out that Fletcher was not only an excellent arranger, but he was essentially the first to arrange music in the style we now describe as "big band."

Duke Ellington, a formally trained musician, also formed his band in the 1920's, again as a dance band. The arrival of an innovative trumpeter named Bubber Miley and a talented saxophonist named Sidney Bechet exerted a profound influence on the Ellington's work, gradually helping to change the band into a remarkably creative Jazz big band.

Bubber developed a style that included a lot of blue notes, growling sounds and effects that attracted a lot of attention to the band. Bechet only stayed with the band for a short time, but he had a strong feeling for Jazz, giving the band not only a sense for the mechanics but also for Jazz phrasing. Ellington described Bechet as the "epitome of Jazz."

One other well-known and well-loved band in NYC at this time was Chick Webb's. The band started in the mid-1920's and became a regular band at the Savoy, which opened in 1926. It was Chick Webb's band at the Savoy that won several famous "battles of the bands", most notably with Count Basie and Benny Goodman. (And, in 1934, it was Webb that gave Ella Fitzgerald her start in the music business.)

Most of New York's Jazz clubs were in Harlem, and in 1925-26 there appeared several popular plays and a book which portrayed Harlem as the happening place in NYC. As a result, downtowners and tourists streamed into Harlem to see this colorful neighborhood, and the nightlife took off.

It was at this time that a great number of now-famous clubs opened. The Savoy (Chick Webb's regular gig) and the Cotton Club (Ellington's regular gig) were two of these clubs. The good thing about the many new clubs was it gave employment to many African American musicians and variety artists. Although the Savoy was integrated, it was nearly alone in that respect: most other clubs were segregated. They featured African American entertainers, but were owned and operated by Whites for a white clientele.

From 1927 until the late 1930's things were so busy in Harlem that good musicians could play every night of the year, sometimes in as many different bands due to constant personnel changes in most of the bands.

### **It Don't Mean a Thing...**

However, it wasn't until 1935 that Jazz with a "Swing beat" achieved national attention and then in large part to Benny Goodman.

As a youth Goodman was an extremely talented clarinetist. He studied with a respected Jazz clarinetist in Chicago, leaving Chicago in 1928 for NYC where he was successful as a sideman. However, he didn't form his own band until a few years later when he got a recording contract thanks to the great Jazz impresario John Hammond. Soon after that he bought some scores from Fletcher Henderson, some of them arranged by Henderson himself. Despite Henderson's fine arrangements, his band hadn't been doing well. Goodman, at the urging of John Hammond (he was the most remarkable man, influencing the history of early Jazz as much, if not more, as any musician), hired Fletcher.

The same arrangements which brought Henderson's band lukewarm interest proved to be dynamite for the Goodman band. For the next several years Henderson arranged tunes for Goodman band in a Jazz/Swing style.

### **Benny Goodman, King of Swing**

Henderson's arrangements (with the help of a flourishing radio broadcast industry) are credited with helping sweep the Goodman band to national popularity the following year at the finish of an apparently unsuccessful cross-country tour in California.

As it turned out, the radio broadcasts of the tour were scheduled too late for people in the east and midwest. On the west coast, however, the broadcasts gained a devoted audience who, surprising the band, swarmed its final concerts. And it was with Benny Goodman that the Swing big band boom began, and our narrative on Jazz draws to a close.

After Goodman's dramatic success ignited the Big Band craze, excellent musicians who had been working as sidemen for other bands found encouragement to start their own bands. Bands led by the Dorseys, Glenn Miller, Bunny Berrigan, Lionel Hampton, Harry James, and Gene Krupa sprang into being. Also at this time Count Basie's band came to New York from its original home in Kansas City.

With big band Swing music in full flower, it was only logical that jitterbug dancing should also rocket to national popularity, which it did.

## Post show Lesson Plan 2 Monologue Development

### Objectives:

- Perform in the classroom, a variety of dramatic presentations, using a range of form)
  - Create Drama through research or the interpretation of a source
  - Develop the background of a character, using appropriate techniques (e.g., writing in role...)
- Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Warm- up

- Ask each student to think about a character from Midnight Sun
- Guide the students in a physical warm-up
- Eventually the students are lying on the floor with the eyes closed about to begin the character building exercise

### Activity:

- Guide the students towards building their characterization by prompting them with character questions

### Writing exercise:

- Ask the students (in role) to get up and take a pencil and paper to write a journal entry in character about how they feel, based on the characterization exercise
  - Students then get together in groups that have chosen to write about the same Midnight Sun character
  - After they have had time to write, ask (one character group at a time) to select and read aloud any part of their journal entry when they have been tapped on the shoulder
  - When they hear another voice beginning, they are to fade out their reading
  - Move around the room and tap students on the shoulder, one after the other
  - The result is a rich soundscape, a collective choral monologue based on the characterization, reflection exercise
- In groups (or individually) the students are to write a complete monologue, drawing both from their journal entry and the class reading

### Post Activity:

- While doing the choral reading did another student say something that you had also written in your journal reflection?
- Did you feel that as a class you had a cohesive understanding of Midnight Sun's character?
- Were there moments in the Midnight Sun performance that were highlighted in your mind and influenced your interpretation of the characters?
- Do you believe you have new insights into the characters and the choices she made?

### Extension Possibilities:

- Instead of assigning various characters to reflect upon, pick a specific character and guide the characterization specifically about that character
  - Perform the "tapping the shoulder" activity as a whole class
- Students may finish the monologue assignment for homework as part of a written component.

## Post show Lesson Plan 3 Point of View Activity

### Objectives:

- *Monologue development*
  - *students will demonstrate an understanding of their own and others' respective functions in collaborative work in Drama*
- Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Activity:

- Divide the students into groups of 4
- Have the students select a scene from Midnight Sun that they enjoyed (felt connected to)
- Each group collectively decides who will play which character from Midnight Sun (roles need not be gender specific)
- The students map the **key actions of the scene** on the attached **Project Planning Sheet**
- Rehearse the piece
- Each student is responsible for developing their Midnight Sun character (**facial expression, voice, body movement**)
- Students may look to the Tarragon production as a grounding reference
- Once the scene is rehearsed the group decides a point in the action where each character would “step out” of the scene and perform a **1 minute monologue**
- The monologue should represent this characters **point of view**, what the character is **internally feeling**, trying to reach out to the audience and convey his/her story
- The monologue can include references to other moments in the play (or past) that are not necessarily performed in this scene
- The students should decide what **structure** they want to use to “**frame**” their monologues (i.e. a freeze out of which the character steps, a blackout and a spot into which the character moves; theme music which indicates a tableau and a monologue)
- Each Scene should **begin** and **end** in a Tableau (to frame their work)
- Each group performs their scene in front of the class

### Possible Extensions on the exercise:

- Before the scene begins -during the tableau- facilitate a discussion with the class as audience about: **Which characters are in the tableau? Why? Is it because of costumes, physicalization on stage? What is the scene about?**
- Each student can submit their written monologue as part of a written component (*the written assignment can come out of monologue brainstorming, before or after the performance of the scene*)
- The students can wear costumes to highlight their character

### Post Activity

#### Discussion of Scenes:

- Did the monologues provide additional insight into the action and character choices?
- How did the framing of the monologues look from a **dramatic** point of view? Did it flow?
- Did different characterization of the characters (from those at the Tarragon) develop or come out of your scenes? Why? or Why not?

## Project Planning Sheet:

### Group Members:

---

---

### Characters and Descriptions:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Summary of Scene Indicating when each Monologue will be delivered:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Technical Requirements (optional):

List the music pieces, lighting, props, set pieces and costumes that are needed for the performance of the scene:

### Lighting:

**Music:**

**Props:**

**Set Pieces:**

**Costumes:**

## Canadian plays set in World War II Excerpted from the Playwrights Union of Canada

1. **Polderland**  
by [Bryan Wade](#)  
**Synopsis:** A patrol of Canadian soldiers takes refuge for one night in a Dutch farmhouse behind enemy lines in World War II. The youngest discovers the price of war when he is forced to deal with a young German soldier.
2. **Letters in Wartime**  
by [Kenneth Brown](#)  
**Synopsis:** In the closing years of WWII, a young Canadian bomber and his girlfriend are separated by war.
3. **Madwitch**  
by Paddy Campbell  
**Synopsis:** A tale of prejudice and bigotry set in a prairie town on the eve of WWII. A young girl persecutes an old Indian woman known as Madwitch until a crisis brings her to a more human understanding of the old Indian woman.
4. **Naomi's Road**  
by [Paula Adele Wing](#)  
**Synopsis:** What happens when you lose everything, including your family? This is the honest and moving story of the forced relocation of Japanese Canadians from Coastal British Columbia during WWII.
5. **None Is Too Many**  
by [Jason Sherman](#)  
**Synopsis:** An adaptation of the book by Irving Abella and Harold Troper about Canada's refusal to admit Jewish refugees into the country before, during and after WWII.
6. **Still the Night**  
by Theresa Tova  
**Synopsis:** The story of two young women who were separated from their parents during WWII, and wandered through Poland, pretending not to be Jewish. Winner of six Dora Mavor Moore Awards, including Best New Play. "Absolutely brilliant...A work of art." – CBC
7. **The Golden Door**  
by W. Ray Towle  
**Synopsis:** Recounts the discrimination against the Japanese community during WWII. Although loyal to Canada, they are treated as enemy aliens and ousted from their homes in a country they called home for forty years.
8. **This Year, Next Year**  
by [Norah Harding](#)  
**Synopsis:** Set in Bournemouth, England, in 1944, a moving story of a mother and her three daughters living and loving during the last month of WWII.

*visit the Playwright's Union of Canada at [www.puc.ca](http://www.puc.ca) for more Canadian play information*