

Big Theatre for Little People



Meet Me Incognito

By
James Still

Student Matinee
2002-2003

Directed by
Christopher Gurr



SEASON

Dear Educators,

Meet Me Incognito is a play centered around one question, "Who am I?" When I first heard that question I thought the answer was easy. "My name is Andrea and I'm the Associate Director of Education at Geva Theatre Center. I'm happy when the sun shines. I don't like to be late for things. I love to drink a cup of coffee first thing in the morning and I hate standing in line at the post office."

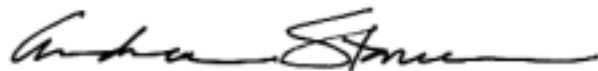
All of these things are true and they help to make me who I am. However, *Meet Me Incognito* is about exploring the question much further than likes and dislikes. It's about looking deep inside. In an interview, director Christopher Gurr said:

"Who am I" is a never-ending question. The answer changes all the time. That's why we ask the question so much and why we continue to ask it no matter how old we are.

Meet Me Incognito takes us on an incredible journey allowing us to examine our identity and our place in the world. It is unlike any other play I have seen and I think that is what makes it so magical. The non-linear form of *Meet Me Incognito* encourages audience members to look at themselves from a variety of perspectives. And while it is always important to search for answers, this play reminds us that we can also learn a great deal by listening to life's questions.

What follows on pages 3-10 are activities, articles, and questions written for your students. Please feel free to adapt activities for your class, as they were designed for a wide range of students. For further information on this production or other Educational Programs please call (585) 232-1366 x3058.

Thank you for your support of Geva's Big Theatre for Little People. We look forward to seeing you and your students at *Meet Me Incognito*.



Andrea Stoner
Associate Director of Education
(585) 232-1366 x3058

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Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

Him

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

"I always tell Mary: home is where the heart is." Abe

Synopsis – The Story of the Play

Meet Me Incognito is a play that is hard to explain because it doesn't have a simple plot like many television shows and movies you've seen. It is a story about a girl who takes a trip, not to another city or country, but through her own heart, mind, body and soul. She meets four incredible friends that help her to find her way. Together they sing, dance and tell stories as they search for the answer to the question "Who am I?" The question is not easy to answer, and they find many other questions along the way. The audience joins the girl and her friends in a never-ending journey full of hope, joy and amazing discoveries.

About Writing the Play – From the Playwright, James Still

I remember feeling very free when I wrote this play, although there are many strong ideas and feelings behind it. I wanted to put the "play" back in plays but I also wanted to write something that had a kind of sophistication to it. Like everything I write, I wanted *Meet Me Incognito* to be unlike anything else I'd ever seen. I wanted it to be completely unique. And so it is! Heart, mind, body and soul. The idea that an ensemble of actors will guide an audience through these "stops" of humanity and encourage everyone to continue the journey by looking closer at themselves and the world around them. It seems like 2003 is the perfect time for us to contemplate what it means to be human.

Sophistication:
having knowledge of the world

Unique: *being one of a kind, unusual*

Humanity: *people, the human race*

Contemplate: *to think about carefully*

What makes you who you are?

I am a student.

I am a sister.

I am a soccer player.

I am a violinist.

I am a vegetarian.

I am a writer.

I am a friend.

I am a pacifist.

I am a ...

Introduction

Meet Me Incognito asks the question "Who am I?" and searches for the answer by taking a journey through the heart, mind, body and soul.



Graphic courtesy of Chris Holden

"Up above our heads live the stories of the sky." Him

From the Director, Christopher Gurr

Can you tell us about the first time you saw Meet Me Incognito?

In my last year at Webster Conservatory in St. Louis, I saw *Meet Me Incognito* in a gym at an elementary school about seven blocks away from where I lived. I hadn't been to an elementary school since I was a student myself, but the company presenting the play was interviewing me for a job in their following season and they wanted me to see their work. I was blown away by how interesting and complex the play was, and how much the audience was really buying into the questions it was exploring. That was my first encounter with the piece. The next year I toured in *Meet Me Incognito* as an actor and musician. So, I saw it first as an audience member, I toured it as an actor and a musician and now I'm the composer and director for this production.

You said that you are also composing the music for the play. What happened to the original score?

Stephen Radek originally wrote the music for the play and composed it directly into a synthesizer. Unfortunately, when that synthesizer died, the music for *Incognito* was lost. So now I'm writing new music for the seven songs and eight other instrumental pieces in the play. We will record the music onto a CD and then use that recording during rehearsals and performances.

Do you think you have more influence on the play being both its composer and director?

Sure. I also composed the score for *Tomato Plant Girl* when I directed that play last year. Being able to write the music is nice because it allows me a lot of "think time" about how I want the play to feel, which is a very abstract thing. It's not only important for when the audience sees and hears the piece, but the actors can also pick up a lot of information from the music in the early parts of rehearsal. They get things from the music that I could never fully communicate with words.

Will it be difficult to direct Meet Me Incognito after being in the play as an actor?

It might be difficult at times to shake old patterns, but mostly I think it's a good thing to have lived inside the piece as a performer. The fact that I have already experienced the play one way allows me the freedom to explore it in other ways. This production will be a mix of all the different experiences I've had thinking about *Meet Me Incognito* over the last 12 years. The script is the same but the scenery, costumes, music, and the people I'm working with this time are all new. Together we will find our own way to tell the story.

What do you really enjoy about the script?

The most important thing to me is how playful *Meet Me Incognito* is about a serious question and how serious it is about play. Just because something is serious doesn't mean that we should take fun out of the mix when we are exploring it. When we encounter a question like "Who am I" there is an aspect of wondering—and wandering—that to me is very playful. Also, "Who am I" is a never-ending question and I think the playwright has really captured that. The answer changes all the time. That's why we ask the question so much and why we continue to ask it no matter how old we are.



Christopher Gurr

Influence: someone or something that has the power to produce change without use of direct force

The director and actors rehearsed 6 days a week, five hours a day for four weeks to get the play ready for you. After the rehearsal day was over, homework began. What kind of homework do you think an actor does? What kind of homework does a director do every day in between rehearsals?

How do you think the presence of an audience – of you in the audience – changes a play? What makes going to see a play different than watching something on TV or seeing a movie? Which, if any, of those things are related to the audience?

Heart

"Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart." Confucius

If you gave a tennis ball a good, hard squeeze you would use about the same amount of force your heart uses to pump blood out to the body. Your heart is about the size of your fist (for adults it's about the size of two fists), and is located almost in the center of your chest - although it's tipped slightly to the left side. Your body holds about 6 quarts of blood that your heart circulates through the body three times every minute. In one day, that blood travels a total of 12,000 miles. Your heart beats about 100,000 times per day and around 35 million times a year. With all this work for your heart to do, your thoughts and feelings are stored far away in your brain. If that's the case, then why do we associate our hearts with our emotions?

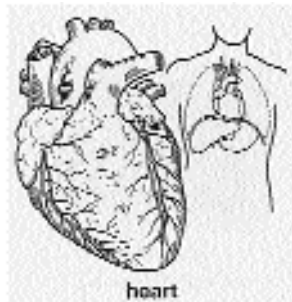
Define yourself using words that begin with every letter of the alphabet. The words can be nouns or adjectives. See if you can put at least one word down for every letter. For example:

A – actor, accident-prone, achiever, ally, artistic...

B – brother, best friend, baker, book-lover, brave, busy...

No one really knows for sure, but most of us have felt a heavy or even a broken heart on a sad day. We know that it takes time for a heart to mend. We have felt light-hearted during good times, and gotten so excited that our hearts have even skipped a beat. There are things that we hold close to our hearts and times when we share those things in heart-to-heart talks. Believe it or not, many of you have probably stolen someone's heart and some of you may have even given your own heart away once or twice.

Maybe it's because our hearts are so important to our bodies that we associate them with all of the important feelings that we have. The human heart is amazing because it keeps beating constantly throughout our lives to carry us through whatever we encounter along the way. If you listen to your heart at first you will hear lub-blub, lub-blub and think about all the amazing things that it does. If you listen closer, you will start to hear the amazing thoughts, feelings and ideas that make you who you are.



Graphic courtesy of
Chris Holden

"Sometimes you open your eyes. You don't know who you are. Are you awake? Are you the same person you were yesterday?" Him

Mind

"The purpose of learning is growth, and our minds, unlike our bodies can continue growing as we continue to live." Mortimer Adler

How do you remember the way to your friend's house? Why do your eyes blink without you ever thinking about it? Where do dreams come from? Your brain is responsible for all of these things and more. Your brain is the boss of your body. It runs the show by controlling just about everything you do.

It is more powerful and much faster than any computer you've ever used.

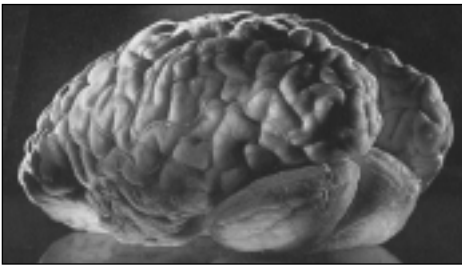
It is large and in charge – so large it fills the upper half of your head.

It looks like a soft wrinkly gray sponge, and it's almost as heavy as a carton of orange juice! By the time you've grown up it will weigh about 3 pounds.

Analytical:
calculating

The brain has three main parts: the cerebrum, the cerebellum, and the brain stem.

Cerebrum: The cerebrum takes up 85% of the brain's weight and allows you to reason. It lets you solve math problems, play video games, feed your fish, do a dance, remember your sister's birthday, and draw pictures. The cerebrum has two halves, with one on either side of the head. Some scientists think that the right half helps you think about abstract things like music, colors and shapes and that the left is more analytical, helping you with math, logic and speech.



The Human Brain

Logic: *to reach a conclusion based on facts*

Cerebellum: The cerebellum is at the back of the brain, below the cerebrum. It's much smaller, but just as important because it controls your balance, movement and coordination.

Brain Stem: Another part of the brain that is small and mighty is the brain stem. It sits beneath the cerebrum and in front of the cerebellum. The brain stem connects the rest of the brain to the spinal cord, which runs down your neck and back. It controls all the involuntary muscles - the ones that work without you even thinking about it. These muscles help you to breathe, digest food and circulate blood. The brain stem is also responsible for sorting through millions of messages that the brain and the rest of the body send back and forth.

Research on the mind provided by 'How does my mind work?' found at <http://endoflifecare.tripod.com/kidsandyoungadults/id24.html>. For more information and a diagram of the brain go to www.enchantedlearning.com

The final section of *Meet Me Incognito* tells the story of a star woman. Many cultures tell stories about the heavens – moon, stars, and sun. (See *Starry Tales* by Geraldine McCaughrean) Write your own heavenly story about the sky and its inhabitants.

"The basket's filled with everything, it's full of everywhere. There is so much more to see than what we think is there." Figure 1

Body

"The body says what words cannot." Martha Graham

It's amazing to think that we were all babies at one time. That we had to be picked up, carried around and fed. We all had to learn to crawl, walk and run. It's incredible to think about how much our bodies had to grow and change in the first few years of our lives. It's also incredible that the same body will be our home in years to come.

In addition to the many things our bodies do, they can also show people how we feel before we even say a word. Someone walking slowly with his/her head slumped over may be having a bad day. Someone pacing back and forth could be anxious and someone skipping down the hall might have just gotten some very good news. Our bodies enable us to travel through the world experiencing everything we encounter through sight, touch, sound, smell and taste. Our bodies also allow us to express who we are in many different ways. By drawing a picture, dancing to your favorite music, or simply sharing your thoughts, your body is helping you figure out the world while at the same time your body is helping the world to better understand you.

Amazing body facts:

There are 230 joints in the body.

Your brain sends messages at the rate of 240 mph.

Your body is 70 percent water and contains eight pints of blood.

When you sneeze, air rushes through your nose at the rate of 100 mph.

An eyelash lives about 150 days before it falls out.

You have about 100,000 hairs on your head.

Placed end to end, all your body's blood vessels would measure about 62,000 miles.

Amazing body facts found at factmonster.com



Find out about the person who said each quote. Is there something in that person's history, or the time in which he/she said or wrote the quote, that makes the quote easier to understand? <http://www.s9.com/biography/> is a site that can give you a little more information about these people.

Soul

"To thine own self be true." William Shakespeare

You can look up the word "soul" in many different dictionaries and find many different definitions. It can be someone's life force or the source of all thought and emotion. It's known as a sense of pride and the "core" or central part of something. Soul can even be defined as a ghost or a style of music. The soul can be a difficult thing to describe because it means something different to everyone.

The soul is a mysterious and magical part of who we are. It's what makes us do the things we do, believe the things we believe and love the things we love. It's the one thing that makes us completely different from everyone else and at the same time allows us to connect with others. The fact that we can't see the soul or define it allows it to be whatever we need it to be. What does "soul" mean to you?



William Shakespeare

About the Sound

Dan Roach is the sound designer. The sound designer works with the director to decide what types of sounds need to go in the play. This is what Dan Roach had to say about designing the sound for *Meet Me Incognito*:

The sound design process for Meet Me Incognito has been an interesting one because the play speaks to the issue of “who am I?” Early on we knew that the stage would basically be a large, blank white canvas on which the play would come to life. This opens up a whole world of sound so the possibilities are staggering. While each scene may suggest certain beginning points, there is also a score being written by Christopher Gurr that I will need to fit effects and other music elements around. The biggest challenge in a sound design is to come up with many of these sound elements without first having heard the other musically scored portions, or seeing what the lighting, costume, and set elements may also be doing at the same instant. Designing for flexibility when the universe of sounds is open to you is quite a challenge. Your imagination and ingenuity need to come to the forefront. It’s a challenge I look forward to immensely on this production.

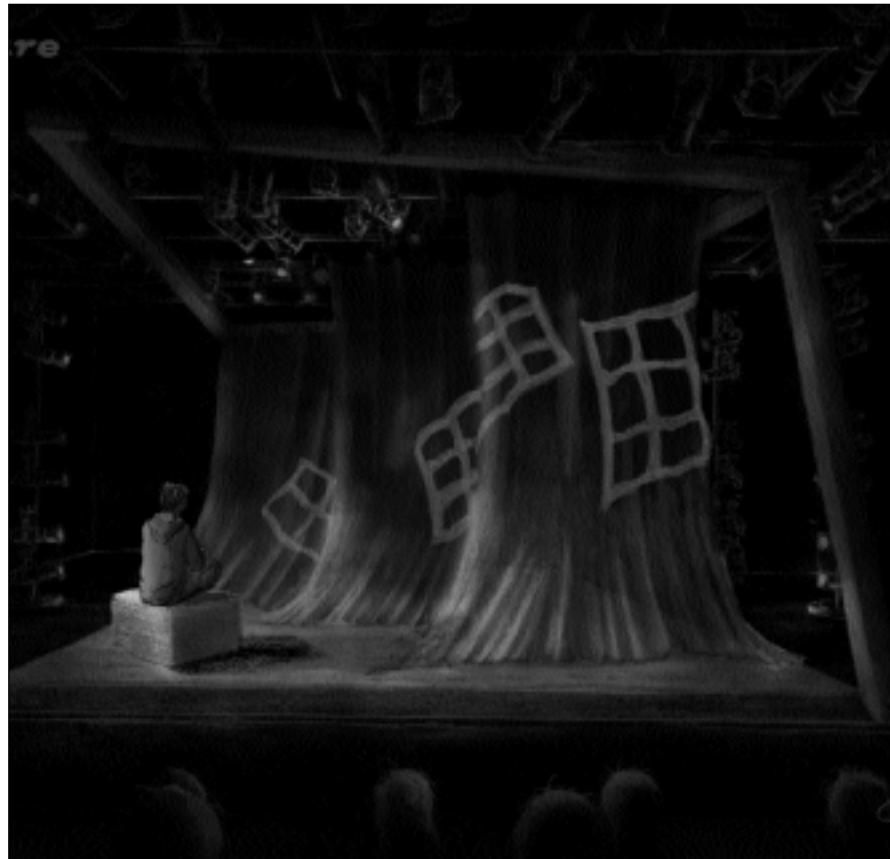
Staggering: causing great amazement

Flexibility: to be able to change with new surroundings

Ingenuity: cleverness, using your imagination

Immensely: a great deal, of great size

The People You Love
– Make a list of the people you see every day; you may want to carry a notebook for a day to make your list. Do the people you spend time with, and the relationships you have, define who you are?



This is a sketch of the set design for Meet Me Incognito. The set designer, Gary Jacobs, also worked with the director to decide what the set should look like.

“Sometimes what you’re looking for can be found in the strangest places.” Him

About the Lighting Design

Our lighting designer, Derek Madonia, worked together with our director, Christopher Gurr, to decide what the lighting for the play would look like. Derek Madonia says this about designing the lights:

The fascination regarding the process of designing James Still's Meet Me Incognito is that, rightfully, so much of the production is to be found in the director's head. The script serves as a departure point for the production, as there is so much left to be realized by the collaborative efforts of the entire artistic team – director; actors, designers. Unlike some plays which may focus on answers, this play offers a question: "Who Am I?" Christopher Gurr, the director, has said that he envisions the play as a "dance piece" with primarily side lighting and lighting in low positions from the beams. The real challenge, however, will be creating a light plot that is adaptable enough to cover the discoveries made in the rehearsal process. Those discoveries should help us to understand how we can best ask the question "Who Am I?"

Departure point: place to start from

Realized: to make real, to achieve

Envisions: to picture in the mind, to imagine

Light plot: a diagram that shows where the lights for the play are hung

A Day in the Life List
– Make a list of everything you do in a day from the time you wake up until you go to bed. Again, you may want to carry a small notebook with you for a day to be as accurate as possible. Do your activities define who you are?



This is a costume rendering done by the costume designer, Amanda Doherty. She worked with the director to decide how the characters looked.

"The Earth is gentle. And mysterious. And very beautiful. You have to treat it with care."

Astronaut

The Audience – The Final Piece

“The public sometimes thinks an artist is a television set – something comes out, nothing goes back. They don’t realize that if they can hear me, then I can hear them – their coughs, the electronic beeps from their wristwatches, the squeaking of their shoes.... The art of performance depends on the relationship between the musician and the audience. In the concert hall, each motionless listener is part of the performance. The concentration of the player charges the electric tension in the auditorium and returns to him magnified....The audience grows together and becomes a group. There’s the impression of a journey undertaken together and a goal achieved.” **Pianist Alfred Brendel**

This is a quote from a musician, but everything he says applies to the theatre, too. When you come to see a play, the actors are aware of you. Unlike a movie or a television show, the audience can affect or influence what happens on stage. Actors can hear the audience laugh, cry, become restless, or become still and silent with concentration. The mood of the audience can affect the mood of the performance – this is why we say that no two performances are alike, because no two audiences are the same.

We hope you enjoy the show. While you sit in the audience, please remember that you are a part of the theatre journey. You do not take that journey alone; please respect the people who are on the journey with you and allow them to enjoy the play also.

The audience is the final piece of the process – without an audience, the actors would still be rehearsing. By adding the audience the play becomes a performance!

Tell Us What You Think

Please write to us or send us pictures! We will be posting selected student responses to the play on our website, www.gevatheatre.org. We are always interested in knowing what our audiences think about our plays, especially...

- The most fun part
- The part that surprised you
- The most exciting part
- The part you talked about on the bus on the way back to school
- The first thing you told your family about the play when you got home
- The part you’d like to see again
- The part you thought about the most after
- The moment where you noticed the set
- The minute where you noticed a costume
- The most interesting sound you heard
- The part where something unexpected happened

Important Ideas – There may be things that you think are important, but you may not spend time on them everyday. Make a list of ideas that are important to you. Does this list help to define who you are?

“If you could empty out your mind, would everything you know fill the entire continent of Africa?” Him

Internet Resources

<http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze33gpz/myth.html>- This webpage is filled with links to myths from all over the world.

<http://kids.msfc.nasa.gov>- This is a webpage from NASA with lots of very cool activities for kids dealing with space.

<http://vilenski.org/science/humanbody/index.html>- The Human Body Adventure, which is a website with a tour through the different systems of the human body.

www.kidinfo.com/Health/Human_Body.html- This site has a lot of links to body information sites and lots of information on everything about the human body.

For Teachers

The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life by Joseph LeDoux

The Science Time Book of the Brain edited by Nicholas Wade

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*"I am an actress. And I understand that
anything is possible."* Juliet

Tickets Still Available



By José Cruz González
Directed by Graham Whitehead
Co-Production with Childsplay, Inc.

April 29 - May 9
Tuesday - Friday

Suggested for grades K - 4



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