

DISCOVERY GUIDE

MAYBE HAPPY ENDING

THE TONY-WINNING
BEST MUSICAL



A note from writers Will Aronson and Hue Park:

It has often been pointed out that people are gradually merging with technology, and it's easy to imagine a future when people and their electronic gadgets start to become indistinguishable. But underneath this, all the old human longings and fears are still there, unchanged – just maybe hidden from ourselves a bit more. Perhaps technology helps us forget that we are still confused humans, who only get a very short time to work things out before the season changes and we're gone.

With this in mind, we began to imagine a story not of two people but of two robots who, through their innocent, goofy discovery of the world, might actually remind us what it is to be human. To capture this feeling, we decided that instead of using an electronic, futuristic sound, we would paint our futuristic story with analogue, acoustic sounds – piano hammers and resonating strings, the crackling sound of a needle on LP grooves. And we would fill the story with as much of the world's simple magic as we could: a road trip; a field lit up by fireflies on a summer night.

An LP-player, a firefly, a human being – we all have a beautiful moment here in the universe, where we light up the darkness or make the air vibrate magically, and then we are gone. The question is only what we do with that knowledge. Do we love harder? Is loving someone intensely worth the pain that comes with that? How do we live fully, knowing all the while that everything is always changing, that everything must pass?

ADVENTURE IS RIGHT OUTSIDE YOUR DOOR



THE ONES WE MEET

OLIVER

An obsolete Helperbot 3 who loves other forms of outdated technology such as LP players, paper maps and books - which some people claim were even better than what came later.

CLAIRE

An obsolete Helperbot 5. As a model 5, she is capable of more nuanced emotional shadings than the 3, including a better command of specialized language like sarcasm.

JAMES

Oliver's former owner, James loved jazz and all sorts of antiquated fashions and technology, passions that he passed on to Oliver. Like many wealthy humans of his era, James had increasingly little direct human contact.

GIL BRENTLEY

A popular American big band leader from the mid-twentieth century, now forgotten except by a select few. Gil Brantley was James' favorite jazz musician, and therefore is Oliver's as well. Everything Oliver knows about human relationships he learned from Gil's songs.

JIYEON

Claire's former owner. Young and wealthy.

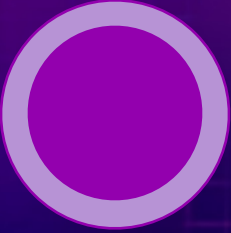
SUHAN

Jiyeon's boyfriend and later husband.
Not from the Helperbot-owning class.

HWABOON

Oliver's plant and closest confidant during his decade living alone in the housing complex for obsolete Helperbots.

THE BEGINNINGS



HAVE A LISTEN:

Play the song “Everyday Robots” by Damon Albarn

Before reading further, ask yourself how the song makes you feel?
What does it make you think about and wonder?

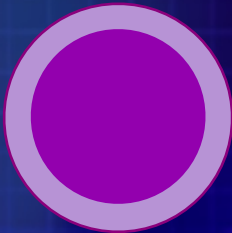
In 2014, South Korean lyricist and musical theatre writer **Hue Park** was sitting in a coffee shop and heard the song, “Everyday Robots”. It was hearing the themes of isolation and technology vs. human connection that sparked an idea of helperbots experiencing human emotions. He pitched the idea to **Will Aronson**, a musical theatre composer, writer and orchestrator he had met at NYU. Their unique backgrounds led them to write the show simultaneously in Korean and English.

The English and Korean styles of writing lyrics are quite different. English lyrics rely heavily on structural rhyming, which can sometimes lead to artificial patterns and feelings. In Korean lyrics however, the goal is to make the piece sound poetic and literary, focusing more on emotion. The search for the right words is more about the beauty of the word rather than the structure. These two schools of thought heavily influenced the process, as the show was written in both languages simultaneously. It is the blend of the two languages that also blends the artificial, mundane tones of the Helper-bots (English), with the human emotion and feeling of humans (Korean).

The pair wrote the outline of the story first, entirely in English. The dialogue was written in English, and together, they would determine at what moments spoken words were no longer enough and music had to take over. Then Aronson would set to work on his own at the piano, focusing on melodies alone. He would then give Park many musical options for single moments in the show, playing them all to see which one would best capture the feeling and narrative they were searching for. What would the song itself say? The music was then locked in and it was time for Park to get to work.

Park would move forward, finding the Korean words that would fit with the emotional structure of the music, ignoring structural rhymes, but focusing on the natural sounds of the words to connect to the emotion. It was the music that would carry the structure rather than the lyrics. With the strong Jazz chords in much of Aronson’s music, Park could focus more on the soft, flowing words in the Korean language to help blend the Helper-bots with human emotion. The show first opened in Seoul, Korea in 2014.

When circling back towards the English version, Aronson took a more active role in refining the English lyrics to ensure that the structure and rhyming patterns that American audiences expect were there. The English version of the show is not a direct translation. The pair completely re-wrote the lyrics so that both versions honored the rules and expectations of both languages and audiences.



MEET THE TEAM!

GOODBYE, MY ROOM

Compare the first few lines of the song, in both languages. This is a **word for word translation**. After reading about their creation process, do you notice the difference, with the English version fitting more to structural rhyming? What do you notice?

ENGLISH:

Goodbye, my room
I'll miss every part of you
Your concrete and wood
The faded patch of carpet
Where I stood
Bright busy mornings
And long afternoons
In your warm embrace
No mere place
You were my room
Goodbye, my room

KOREAN:

Hello/Goodbye, my room.
Thank you all this time, my room, which
warmly guarded me on days
I was always alone.
It is now time to leave you,
who are so familiar.
I am sorry, goodbye, my room.
I will be back, just for a moment.
I am about to leave for a distant road
in the world outside the door.



GIVE IT A TRY!

Identify a poem or short piece of text that you connect to. What feelings does it imply to you?

What instruments do you connect to the piece? What colors?

Spend some time listening to a variety of instrumental musical selections. Identify three that seem to match what you are thinking for the written piece.

Play each piece behind a narration of the piece. Which is the best fit? Why?



MICHAEL ARDEN



DIRECTION

What makes *Maybe Happy Ending* such an unforgettable musical?

There's something incredibly universal about the story. It's about kindness, mortality, human responsibility, and the meaning of love and life. Part of its magic is how we come to know the two robots, these creatures that feel far away from us until suddenly we realize we are them. The empathy created in observing their adventures packs an emotional wallop for the audience, something not every story or show can do.

The show was a hit in Korea first. Did it surprise you that American audiences love it?

People are people, and a good story will work in any culture. Look at *Les Misérables*, a show about the 1800s in France that resonates around the world because it's about redemption and the human condition and how people live and love. I think that's what *Maybe Happy Ending* is about, too, and it reminds us that no matter how different we are, we are mostly the same because we're all human.

You must enjoy watching the audience's reaction to the twists and turns Oliver and Claire experience?

It's incredible. I love it when the audience as a whole gasps or laughs together, because in a world that is so divided, getting a thousand people to spontaneously do the same exact thing at the same time is magical. I see people take each other's hands and put their arms around each other; these moments of tenderness are the best part for me when I watch from the back of the house.

What was it about this script that hooked you the first time you read it? What was it about this script that hooked you the first time you read it?

It was that I started out feeling so distanced from the characters. Like, oh, these are robots in the future in Korea, that's nothing like me. And then by the time it was over, I thought, "Oh, that *will* be me one day in some way, shape, or form." I think that's what's so universal about the story, it kind of taps into the universal heartbreak and joy that is when you sign up to love, you sign up to lose. I just felt like I was watching my own life flash before my eyes through the lens of these strange robots, and I was so moved by that.

Your productions vary widely in size, story, and style. What makes you say yes to a show like *Maybe Happy Ending*?

The material has to touch me emotionally, and I have to believe that it will affect an audience enough for them not to be done with the story when they leave the theatre. The theater I like to make has a "third act," which is the impression on the audience that hopefully challenges and inspires them to action in some way. Not every show needs to make you want to change your life, but great theater can cause you to self-reflect and hopefully behave slightly differently in the world. Be more loving, caring, empathetic. It's the butterfly effect, and that is why I firmly believe theater has the power to change the world.

SETTING THE SCENE

Scenic designer **Dane Laffrey** once said, “the story of *Maybe Happy Ending* is really, really focused. It’s like a closeup on these two characters. And so we wanted to be really judicious with the world building around it.”

Laffrey’s design was heavily influenced by the modular Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo, which was originally designed to function as a compact, high-end living space. It was the only tower of it’s kind built, which Laffrey saw before it was demolished. “il was all very carefully thought about to condense a life into the smallest amount of space possible. So that felt both practically, or logically, the right kind of architecture to imagine would exist for these Helperbots. But also there’s some shared DNA there about a beautiful idea fallen into obsolescence.”

The scenic design throughout the show deliberately focuses the eye within the story, using irises to direct the audience vision. “A big part of the reason why we wanted to start so small is to give us somewhere to go,” notes Laffrey. “The first image of the story proper is a tiny little closeup. It’s just a little frame around HwaBoon, Oliver’s plant. And from there we open a bit more. And then when Claire first appears, we open a little further. It has a feeling of slowly expanding from something so small.”

Laffrey also mentions the “enormous overlap” between physical, automated sets and the video elements. “We were given an extraordinary opportunity here where the idea of analog versus digital, or human versus digital, is so much a part of the story that it felt like something we could really allow to grow out of the storytelling,” he describes, “as opposed to be used as a tool to replace scenery that wasn’t there.”



A few minutes with Dane



DANE LAFFREY



GIVE IT A TRY!

Explore architecture. Don’t limit yourself to what you know - look to other countries, cultures, and cities you have not traveled to. Identify something that makes you say - “WOW”.

How could that style of architecture or building influence a story you want to tell? Does it influence how the story is told?



How did you settle on a more modern look for the costumes of Maybe Happy Ending versus something stereotypically sci-fi?

I landed on a more modern look because the team wanted the future to be familiar, as opposed to something that was 100 percent imagined. We took a lot of cues from the mid-century presence embedded in the piece, grounding much of the costume design in the aesthetics of the mid-20th century.

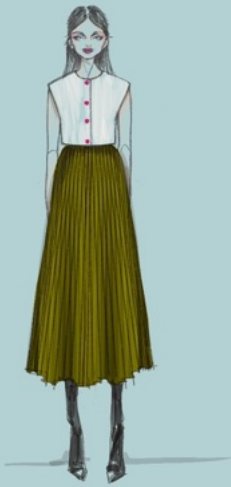
How much did the show being set in Korea factor into your thought process of choosing the

The Korean setting of the show greatly influenced the designs. We looked at Korea in the present as a template, as well as in the past. As a matter of fact, the yellow raincoat that Oliver wears is rooted in traditional Korean raincoats. We really looked at this idea of what modern Korea, more specifically Seoul, looks like and used it as a foundation to create an imagined future that carries a familiarity to the

How do you think theatre can play a positive role, either for yourself and/or the community at large?

I've always believed that the theatre is a venue for thought. When we think of the reasons for audiences to go to the theatre, yes, they go to be entertained, and yes, it is to experience something visceral. I also feel that it should be a place where they can think. Perhaps coming out of what they've just seen is that we've shifted a point of view or made us think about matter twice, and we've succeeded if we opened brain space or heart space with new ways. We walk into things believing we've fully defined who we are. The theatre being a venue of thought makes you meditate on your own definition about your identity and existence.



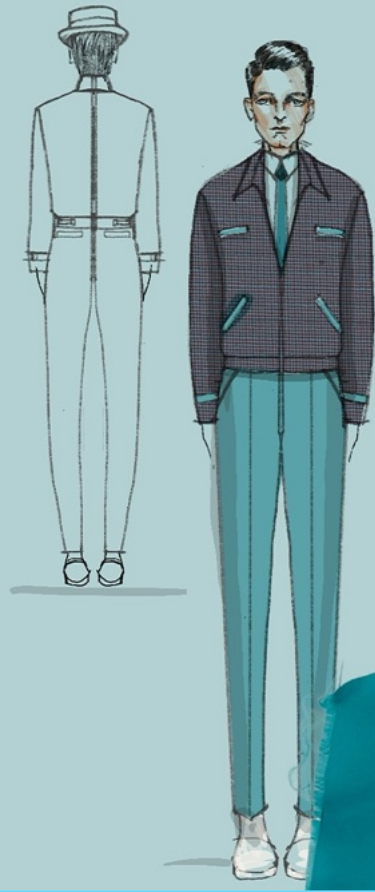


“Along with a sense of personal style, Claire’s wardrobe stands on its own. We allude to clothing pieces her previous owner left her.

As a more advanced model, we imagine Claire being capable of more complex sartorial choices.”

CLINT RAMOS





"Being an older helper bot model, Oliver's outfit is intentionally cohesive-- as if every piece came in a complete set that arrived along side him."

CLINT RAMOS





“As Oliver leaves his room, he believes every human he interacts with looks like his old owner James. They aren’t all James, but they are all portrayed by [one person] rapidly changing his look throughout the show.”

CLINT RAMOS



LIGHTING

What was your inspiration for the lighting design of “Maybe Happy Ending?”

The lighting for “Maybe Happy Ending” was born out of a set of constraints. Our set designer, Dane Laffrey, created a beautiful geometric design of white boxes, frames, and video surfaces, which was perfect for the piece but presented challenges for the lighting team. We spent weeks planning our approach to lighting each scene and quickly realized that color would be a critical tool in telling this futuristic story. We started doing research and digging into the colors found in Seoul, where the musical is set in 2046. The research, coupled with the intricate set design elements, reminded me of the work of artists James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson, and Dan Flavin. Their use of rich, bold colors and their transformation of space and architecture through lighting and geometry inspired me as I designed the visual world of this production.

How does lighting help to tell the story of this new musical?

We used color to enhance the play’s world, emotional impact, and storytelling. We wanted to create a world that felt familiar, but not too familiar that the audience forgot that the story takes place in the future. In the show’s present, which is 2046, we used crisp, vibrant colors that stood out vividly against the set. When we enter Clair and Oliver’s memories, the video and lighting turn black and white. When Oliver sings a song fondly reminiscing about his life with his former owner, James, we present those memories in warm sepia tones, evoking the comfort and happiness Oliver feels. Lighting helps track where we are and connects to how Clair and Oliver feel about their world around them.

How did you incorporate lighting into the high-tech set of moving scenery and immersive videos?

It was definitely a challenge, but what made it possible was the amazing teamwork between the lighting, video, and scenic teams. George, the video designer, would often check out what I was doing and respond, and I’d do the same. It was like playing jazz – it was thrilling. I also felt a responsibility to use lighting to make sure the actors didn’t get lost in all that technology. “Maybe Happy Ending” is a small, simple story with a small cast, and it was my job to make sure the performers stood out in the technology we were using to tell the story. Everyone on the team was aware of this challenge, and we all worked together to frame the piece without overwhelming it.





GIVE IT A TRY!

Using the story you have been working with, reread the words with a video and lighting designer's eye.

Mark places in the text that signify color to you:

- What are the tones that are taking shape?
- Where do you see light vs dark moments?
- Where are the moments where light and video could blend to help make the moment come alive?

VIDEO & PROJECTION

Thoughts from designer, George Reeve:

"We are very passionate about the blurred lines of when scenic design ends and video takes over or when lighting continues in its own right and then becomes video. It's a beautiful, harmonious relationship and collaboration from every person involved. It took a lot to work the language of what this would be, beyond just a backdrop, and also allow the audience the chance to have some imagination with it and see what they want it to be."

"The whole story is about a journey - you go on a journey, and the video does that. It starts off incredibly simple and streamlined, and then about halfway through we suddenly jar the audience into looking everywhere and you say "Wow".

"The world of Oliver and Claire is so beautifully saturated with color and what Ben did with that color is stunning. It was really important to continue that in the video. The feeling of hope in some moments with that color is in stark contrast to the black and white desaturated world of memories/ The restraint that we took as artists, with the push and pull of when we show something versus when we don't was a great challenge that we had to play with."

"It's rare to be part of a piece of theatre that's so completely original. I'll forever be proud that our team could change the perception that video is just for stage backdrops. Going forward, I'd love to see the boundaries between theatre departments continue to blur. Video and traditional elements can go hand in hand to deliver unforgettable art."

GEORGE REEVE



DID YOU KNOW?

15

AUTOMATED
SCENIC
ELEMENTS

96

AUTOMATION
CUES

1700

LIGHTING
CUES

242

VIDEO TILES

27

FIREFLIES

6

TONY AWARDS

- *BEST MUSICAL
- *BEST LEADING ACTOR IN A MUSICAL
- *BEST DIRECTOR OF A MUSICAL
- *BEST ORIGINAL SCORE
- *BEST BOOK OF A MUSICAL
- *BEST SCENIC DESIGN OF A MUSICAL

THE JOURNEYS

As Claire and Oliver embark on their own journey together, we can't help but to look at our own. So often in our lives we are rushing from task to task, rarely taking the time to consider what is most important until it is too late.

Let's go on the journey, and as we do, let's pause to consider what just may be a beginning to making our own lives as rich as they possible can be.

WHY LOVE

Why love?

Why did we bother to try love?

Why did we foolishly stop to say hello
Instead of going our ways?

But your heart was free
And mine was on my sleeve
Were we brave?
Or were we just naive?

So tell me, why love?
When all things end in goodbye, love?
Why did we dream that this fate would not
be ours
When even stars up above
Ask where their glow went
Love lasts one moment
And then that final task
To sigh and ask
Why love?

This is the first music we hear at the top of the performance.

As you listen, what feelings does it convey?

Listen and focus on the music, then listen again and focus on the words.

Does the musicality match the words?

What does the tone of this song imply about the journey we are about to go on?

*A friendly morning chat to start a perfect week,
but I don't need a chat to make my day unique.
Just the sun that warms my chair
is sufficient to make me declare, "LET'S ENJOY THE DAY!"*

-Oliver

While we all are on our own individual journey, there are similarities along the way which provide us with common experiences. By recognizing this idea, we are able to connect on a deep level - one that is uniquely human...or is it?

Perhaps it is these common experiences that can bridge the divides, and help us to recognize no one is alone other journey. It is the paths we cross and the connections we make that both energize and comfort the path.

Gather together with a group of people, ideally people you only know casually or not at all. Use the conversation starters provided here to begin a dialogue.

Take note of how you feel prior to beginning, and then again at the end. How did your feelings about speaking with this group change? Did you notice at what point you began to feel more comfortable?

What "room " in your life have you said goodbye to with a sense of longing or perhaps grief? Perhaps a home, a job, a friendship?

What was the outcome of the goodbye? Did it come easily? Looking back, is there regret? Is the uncertainty of not knowing the outcome worth the risk?

Was the angst of the goodbye juxtaposed with the excitement of what was to come?

Discuss safety with opportunity.
What helps you to know when something is willing to be let go of in order to open a new door?

What would you be willing to let go of for this new opportunity?



I just love fireflies.



What do we gain when we let people in, that we may never get if we stay safe alone?

Stepping out of our comfort zone and what we know can be hard. Often, it is your own passion about something, or the excitement and passion of someone else that can spurn us to go. Do you go for your own desires and happiness or do you go for the happiness it brings someone else?

Identify one thing that you love and have great knowledge about. How can it inspire you and energize you?

Find someone that you can discuss this topic with - ideally, someone who may only have a little knowledge about the same topic, yet they are interested in hearing more about it.

What do you notice about your interactions with that person after the conversation? Do you feel more connected? Ask that person to share something with you they are passionate about. Be a true active listener. What do you notice about yourself as well as the person you are speaking to as a result?

"It's the way that it always was"

We tend to go through our lives with unspoken rules about what is allowed or not allowed, because "it's the way that it's always been" This sometimes comes into play with what we think we can become. In the case of Claire and Oliver, Helperbots don't need, but they serve. Their routines are fixed because it's always the way it's been - not because they have thought about them.

When something happens that goes against "the way it's always been", a decision needs to be made whether to let the rule break or defend it. When it is defended, certainty and routine feels safe. When it is broken or altered, risk and fear come in.

What is something in your life that defends the phrase, "It's the way that it always was"?

- Do you wish for it / want it to change? Why?
- Are you alone in this feeling?
- What's the risk of change? What will it take for the change to happen?
 - Is the change simply too great?

There is also great opportunity here to discuss technology and generational shifts. For some reason, technology always seems to make the change and takes the risk. Why is it so hard for our own selves to make those same changes so easily or willingly?



ENDINGS OR BEGINNINGS?

The challenge Helperbots - and all technology - face is the constant need to recharge their battery. This becomes true not only with age, but the more energy they expend. There is an important lesson to be learned here, particularly as Claire and Oliver become more connected to each other, beyond sharing a charger.

**HOW DO YOU CHARGE YOUR OWN BATTERY WHILE HELPING OTHERS?
HOW CAN YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR OWN BATTERY WHILE DOING THE SAME FOR OTHERS?**

As our batteries wear down, stakes become higher. Having a charged battery is able to keep us functioning and successful, but it doesn't stop us from being isolated. Recharging is not only about survival, but about living. When we are able to perform at our highest levels, we are able to connect and truly be alive. Taking care of ourselves and charging our batteries comes as much from connection as it does from being able to keep going and running. And ultimately, it is the act of charging that we choose to begin again, rather than end.

How do you recharge your battery?

How often do you need to "recharge"?

Do you have different batteries for different facets of your life? Some that need charging more than others, or use a different kind of energy supply?

Are there times that you feel that you are just running out of battery and the charger is no longer working?

*Love is unstable;
love is well-known to have an equal if not greater tendency
to create pain rather than joy;
love makes people, and as far as we know, robots, act irrationally.*



Oliver and Claire have been built as all other technology we are used to - to be disposable when the next best thing arrives. Perhaps it is the disposability of technology that sharpens growth and pushes boundaries further when we think about technology. But for Oliver and Claire, is it that idea of disposability that makes them more willing to take a risk with each other?

If so, why is it so much harder for us, as humans, to realize the same thing? Ultimately, we are disposable as well, but we seem to either forget that (or not recognize it at all). Is that the irony? That we can learn these lessons about the importance of connection, our limited time, and love from technology seems improbable...or is it?

How can we grow and leave our mark on those who know us, the rooms around us, and the world we live in?

In a world of rapid-growth in technological advances, can we step back enough to allow the technology to help us learn and grow, not only for ourselves, but ethically in the way we use it in the world?

What are the crucial steps we must take in order to allow the uniqueness of being human not be taken over by technology? Where is the dividing line?

THE ENDING'S NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT PART



Direct from the official script:

We all have a beautiful moment here in the universe, where we light up the darkness or make the air vibrate magically, and then we are gone.

The question is only what we do with that knowledge.

Do we love harder?

Is loving someone intensely worth the pain that follows?

How do we live fully, knowing all the while that everything is always changing, that everything must pass?

WHAT MAKES A "MAYBE HAPPY ENDING"?

MAYBE HAPPY ENDING

[OLIVER]

The ending's not the most important part
But as endings go, ours is not so bad
No tears, no regret, no broken heart
And sure, no memories of what we had
But maybe letting go and moving on
Before we make a mess
Is that a happy ending?
More or less

[CLAIRE]

Those sunny afternoons you spent with me
They'll still be happening, just somewhere in the past
Each simple moment was a luxury
They're not less valuable just 'cause they didn't last

[OLIVER]

And if nothing else, we fell in love?
Not knowing we could fall—
Is that a tragic ending?

[CLAIRE]

Not at all

[OLIVER & CLAIRE]

And maybe we'll meet again sometime

[OLIVER]

Sometime, when we're better at pretending

[CLAIRE & OLIVER]

And maybe we'll meet again somewhere
Somewhere things don't have to have an ending

[OLIVER]

You held my hand
You taught me love
And then you set me free

[CLAIRE]

That's not such an awful ending

[CLAIRE & OLIVER]

If we have to have an ending

[OLIVER]

Is this our maybe happy ending?

[CLAIRE & OLIVER]

We'll see

Is a
"MAYBE HAPPY ENDING"

one where
everything works
out "perfectly"?

or

Is it one where
something - love,
connection, or growth -
was achieved,
regardless of the
outcome?

If the outcome is less
than desirable, does it
negate the happiness
and worth of the
moments?



*Photographs from the Broadway production and North American Tour by Evan Zimmerman and Matthew Murphy of:
Claire Kwon, Steven Huynh, James Seol, Francisco Javier González / Music from the Original Broadway Cast Recording
Discovery Guide designed and written by Holly Valentine*