



blind date

By Rebecca Northan

Apr 9 – 28, 2019



Centaur Theatre
Study Guide

Prepared by: Julia Ainsworth
(BFA, B. Ed) Arts Educator & Theatre Artist



**Proudly supporting
Centaur's Theatre of Tomorrow**



STRONGER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER™



Table of Contents

About the Creator	3
Production History.....	4
Audience Etiquette.....	5
Pre-show Discussion.....	6
Q & A with the creator	7
Post-show Discussion	9
Theatrical forms.....	10
Lesson Plans & Assessment	12
Glossary of Improv Terms	19
Glossary of Clown Terms.....	22
Works Cited	24

About the Creator Rebecca Northan

Rebecca Northan is an actor, director, playwright, and improviser. Her other creations in the “spontaneous theatre” genre include: *Legend Has It* (playRites Festival 2014, Alberta Theatre Projects, Brooklyn Academy of Music, NYC... soon to be workshopped and adapted for YTP in Toronto) as well as *An Undiscovered Shakespeare* (in development at the Stratford Festival) Recently, Rebecca wrote & directed, *Slipper*, a panto adaptation of *Cinderella* for Alberta Theatre Projects, and has been commissioned to create their Holiday Family Show for 2018, 2019, and 2020. Her other scripted play, *Kung Fu Panties*, won an Audience Choice Award for its sold-out run in Calgary. *Undercover* is slated to play Vertigo Theatre in Calgary, and the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton. @rebeccanorthan @spontaneousYYZ #UndercoverYYZ

Source: Tarragon Theatre



Rebecca Northan

Production History

Blind Date premiered in 2010 and has gone on to be performed over 600 times in Canada, the United States, and the UK, with eight different actors trained to play the lead role. In the fall of 2016, a Queer adaptation premiered at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in collaboration with Evalyn Parry. Rebecca Northan received a Dora Award for the Tarragon production of Blind Date in 2015. Blind Date will be performed for the first time in Quebec at the Centaur Theatre in 2019.



Rebecca Northan as Mimi

Audience Etiquette

Welcome to the Centaur Theatre! We are so pleased to welcome you to our production of “Blind Date.” To make the most of your viewing experience and in consideration of actors and audience members around you, please be mindful of the following:

- Cell phone use in the theatre is not permitted. Please put your cell phone on silent and refrain from taking pictures, videos or texting during the performance.
- Please refrain from talking or opening candies during the performance.
- Food and beverages are not permitted in the theatre.
- Please do not kick or step over the seats when entering and exiting.
- If you are taking notes for the purpose of writing a response or review, please be discreet to avoid distracting others.
- Though this play is audience interactive, please refrain from calling out, touching or interacting with the performers unless invited to do so.

Enjoy the show!

Pre-show Discussion

1. What images and themes does the title hint at?
2. What are your expectations for this improvised show about dating? What are you excited about or curious to discover? Be prepared to revisit these expectations in the post-show discussion.
3. How do you anticipate being involved as an audience member? Would you like to be selected to participate in this play? Why or why not?
4. What do you imagine are some of the challenges of performing this type of show?
5. Have you attended an improvised show or interactive play? How does the format differ from a traditional theatre production?

Q & A with *Blind Date* Creator Rebecca Northan

Where did the inspiration for creating this show come from?

The idea thumped into my head, fully formed, so it's hard to say where it came from. Where do ideas come from? Do they even really 'belong' to us? If I ask you to "come up with a good idea", chances are good that your mind will freeze up and give you nothing, or you will agonize under the pressure of coming up with something "clever". I think, at the time, I just happened to be open enough for the idea to arrive.

What was your creative process like? How does creating an improvised work differ from writing a traditional play?

Blind Date started out as a 10 minute 'clown turn' that I did about 30 times over a summer. At the end of the summer, I wondered what would happen if we took the time to get to know the "Date", and so the longer version unfolded from that curiosity. When creating, what I call: Spontaneous Theatre, you come up with a hypothesis, then you bring in some volunteers and you try your idea on your feet and see what happens. Often it all falls apart, but you learn very valuable things, and you go back to the drawing board. Most of the research, discovery, and honing gets done in front of an audience. That's sort of the opposite of how scripted theatre works.

What is the most surprising or bizarre thing that has happened during a show?

I'm always surprised that we're still doing the show, and that people are willing to participate.

What has been the best blind date you have been on? The worst?

On stage - they're all great for different reasons. It's wonderful when the Guest is having fun, being themselves, and surprising themselves. When they come off stage and say, "I didn't know I was capable of that!" As for the "worst".....people always ask that questions, and we just don't answer it, because there is too much focus put on the negative. It's not all that sensational.

What is the "social experiment" aspect of the show about?

Bringing a non-performer on stage, putting them in a familiar social situation, in this case, a Blind Date, and then seeing what happens. Often we discuss dating etiquette, and where current notions might come from. We unpack this social thing called, 'dating' in real time.

How do you put your date at ease during the show?

By being kind to them, and being honest with them. I always offer my own truths first. The same way you put anyone at ease.

Why did you choose to perform this play in the tradition of clown?

The nose gives permission, and reminds everyone that we are just 'playing'.

What is the most challenging aspect of interacting and improvising with a live audience member for each performance?

Challenging isn't quite the right word, that makes it sound 'hard'....what it is, is always engaging. We never know what will happen - so we can't ever really be prepared. We have to be willing to throw out our own ideas in favour of what is happening in the moment.

Even though you have been performing this play for almost ten years, are there still moments that are scary or risky?

This work does not scare me - it inspires me, and that is what we keep doing it. The 'risk', is that we don't know what will happen.

Have you stayed in touch with any of your dates after the show?

Yes.

What advice can you offer to young creators starting to explore improvisation and interactive theatre?

Be kind. Be gentle - with yourself, and whoever you are playing with. Have empathy for Fear - your own, and others'. Be curious. Hold onto your sense of play, and wonder. Try to leave cynicism at the door. Fail forward. Be positive.

Post Show Discussion

1. How did the play confirm or contrast with your expectations?
2. What moments did you find particularly surprising?
3. What purpose did the pre-show interaction with Mimi serve?
4. What factors might the actor portraying Mimi consider in selecting an audience member as her date?
5. What does the portrayal of Mimi in clown add to this work? What would be lost if the character of Mimi were interpreted realistically?
6. What risk and responsibility does this production take on by sharing the stage with an invited audience member for the duration of the performance?
7. What strategies were used to help make the audience member feel comfortable?
8. What “offers” did the audience member on the date with Mimi make?
9. What commentary does this piece offer about love & dating?
10. What role does empathy play in this production?
11. Would you return to the theatre to see this play again?
12. How does the minimal aesthetic serve the production?

Theatrical Forms

Interactive Theatre

Interactive theatre is a theatrical form that bridges the traditionally separated roles of performer and spectator. Interactive theatre “breaks the fourth wall” and invites audience members to step out of their role as “passive observer” and actively engage with performers and plot development. The degree of interaction varies depending on the boundaries set by the artistic team and the theatrical style. In improvisation shows, performers ask audience members for suggestions of theme, location, images, and relationships which serve as inspiration for the performers. Other immersive formats may cast audience members in a specific role (such as jury members or party guests), ask audience members to vote at key moments and/or engage with their surroundings. In Forum Theatre created by Augusto Boal, audience interaction is employed to engage audiences in dialogue on themes of oppression and socio-political injustice. In Forum Theatre/ or “Theatre of the Oppressed” audience members are invited to step into a character’s role to transform the outcome of a narrative.

Improvisation:

Improvisational theatre is a theatrical form commonly referred to as impro/improv. Characters, relationships, setting, plot, and dialogue are created extemporaneously by the players without advance planning or script writing. The term improvisational theatre is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of styles including improvisational comedy and dramatic works. Improvisation is often used as a tool in the creative development process in theatre, film, and television.

Improvisation is also used for educational and therapeutic purposes. Spontaneous role play is used in the fields of simulation training for medical practitioners and law enforcement. In the practice of psychotherapy, improvisation may be used as a tool to develop empathy in order to understand an individual’s inner thoughts, emotions, and relationship dynamics.

Clown:

Clown is a physical style of comedic performance drawing upon a wide variety of theatrical traditions including mime, slapstick and circus arts. The clown performer embodies the archetype of the fool who struggles with day to day tasks. Through their hilarious & disastrous struggle, the clown transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. The high degree of physical humour makes the art of clown accessible and entertaining to a broad audience. The most well-known genre of clown in contemporary culture is the red nosed type with colourful, exaggerated costumes, shoes & props.

Portrayals of clown in film and television include Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, *Mr. Bean* (Rowan Atkinson), Kramer in *Seinfeld* and Sacha Baron Cohen's various characters including *Ali G* and *Borat*.



Mr. Bean (Rowan Atkinson)

Lesson Plans & Assessment

1. Intro to Improvisation

Curriculum Connections: Performing Arts

Lesson Overview:

Through guided exercises, students will be introduced to the craft of improvisation in performance and develop skills in spontaneity, artistic risk-taking, focus, and creative collaboration.

Warm-Up Exercises:

- a) **“Sound & movement”** In a circle, each student will make a specific sound & movement. Group will mirror back. Repeat the sequence 2-3 times increasing the speed each round.
- b) **“Yes, Let’s!”** Students stand in a circle. Each student will vocalize a specific “offer” that can be easily physicalized (I.e. “Let’s throw a Frisbee”). Group will respond enthusiastically with the phrase “Yes! Let’s!” followed by miming of offer. The pattern will flow through the circle until every participant has practised making an offer. Encourage students to practice enthusiastic commitment vocally and physically to each offer.
- c) **“Yes, AND.../Circle storytelling”** Students stand in a circle. One student will begin storytelling with “Once upon a time” and contribute one phrase to building a story. The storytelling will continue clockwise to the next participant. Each participant will continue the story by beginning with the phrase “Yes, and...” until the story concludes and closes the circle.

For example:

Student 1: Once upon a time there was a boy named Billy who lived with this grandmother in the forest.

Student 2: Yes, and they lived very peacefully until one day one they awoke in the middle of the night to hear strange sounds.

Student 3: Yes, and Billy peered out the window to see a creature staring back at him.

Note: Encourage students to build a clear platform of basic story elements (who, what, where) and to structure the story with a clear beginning, middle and end.

Improvisation Exercises:

Props: Students compete to improvise imaginative uses for everyday objects

Students are divided into pairs & given a prop (i.e. a piece of rope, a piece of paper) prior to the performance. A timer is set for 2 minutes. Pairs must work together to transform the prop as many times as possible (i.e. a rope may be transformed into a snake, ponytail, necklace etc.) Each transformation is awarded a point. The pair with the most uses (points) wins.

*Note: a prop cannot be used for what it is i.e. a rope cannot be used as a skipping rope.

FREEZE! Students improvise short scenes inspired by physical movement

Two players will improvise a highly physical scene (with or without dialogue). An audience member may call “FREEZE!” at any point. When “FREEZE” is called, the players freeze and the audience member taps out a player and takes their exact position on stage. The audience member now becomes the initiator and player in a new scene inspired by the frozen position they have assumed.

*Note: The position must be transformed into a new scene (not a continuation of the former scene or movement). All students should be encouraged to participate and try calling “FREEZE!” at least once. Encourage players to **accept** and **build upon** offers and keep the scene as physical as possible to avoid “talking heads”. Encourage students to establish a clear platform for their scene (i.e. who, what, where).

Performing Arts Rubric:

Project: Intro to Improvisation Exercises

COMPETENCY	(32) (41)	(50) (56)	(66) (73)	(80) (87)	(94) (100)
CREATES & PERFORMS	Demonstrates a lack of commitment and willingness to take artistic risks (make creative offers) in improvised performance. Demonstrates a lack of support and acceptance of scene partner’s suggestions/offers.	Demonstrates some commitment and willingness to take artistic risks (make creative offers) in improvised performance. Demonstrates some support and acceptance of scene partner’s suggestions/offers.	Demonstrates a solid commitment and willingness to take artistic risks (make creative offers) in improvised performance. Demonstrates support and acceptance of scene partner’s suggestions/offers	Demonstrates strong commitment and willingness to take artistic risks (make creative offers) in improvised performance. Demonstrates consistent support and acceptance of scene partner’s suggestions/offers.	Demonstrates enthusiastic commitment and willingness to take artistic risks (make creative offers) in improvised performance. Demonstrates strong and consistent support and acceptance of scene partner’s suggestions/offers.

2. Play Review

(Curriculum Connections: English Language Arts, Performing Arts)

Lesson Overview:

Individually, students will write a 1000 word review of the Centaur Theatre’s Production of “Blind Date”. Students will apply their knowledge of theatrical/literary elements to their review of a live performance and demonstrate a knowledge of theatrical terms. Reviews must include the following:

- Production information (play title, theatre company, date, production credits)
- A plot synopsis (a brief description of what happens in the play)
- Staging/design (how was the stage used? Describe the design and staging elements: set, props, costume, lighting, sound, music, choreography)
- Performances (what character choices did the actors assume: vocally, physically? Were these choices effective?)
- What theatrical genres* or devices* were used throughout the play (*refer to the glossary of improvisation & clown terms)?
- What moods, feelings, and emotions did you experience while watching the play?
- What questions did you have while watching the play?
- What is the central premise of the play?
- How did the theatrical style(s) support the themes of the play?
- In conclusion, what elements were most effective and enjoyable about this production? What elements would benefit from further development in your opinion?
- Overall, would you recommend this play? If so, to which demographic and why?

English Language Arts Rubric /Performing Arts

Project: Blind Date Play Review

COMPETENCY	(32)	(41)	(50) (56)	(66) (73)	(80) (87)	(94) (100)
ELA: PRODUCTION PERFORMING ARTS: APPRECIATES	Demonstrates a lack of comprehension of theatrical terms and literary elements (character, plot, themes, etc.) of <i>Blind Date</i> Written response is incomplete and demonstrates a lack of organization of ideas.	Demonstrates some comprehension of theatrical terms and literary elements (character, plot, themes, etc.) of <i>Blind Date</i> Written response is somewhat complete and demonstrates some organization of ideas.	Demonstrates a solid comprehension of theatrical terms and literary elements (character, plot, themes etc.) of <i>Blind Date</i> Written response is complete and demonstrates the organization of ideas.	Demonstrates strong comprehension of theatrical terms and literary elements (character, plot, themes etc.) of <i>Blind Date</i> Written response is detailed and demonstrates strong organization of ideas.	Demonstrates thorough comprehension of theatrical terms and literary elements (character, plot, themes etc.) of <i>Blind Date</i> Written response is thorough and demonstrates excellent organization of ideas.	

3. Research Project

Lesson Overview: Students will research National & International theatre companies which practice the performing arts traditions of clown, improvisation and interactive theatre.

In groups of 2-4, students may select a company from the suggested list (below) of established Canadian and International theatre companies. Students will prepare a five minute power point/multimedia presentation to share with the class introducing one another to the company. Students should take notes on one another's presentations and be prepared to ask follow up questions.

Each presentation must include:

- ✓ Company mandate
- ✓ Company history & past productions
- ✓ Company members
- ✓ Artistic approach
- ✓ Notable shows and reviews
- ✓ Production photos
- ✓ Short video clip of show trailers, interviews etc.
- ✓ Short Q & A period from students/teacher

Suggested Company list:

Mixed Company Theatre Toronto (Forum Theatre)
 Mooky Cornish (Clown act)
 Mump & Smoot (Clown duo)
 Morro & Jasp: U.N.I.T Productions (Clown duo)
 Ontroerend (Interactive Theatre)
 Play Back Theatre (Forum Theatre)
 Punchdrunk (Immersive/interactive theatre)
 Loose Moose Theatre Company (Improvisation)
 Second City Theatre Toronto (Improvisation)
 You Me Bum Bum Train (Interactive theatre)

English Language Arts Rubric /Performing Arts

Project: Theatre Company Presentation

COMPETENCY	(32) (41)	(50) (56)	(66) (73)	(80) (87)	(94) (100)
ELA: Competency 2 (Talk to communicate) PERFORMING ARTS: APPRECIATES	Demonstrates a lack of knowledge of theatre company. Presentation is incomplete and demonstrates a lack of organization of ideas.	Demonstrates some knowledge of theatre company. Presentation is somewhat complete and demonstrates some organization of idea.	Demonstrates a general knowledge of selected theatre company. Presentation is prepared and complete. Demonstrates basic organization of ideas.	Demonstrates strong knowledge of selected theatre company. Presentation is well prepared and informative. Demonstrates strong organization of ideas.	Demonstrates detailed knowledge of selected theatre company. Presentation is well prepared, effectively structured and informative. Generates interest and dialogue from peers.

Glossary of Improvisation Terms

Accepting

Agreeing & applying offers made by a player to advance the action of a scene.

Advancing

Moving a scene forward in plot.

Ask-for

Asking a question of the audience to provide inspiration for a scene.

Beat

A unit of action in a scene. A scene is comprised of a sequence of beats.

Blocking

Rejecting or interrupting an offer made by a scene partner. The opposite of accepting. *Not to be confused with the theatre term referring to the staging of movement on a stage.

Call back Reincorporating a previous idea, character or event from earlier in a scene or show. Most successful when the link is clear for the audience and used to resolve a conflict or advance action.

Canceling

Erasing previous offers or actions already played out. Not recommended.

Conflict

The struggle or obstacle in a scene that creates necessary tension & suspense. Without conflict, a scene falls flat.

Context

The wider cultural, historical or political setting of a scene.

Driving

Monopolizing the direction of a scene.

Explore and heighten

To run with an idea while increasing the dramatic stakes.

Focus

Where the audience should concentrate their focus on a scene. All players should support this focus by avoiding unnecessary distractions.

Gagging

Making unnatural jokes that do not compliment a scene or move it forward. Frowned upon.

Gibberish

A fictional made-up language spoken by the players.

Handle

The premise of a scene.

Information overload

Introducing too many informative details in a scene. Over complications that are impossible to resolve.

Masking

Moving in a way on stage that blocks visibility of the performers for the audience.

Mugging

Exaggerated unnatural facial expressions that are distracting from the focus of a scene.

Naming

Identifying characters, props, locations etc.

Narrative

The story of a scene encompassing a beginning, middle, and end.

Objective

A character's goal in a scene.

Offer

Any suggestion (through dialogue or movement) which advances the scene. Offers should be accepted, explored and heightened by scene partners.

Physicalization

Application of a character's objective into physical movement on stage.

Post-show/Notes

Feedback sessions amongst the ensemble of players after a show.

Plateau

A point in a scene that lacks action or suspense.

Platform

The basic who, what and where of a scene. A successful scene is built on a solid platform.

Raising the stakes

Increasing the dramatic consequences for characters in a scene.

Running order

A prepared breakdown of ask-fors and handles to be used in a show.

Setup

Presenting the handle and ask-for to the audience at the beginning of a show.

Space-object

A mimed object used in a scene. Actual props are rarely used.

Status

A character's sense of social status. Scenes may hinge on status transfers, in which one character's status declines while another rises.

Stepping out

Breaking the illusion of a scene.

Synthesis

Creatively combining two different ideas.

Talking heads

When a scene consists primarily of dialogue instead of physical action.

Transformation

Changing a character, object or location into something different.

Uber-mime

Overly complicated mime that is unclear to the audience.

Waffling

Struggling to make a decision which advances the plot. Causes a scene to plateau.

Walk-on (or Walk-through)

When a performer enters a scene to offer a strong idea that advances the scene and then exits.

Wimping

Accepting an offer but failing to apply it.

Source: <http://www.improvcomedy.org/glossary.html>

Glossary of Clown Terms

Auguste

The Auguste character is a low-status character with an upbeat, trickster or anarchist personality. The August character traditionally wears the red nose and often sabotages instructions given to them by a higher status character such as the White Face clown.

Bit

The clown's bit comprised of several "gags" scripted or improvised.

Blow-off

The comedic ending of a clowns' bit, entrée or gag.

Business

The specific movement of a clown which expresses information about the character.

Bouffon

A clown term coined by French theatre artist Jacques Lecoq to refer to a style of performance focused on the craft of mockery.

Character Clown

An exaggerated comedic performance of a specific character such as a cook, hobo, police officer, baker or housewife. Character clown costumes make use of props and costume pieces such as wigs, moustaches, canes to create a larger-than-life character profile.

Entrée

A 5-10 minute clown act comprised of gags and bits.

Framework

The basic outline of a clown performance. The outline may vary from script to a loose framework with a general opening, middle, and end, leaving room for the clown's spontaneous creativity.

Gag

A gag is often a joke a clown plays on another clown or audience member. When repeated within a “routine” or “bit” the gag becomes a “running gag. A gag may be a short scripted piece or a simple joke such as a trick prop.

Interlude

A transition as part of a circus show in which a clown may appear to provide commentary on the previous scene or introduce the next act. Interludes may include a running gag or provide a framework for the overall show.

North American Clown

The most common North American Clown circus type depicts the downtrodden character of the hobo/bum/tramp.

Pierrot & Harlequin

A comedic clown duo of stock characters rooted in the tradition of Commedia dell’arte. Pierrot is an innocent, sad clown who is often the victim of unrequited love. In contrast, the Harlequin character is a light-hearted trickster.

Prop stunt

Comedic clown bits that make use of props such as a tiny car, clown bike, handkerchief or squirting flower.

Show

The production that a clown is appearing in such as a circus or variety show. A clown show is comprised of Entrées, Side dishes, Clown Stops, Track Gags, Gags, and bits.

Side dish

A short comedic clown act running from 1-3 minutes comprised of different bits and gags

White Clown

A sophisticated clown type that often gives instructions to a lower status clown character such as the “Auguste” clown. This character is often melancholic and contrasts with the upbeat personality of Auguste.

Whiteface Makeup

Whiteface makeup is used by “Pierrot” clown types as well as the Buffoon/grotesque types with the addition of painted lips, red nose & wig.

Works Cited

Circopedia www.circopedia.org

Drama Library Online <http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/genres/>

Improv Comedy <http://www.improvcomedy.org>

Tarragon Theatre <http://www.tarragontheatre.com/>