

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# The Bridge

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by Louise Helfgott

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EXTRACT

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## THE BRIDGE

### CHARACTERS

- JULIE        A 15 year old girl.
- STEVE        An older and more streetwise teenager  
              who looks after Julie.
- RICK         A friend of Steve's, of a more aggressive  
              nature.
- SHANE        Streetwise, but a bit of a comic.
- VINCE        A recreational fisherman, mentor and friend to the above.
- SALLY        A dedicated social worker.
- AMANDA &     ]        Julie's parents.  
DENNIS COULTER ]
- LOCAL POLITICIAN
- POLICE OFFICER (1)
- POLICE OFFICER (2)
- COUNTER OFFICER
- JUVENILE JUSTICE OFFICER

Some of the above characters can be played by the same actors. There will also be other gang members on stage. In the 2006 production there was also a "bag lady" on stage, who hung around the streetkids, sometimes mimicking them, at other times just following them, with all her worldly goods being pushed around in a shopping trolley. This character added a new dimension to the production but it would be a director's choice to include in any forthcoming productions.

## THE BRIDGE

A synopsis of the musical based on an original idea by Jocelyn Perrers and Sally Romano.

This musical traces the life of 15 year old Julie who runs away from her middle class home to seek refuge on the streets with other runaways. Under an old bridge she meets up with Steve, Rick and other street kids. She also meets Vince, a teacher by day and recreational fisherman by night, who is a frequent visitor to the bridge, and acts as mentor to the gang. Although Julie finds life on the streets hard, she refuses to return to her comfortable home in which she felt unloved and unnoticed.

Enter Sally, a dedicated social worker, who has heard about Julie's plight from the girl's parents and attempts to persuade Julie to consider other options besides homelessness. Ignoring Sally's initial pleas, Julie becomes immersed in the drug culture and the criminal activities which support it. She encounters the violence of gang warfare and the harsh realities of the prison system before finally agreeing with Sally to see her parents again.

In the meantime, Julie's mother has come face to face with the violent side of Rick and other members of the gang and has subsequently had a change of heart towards her daughter and towards the other streetkids. In the final scene Julie is reunited with her parents and Sally and Vince come together, having formed a strong relationship in the course of events.

Other themes, such as the conservative political line to juvenile justice, are interwoven in the tapestry of this musical which utilises a variety of musical styles, choreography and both naturalistic and surrealistic modes of expression to re-create the atmosphere of the homeless world.

Another opening was used for the 2006 production – this is also available upon request. Other changes to the script are currently being explored and can be negotiated in any forthcoming productions. Some of the changes made by cast and crew of the 2006 production have been incorporated in this copy of the script.

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## ACT 1 SCENE 1

*Under the bridge. Night ... the sound of footsteps. A muffled cough. The flare of a match.*

RICK           Who's that?

STEVE          Steve.

RICK           Pay up man. Pay the toll.

STEVE          Piss off!

RICK           Pay up.

STEVE          Where's the bloody torch! I'm going to end up in the drink any minute!

*Torch is switched on.*

RICK           Cops went past. Had to turn it off.

STEVE          After what you've been taking today, just as well ... any left?

RICK           Pay up.

STEVE          Fuck off.

*They move down to the steps and light cigarettes.*

RICK           Where's the guys?

STEVE          How do I know? I'm busy minding my own business.

RICK           That's a change.

*Steve indicates for Rick to be silent after hearing a noise. He turns off the torch. Enter Julie, hair ruffled and wind-blown, Crying. Dim lights.*

### SONG - "LONELY GIRL"

JULIE          *She shivers violently and leans against the pylon. Noise cuts in.*

Who's there?

*Someone throws a stone at the streetlight. It goes out. A torch is shone at Julie. Members of the gang may suddenly run across the stage as if trying to get away. Julie sinks to her knees frightened. Lights out.*

## **ACT 1 SCENE 2**

*It is the opening of the bridge, six months earlier. A carnival atmosphere is evident on stage. People are carrying balloons, there are street performers etc. The politician (male or female), holding scissors, stands in front of the bridge which has a red ribbon straddled across it. Bright sunny lights through this scene. The politician starts talking.*

POLITICIAN It's wonderful to see you all here on this auspicious occasion, the opening of our new bridge. *(Pause)* What is a bridge?  
A bridge is more than just a great engineering feat. More than a triumph over nature. A bridge is the link between two bodies of land, the spanning of a rift, the closing of a gap. It allows us to reach inaccessible places, and open up new pathways. So as you see it is a very important structure. The building of bridges opens up new pathways for mankind, and ensures the steady upward progress of civilisation.

Symbolically it is a bridge between the past and the future, between the dreams of our ancestors and the hopes of our children. So it is with hope for a better future that I open this bridge. *(steps forward)* I now declare the bridge open.

*He cuts the ribbon. People commence walking. Lights fade.*

## **ACT 1 SCENE 3**

*Back to under the bridge.*

RICK You don't belong here.

JULIE I told you, I've got no home.

STEVE They'll take you back. They always do. Go home, before it's too late.

JULIE No. I can't. You don't know what they're like.

RICK Do they beat ya up?

JULIE *Confused.* Not really.

STEVE Rape ya?

JULIE *Disgusted* No. *Confused* No. It's not like that.  
*They circle her.*

RICK Send you to a good school?

STEVE Buy you nice clothes?

SHANE Give you lots of money?

RICK So you could buy whatever you like.

SHANE Turkey. Beef jerky. Roast dumplings. Duck flambe. Mmm.

STEVE What are you on about?

SHANE Getting sick and tired of eating rats. Gotta dream mate. Gotta dream.  
*Julie shrinks under the truth.*

STEVE So what ya doing here?

JULIE *(Getting angry)* I don't know.

RICK *(Accusing)* They gave you everything ...

JULIE It didn't mean ... anything.  
*The gang returns*

RICK Go back

JULIE: I can't.

STEVE What do you want to be like us for? Pinching cars. Trashing houses. Bashing people up. Thrown in the can, then you're back on the streets.

SONG - **"STREET KIDS"**  
*Blackout.*

**ACT 1 SCENE 4**

*Dusk. Vince is fishing off the old bridge. Kerosene lights dot the bridge revealing other fisherfolk.  
Enter Julie flanked by Rick and Steve.*

STEVE Hey Vince. Catchin' anythin'?

VINCE Catch you in a moment.

SHANE Yeah. Try it. You'll end up with your fish.

VINCE *(To Julie)* Hello. You're still with these no-hopers, eh? I thought you might have changed your mind.

JULIE No. Why should I?

VINCE You don't seem the type to hang around here.

JULIE *Trying to act 'tough'.*

What's it to you?

VINCE *Kindly and joking*

Don't like to see you following the footsteps of this riff- raff ...

RICK Shut your mouth, Vincey, or we'll shut it for you.

VINCE Yeah, that's right. Threats, threats, threats. But no action.

*Rick goes to tackle Vince. Steve stops him.*

STEVE Hey. It's Vince.

VINCE *To Julie*

Where's home?

JULIE Haven't got one.

VINCE Oh, come on Julie! How old are you? Fifteen? Sixteen?

JULIE Fifteen.