

The soundscape of *Kin* by Gecko

Gecko is an award-winning and internationally acclaimed physical theatre company, led by Artistic Director Amit Lahav.

When developing this information, we have tried to consider how to create a parity of experience for different audience members. As a physical theatre company, we use lots of different methods to tell our stories, including choreography and movement, set design, lighting design, sound design and music.

We try to create an environment in which our audience have an emotional and personal response to the show – we are less interested in everyone seeing the same story in our shows than in how the show makes them feel or encourages them to think about their own response to the themes we are exploring.

For *Kin*, these themes are migration, family, belonging, racism and empathy.

Since Gecko's first show in 2001, Amit has worked with composer Dave Price who has developed an intimate relationship and working method with the company, which allows him to create original music that reflects the narrative and emotional tone of the piece. This is combined with a soundscape by designer Mark Melville.

Within the performance, our performers do use language, but our intention is that this should communicate emotion, and is supported by body language and facial expression. Breath is also used as a way of portraying emotion to support the narrative, and to allow the performers to connect to one another.

Unlike a more traditional play, language is not the main method of storytelling. Our performers come from all over the world and they speak different languages in the show, including Cantonese, Nahuatl, Norwegian, Malayalam, Mandarin, Polish and Spanish. Often words are muttered or sentences are left incomplete. As a result of this, no audience member understands all the language and the words spoken are less important than the emotion conveyed. We don't caption the show or have BSL interpretation through the show as this would translate all language into a single language and so create a different experience.

Where language is important in understanding the meaning of a scene, this is included in this document.

We hope that this information can be used in advance of the show to give an understanding of the way that sound and music feature within the performance. We welcome feedback and will always offer a BSL interpreted post show discussion alongside one of the performances.

The Officers' Mess and Borders

The show opens with the exterior of a Mess Hall. From within, there is music suggesting a party. As the inside of the Mess Hall is revealed, the officers sing drunkenly. The music, mostly sourced from the Balkans, reflects the atmosphere – it is full of energy, featuring plucked stringed instruments and piano. As the Officers dance together in a circle, the stringed instruments play multiple notes at once using their bows to create a discordant tone. It is inspired by traditional folk music and all the Officers know the dance moves, perhaps suggesting a shared cultural background.

They drink more and the music turns to brass instruments. It becomes faster and more frenetic to reflect their behaviour.

There is a voice through a tannoy speaker – the kind of speaker that is often in public spaces to give instruction, like in a railway station – and the Officers disperse. When we see Officers speaking into handheld microphones their voices are distorted as if through a megaphone or tannoy speaker. Usually this is accompanied by a demonstration of power, between different Officers, and also between Officers and people arriving at the border. Borders are represented by striped barriers that rise slowly, making a creaking sound, before slamming down with a bang to reflect the powerlessness of the people.

These are environments we return to several times within the show.

Puppet Sequence

Approximately 10 minutes into the performance, two puppets resembling an elderly man and woman appear. The speech in this sequence is recorded holocaust survivor testimony. It features [Frank Bright MBE](#) who invited us into his home, gave us his time and humanity, and shared his story of loss, empathy and survival, [Freida Stieglitz](#) from the archive of the **USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education** and Lydia Tischler from an interview with [Channel 4 News](#).

The music that accompanies this section was inspired by lullabies. It begins with piano and clarinet and is evocative of Middle Eastern music to reflect the story of Amit's grandmother Leah, whose epic journey from Yemen to Palestine is one of the inspirations of the show. It shifts to cello, more evocative of Eastern European culture.

Transcript:

Man, Frank Bright: *Coughs* [*speaks in Hebrew*]. By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, ye we wept when we remembered Zion.

Woman, Freida Stieglitz: She took me by one hand, and my sister by the other hand, we walked out into nowhere, into no place.

Man, Frank Bright: Umm, I, I, I... I had nothing.

Woman, Lydia Tischler: We arrived in the middle of the night, and you could smell the fear, you really could smell it.

Man, Frank Bright: We hung our lyres upon the willows, in the midst. How should we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? *[continues speaking in Hebrew]*

Woman, Freida Stieglitz: And she said to us, I don't think I'm gonna survive, that's what she said to us. I don't think I'm gonna make it. But you, children, she says, you'll probably make it.

Homes and Displacement

Another key scene that features multiple times in the show is the home. Sometimes this is an image of stability and sometimes it is threatened.

The first home scene shows Leah reuniting with her family. The music features a strong deep female vocal paired with violin and flute. The presence of these instruments, and later also accordion and clarinet, acts as a cultural link to the puppets, and is returned to both within the music and through props. They are instruments typical of Jewish bands of the early 20th Century which are also small enough to be portable, reflecting the idea of migration.

There is an undercurrent of a beat that increases in pace, culminating in the ensemble sequence representing work and opportunity. The music in this section uses the major key. It sounds hopeful. This is carried into the home of Leah's family as they receive payment for their work.

As the family's situation becomes more precarious, sounds are enhanced to take on an expressive quality to reflect the emotions the characters are feeling, including:

- rumblings of the earth
- rhythms of winds
- drumming of rains
- rooms and buildings breaking apart

Leah reappears wearing a lifejacket. She blows, as if into a whistle and the sound morphs into a cry of distress. We see this action repeated by different characters through the show. This is the call to the ancestors for cultural and spiritual salvation. The response each time is an abstract choral representation of the respective family's culture – an answer of sorts, a reflection, voices from the past. It is a love filled force.

Sound becomes more ominous on the arrival of the second family – the Karunas, and the conflict that ensues between them.

This family has a much more limited instrumentation reflecting their lack of resources – voices, clapping and a suitcase as a percussion instrument with the Armenian Duduk (an ancient woodwind instrument similar to the modern clarinet) and the Ethiopian Krar (an ancient 6 string harp similar to the harp of David depicted in antiquity and very popular in modern Ethiopian music) being the only conventional instruments.

The mother of the Karuna family evokes memories of conflict and displacement with claps. The family stands looking out at the audiences as the sound of people having dinner is heard. It is cosy and familial. Suddenly, it is interrupted by a raid, with soldiers threatening to shoot.

The two families compete over the home space. At the climax of this conflict there are sounds of bombs and destruction. A member of each family argues with each other; dramatic operatic singing is morphed with distant explosions and the voices of the performers are distorted as they fight, reflecting conflict between the families and in the wider world.

With the arrival of the puppets, there is a piece of music played on a Duduk accompanied by a double bass playing gently underneath it, reflecting the different heritages of the families. This change in tone reflects reconciliation between the matriarchs.

Lifejacket Sequence and Declarations

In the last scene, all of the performers appear in life jackets. They breathe audibly and cry out with distress. This is underscored by emotional music made using only the human voice. Sometimes it is wordless and sometimes it is in Amharic.

The lyrics approximately mean:

"We left our country, we had to flee our home, we have no place of safety, we need a new home"

And

"Hold on, together we can make it. Friends, Brothers and Sisters, together we are as one. Together we are strong"

The song eventually washes out into the sound of the waves of the sea.

Each of the performers steps forward and directly addresses the audience.

Miguel: My name is Miguel Hernando Torres Umba. I am an immigrant from Colombia. I left my family and my country in search of a dream of a better life, and I wish they were here with me today.

Chris: My name is Christopher Evans. I was born in England, and my family migrated from Ireland.

Vivian: My name is Vivian. I'm an immigrant from Hong Kong. I'm trying to make the UK my home.

Saju: My name is Saju Hari. I am an immigrant from India. My wife, my daughters and my work are here.

Kenny: My name is Kenny Ho. I was born in England and my parents were born in China. I belong neither here nor there.

Madeleine: My name is Madeleine Fairminer. I'm from Norway but my work takes me to many parts of the world.

Mario: My name is Mario Patron. All my world is in Spain, but here I can do what I love.

Vanessa: My name is Vanessa. I'm from Mexico. I am an immigrant, and the daughter of people of peace.

After the declarations, the performers come together in a shared song of unity, empathy and forgiveness. Again, sung in Amharic, the lyrics translate as:

*"I'm holding out my hand
I'm reaching through the darkness
I surrender all my anger
We are children of peace*

*Do not be afraid
Brothers
Sisters
Be at peace with yourself
Peace*

*Of unity
We will sing*

*Everyone comes together in song
We are one family
We are one community
We are children of peace"*