**Syncopated Post Enhance Touch Tour Programme notes**

**Please note this document may contain spoilers.**

**INTRO:**

Syncopated is a show written by Varaidzo and features four characters played by two multi-rolling actors: Joseph Munroe Robinson plays HIM and FRANK, and Teddy Oyediran plays HER and PENNY.

Joseph plays HIM and FRANK and Teddy plays HER and PENNY.

FRANK and PENNY are the 20th century versions of HIM and HER. HIM is from London whereas FRANK is American. HER is a scouser but PENNY does not have a Liverpool accent.

The action of the play switches between the present day on the Liverpool docks and 1919 in various locations including Liverpool.

**Costume**

Both HIM and HER begin the action of the play in modern-day base layers which are gradually added to as they tell and explore the story of FRANK and PENNY.

HIM wears a pair of dark brown slacks, a white tank top style vest tucked in, and over this, a pale brown heavy cotton jacket with a dark brown tweed collar. On his feet he wears black converse style trainers.

As FRANK the brown jacket is taken off so the costume is just the brown slacks, white vest and converse shoes. Attached to his trousers is a pair of braces decorated with a red line down the centre and edged in a forest green colour. These, rather than worn around his shoulders, are allowed to hang down.

He also wears a tweed style flat cap which is deep brown and cream in colour in a speckled pattern. As the story goes on and FRANK’s status changes his costumes do too. The flat cap is swapped for a dark brown fedora hat, and over his vest he wears a tweed jacket with a velvet collar. He also wears a mustard coloured bow-tie decorated with a paisley print.

His other costumes will be covered later on in the notes and as they appear in the action of the play.

HER wears red and white gingham shorts and a red sporty Adidas zip-up tracksuit top. It has white stripes going down the arms, and a white Adidas logo on its left side.

On her feet she wears white ankle socks which are slightly frilled at the top, and are visible in a pair of Mary-Jane style, black patent leather shoes, which are buckled at the side.

She carries a leopard print tote bag, and in the beginning of the play, pulls from it, a red-shiny compact mirror in the shape of lips, and a lip gloss. She begins to apply this as he talks to her.

As PENNY she begins in a maroon cloche style hat, made of felt. At first this is all that differentiates HER from PENNY, but as the story moves on, this is added to and these costumes will also be detailed later in the notes.

**Set, Props and staging**

The main stage and playing space of the play is square in shape: It is 4.8m length, 4.2m width and 34cm high off the ground.

At times however the action spills out onto the ground just in front and around the stage. The audience are seated on three sides and the fourth side, as the back of the stage, is draped with long linen sheets of fabric in different shades of blue and purple which effectively block the back stage area. These fabric sections are floor to ceiling in height and approximately 2m in width.

The door that you entered through faces directly onto the stage. This door is also used by HER and is her entrance point at the beginning of the play. There is also a door at the back left of the space which is used by HIM for his entrance at the beginning of the play.

Apart from this the actors remain in the space at all times albeit sometimes disappearing behind the swathes of fabric at the back of the stage. They are able to do this by parting the fabric hanging in the centre.

At points in the play this fabric is back lit, allowing for the silhouettes of PENNY and FRANK to be seen as they change. FRANK’s silhouette is sometimes visible as he plays the saxophone.

PENNY’s silhouette is always visible on the right hand side and FRANK’s silhouette is always visible on the left hand side. Smaller swathes of the same fabric also hang at intervals above the stage. These sections of fabric are all in different sizes some reaching up to approximately 1 meter in width and 3 meters in length.

The majority of these sections of fabric are in blue but some are also in orange, green or purple. During the storm scene a fan blows from the left and right sides of the stage allowing the fabric pieces to move and blow as if being tossed by the wind.

At the back left corner of the stage there is an old, brown, leather bound suitcase which sits open.

It is from this suitcase that FRANK retrieves the tweed jacket, fedora and bow-tie; this costume change is done on stage.

At the back right hand corner of the stage there is a black street lamp.

This is similar to the style of lamp that would have been used in Victorian times and made from wrought iron. It is tall and narrow at its base and smooth to touch, stretching all the way up to a four sided lantern encasing the bulb.

The streetlamp is off at the beginning of the play but flickers and turns on whenever the action switches to the past and FRANK and PENNY are in play.

Just in front of the street lamp, there is a wooden bench facing slightly inward and toward another bench on the other side of the stage.

Both benches have wooden slats with wrought iron sides. The right hand bench has a faded orange base colour with the pale brown wood coming through, where the paint has worn off. There are also sections of collage where black and white images of Liverpool have been pasted on at random points. Some of these images also contain sections of writing and notes—the words are too small to be read but give a vintage visual effect on the bench. The left hand bench does not have any collage but is a faded blue colour and similarly, a pale brown wood base. This bench has an engraved gold metal plaque on its top slat: the metal is smudged and rusted at its edges, but its centre is still shiny and clean. It reads: ‘For Mum. This was her favourite spot on the docks. 21st December 1970-25th January 2020’.

At the beginning of the play, HIM is sitting on this bench. HER enters and sits on the right hand bench.

**In front and around the stage:**

On the ground and around the four corners of the stage there are piles of retro objects and memorabilia which include old fashioned radios, a guitar case, piles of letters, envelopes and nautical rope. There is also an orange life jacket.

At ground level, and in front of the front left corner of the stage, there is a wooden mahogany writing desk.

In front of it, there is a black wooden stool with a cushion upholstered in red leather.

A vintage reading lamp with an olive green shade sits on top of the writing desk. Like the street lamp, this is illuminated whenever the action of the play switches to the past.

Whenever PENNY writes to FRANK she sits at the writing desk and dictates as she puts pen to paper. Also on top of the writing desk, there is a small brown leather vintage radio.

It has a strap across its top allowing it to be carried around. At the beginning of the play as HER and HIM begin to improvise as FRANK and PENNY, HER turns the dial of this radio when she calls ‘action’.

At ground level, On the right corner of the stage - facing out to the front seating bank, there is a large gramophone with a gold sound horn sitting on a dark brown wooden table.

Just to the right of this, there is a large vintage radio which faces out to the right hand seating bank.

Sitting on top of this radio there is a fan which is sometimes used by PENNY.

The fan is cream in colour with a white lace frill at its edge and pink floral detailing which is visible when it’s opened out.

**Sound and Lighting Cues**

The following sound cue *(play SFX)* is played to mark a shift back in time. This is cued by HER turning the dial on the radio as if controlling the back and forth of time periods.

During the storm sequence of the play a bright white light is flashed which completely illuminates the stage. This flash of light is similar to the type that would be flashed by a lighthouse guarding rocky foreshores.

**Key Visual Cues**

**First Meeting:**

When the play begins HIM, carrying a saxophone, enters through the back left hand door and circles around the front of the stage before stepping up and seating himself on the left hand bench. Shortly afterward HER enters from the audience door and sits herself on the front edge of the stage facing directly out to the audience. She turns to notice HIM once he begins to play his sax and approaches him trying to interrupt his playing. She sits on the bench opposite him on the line ‘Thank you’. Her attitude and body language toward him are nonchalant and cold, until her monologue, when she shares with him her childhood days watching the pantomime. At this point she has warmed up to both him and the conversation. When he plays his saxophone for the second time, she swoons slightly.

**Warm up stretches:**

On the line ‘Come on. Shake it out’ she stands in the middle of the stage and begins stretching and doing vocal warm ups like lip trills. Eventually they both end up standing at the front of the stage and facing out to the audience. He is unsure and says ‘Where shall I stand?’ - whilst she picks up the fan and begins coquettishly playing with it, entering into the character of PENNY.

**Frank and Penny:**

HIM takes a while to warm up to the idea of improvisation and role-play though eventually goes backstage to change into FRANK (his silhouette is seen behind the fabric, his movements are measured and deliberate. His braces are revealed and he discovers his flat cap). When he re-enters he has completely become the character: his movements and physicality are bigger and more confident, An American showman! The vintage light and street lamp turn on changing the mood completely. When HER calls action, we have entered the 1920’s.

**Writing:**

HER suggests that FRANK should write to PENNY, she says the line ‘Go on then. Write to me. That’s what happens next’. At first HIM is confused but decides to enter into the spirit of it. With this he changes the configuration of the benches so that the blue left hand bench is turned to face directly out to the left hand seating bank. FRANK dictates the first letter to PENNY whilst HER disappears behind the fabric to change. Her silhouette is illuminated as this happens. She re-emerges wearing a long burgundy coat made of wool and reaching down to her mid-calf. It is decorated with a fur trim . PENNY then moves the right hand bench to face out to the right hand seating bank. In this way both benches mirror the other with a slight gap left between them. As FRANK continues to dictate his letter from the left hand bench PENNY moves around her own bench, letter in hand and reading. She also picks up a record from the corner of the stage next to the lamp post, unsleeves it and places it on the gramophone . For the letter writing PENNY always writes from the writing desk with FRANK sitting at his bench looking at her. FRANK writes from the bench whilst PENNY sits and listens from hers.

**Saxophone playing:**

PENNY writes her first letter from the writing desk which includes the line ‘and then you played your saxophone and I sang to it’. At this point, in view is FRANK’s silhouette behind the fabric as he plays his saxophone. After this, he emerges in a teal coloured shirt and tie worn loosely around his neck. He continues to button up the shirt and fix his tie on stage. The tie is brown in colour with pale green diamonds decorating the brown. After this point, whenever we hear FRANK play his saxophone, it is his silhouette that is visible as he plays behind the fabric.

**The Plan:**

After an argument between HIM and HER regarding the storytelling, HER goes backstage to change her costume once again. Her silhouette is seen putting on lipstick. She re-emerges in a dusty pink and cream skirt and a silky shirt tied at the front. The shirt is in the same dusty pink colour as the skirt. The fabric is silky and loose in style. She re-enterson the line, ‘but she’s not in these fancy rooms with him’.

**The foot stomp:**

We hear HER, stamp her foot in annoyance as FRANK once again continues to dictate a letter that speaks to his success with the band. After this stomp, she goes off-stage and changes her costume, once again her silhouette is seen. When she returns she is dressed in a blue nurses tunic made of cotton. Over this she wears a beige coat made of wool which reaches down to her mid-calf.She sits at her writing desk, and looks out to the audience, looking confused and slightly grumpy; unsure about the story that is unfolding.

**Scotland:**

In his letter, FRANK mentions Scotland, telling HER, that it is ‘the coldest place I’ve been to in all my years’. At this PENNY, takes off the coat that she is wearing over her dress, and leaves it on the stool. She walks to the opposite front corner of the stage, and drops the needle onto the record. She looks resigned and annoyed.

**The hug:**

As HER stands on stage, looking directly out to the audience, FRANK approaches her from behind and hugs her as he says the line ‘it would mean everything to me to look out into the audience and see that smile in front of me’- their bodies are close and they are touching. FRANK continues to speak as he hugs her. It doesn’t help. HER, is still visibly dissatisfied by the story that he is telling and they break apart.

**Like a Statue:**

In one of her final letters to FRANK, PENNY writes that she feels ‘stuck, like a statue. Waiting for my life to begin’. At this point, she scrunches up the letter that she has been writing and throws it away. She exits the stage in annoyance.

**The bump:**

HER, re-enters, this time with a smile on her face, when FRANK (mid-letter) says the line, ‘God I hope you can make it’. She is now wearing the same modern day costume that she wears as HER at the very beginning of the play. The difference is that this time she has a large pregnancy bump protruding underneath her Adidas tracksuit top—she has stuffed it with something to aid the make-believe. She grins at HIM, delighted with her idea.

**The storm:**

There is a storm that occurs in FRANK’s story, and this is depicted by occasional flashing white lights akin to a light house, fans blowing causing the fabric swatches to blow, and by FRANK’s physical storytelling. He grabs onto the back of the left hand bench and pulls desperately at it as if holding onto the side of a sinking ship. His movements are frantic and desperate resulting in him pushing the right hand bench so it rests on the front of the stage, half off and half on with its legs in the air. Meanwhile he pushes the other bench to the back of the stage so it faces directly out to the front. Eventually he ends the scene off-stage, with just his ghostly outline silhouetted against the fabric. At the end of this storm sequence, HER, makes to leave the stage but before she can do this, he re-emerges as HIM, shouting ‘Wait’. He sits in the centre of the stage exhausted and panting.

**The truth:**

When she as HER, finally shares her story with HIM, she sits on the bench at the back of the stage and speaks: her story is partly directed out to the audience and partly to him. At one point she references the plaque that is on this bench. Eventually he also sits beside her on this bench and there is a warmth that exists between them. He has finally broken through her barriers.

**The song:**

HER begins to slowly find her voice, singing at first quietly and unsure, but ending confidently, and strongly. She goes from sitting to standing, arms out and powerful. At this point HIM, stands beside her. At the end of the song there is silence as they stand in the middle of the stage looking into each other’s eyes.

**Ending banter:**

By the end of the play both are fully comfortable in the other’s presence. HER, jokes about how ‘Someone’ had disrupted her rhythm and pokes HIM playfully as she says this. He retorts jokingly ‘hey’ ! The final note and image is of them hugging each other on the bench.