

2FUNK  
MUSIC CA  
• LEICESTER

Magic Hour: The Murder Mystery Disco! // That's what I call murder • It's magic • Confidential: not for public release

#4

# NOISES OFF

17 • 04 • 2019

How To Save A Rock // Truth and testimony • Uncomfortable truths

03 // REVIEW

*Yen*

Family struggles

04 // REVIEW

*Yen*

Broken heart

05 // COMMENT

*Interview*

We made it, mum

07 // REVIEW

*Standing Too Close On Our Own In The Dark*

Rough night

08 // REVIEW

*Magic Hour: The Murder Mystery Disco!*

That's what I call murder

It's magic

Confidential: not for public release

10 // REVIEW

*Yen*

Darkly detailed

11 // OPINION • REVIEW

*Festival Life • Magic Hour: The Murder Mystery Disco!*

Tired of standing

Magic hour and a bit

12 // REVIEW

*Festival Company*

Embedded critic

13 // COMMENT • REVIEW

*Dramaturgs • How To Save A Rock*

Wtf is a dramaturg?

Humming and whirring

14 // OPINION

*Daily Discussions*

The power of community

15 // NOTICES

Technician impossible

Funnies

## Editorial #4

Going to dinner.

Going to lunch.

Potatoes. Potatoes.

Was that on Sunday?

Did that happen yesterday or this morning?

*Three issues of Noises Off have already passed through the festgoers hands with their slick covers and hand-stapled spines (big kudos to the tireless work of the Management Team).*

We appreciate everything everyone does for *Noises Off*; whether you're an avid reader, a casual peruser, you're involved in one of the shows we've had the privilege and responsibility of reviewing, or you've contributed to the magazine (an extra special thank you to you!).

Reviewing isn't a responsibility any of us take lightly. We pick over shows carefully, spend hours, and where possible, days, thinking, talking and refining before we put pen to paper. We believe honesty, in lots of different forms, has value, as does celebrating what shows here

achieve. We're both makers and critics, so we spend a lot of time thinking about what it means to write a negative review of a piece of art that often dozens of people have poured months, if not years, of their lives into.

The energy, ideas, love that go into the shows we see are of immense value. Our word limits (typically 500 or 850) sometimes feel measly and inadequate. If we could pause and suspend time, we'd write dozens of longform responses to and considerations of every show at NSDF, and more. But the festival rushes ahead, and we have to move quicker and quicker to stay on top of what's going on.

In this issue you'll read writers' responses to *Yen* (p3-4, 10), *Standing Too Close On Our Own In The Dark* (p5-7), *How To Save A Rock* (p13). They get immersed in *Magic Hour: The Murder Mystery Disco!* (p8-9, 11). On page 12, Emma Rogerson gets stuck in to the Festival Company as their embedded critic, while on page 5, Lucy Thompson looks at the future of shows beyond the festival, asking what it means to have 'made it' after NSDF.

On Thursday *Noff* reverts to its embryonic form and becomes a zine. Issue 6 will be a handmade

back-to-basics photocopied magazine. It may turn out a little rough around the edges, but it'll hold a lot of heart. We want you to come and get involved. Before 14:00 you can come and contribute content – writing / drawing / collaging / photography / a hand-written note - sum up your week at NSDF or highlight something that you feel still needs to be said. Or send us some jokes. Please? We're craving a good chuckle. We do get a bit delirious up here (see 'Overheard in the Noffice' on page 15).

**Naomi and Florence xoxo**  
**Editors**

**Google Hangout message from Naomi's**

**mum:** If Florence's mum can get a mention in Editorial#2, Naomi's Mum should have one as well ;) :D

*The conversation continues online [nsdf.org.uk/noises-off](https://nsdf.org.uk/noises-off)*



**@noffmag**  
**noff@nsdf.org.uk**



# Family struggles

*Pound of Flesh's Yen is a heart-wrenching depiction of children in poverty, says* **Marina Johnson**



**I had been brimming with concerns and preconceptions before even getting through the door for this show. I have already seen and reviewed a production of *Yen* this year.**

The previous production left me feeling like the show had uncomfortable connotations of poverty porn designed to shock and awe sensitive middle class audiences; and without revealing too many spoilers, I could not fathom how Jennifer came to the decision she makes at the end of the show. Pound of Flesh have changed my opinion. This production could not have been more different.

I just wanted to give everyone a hug. These neglected children, who are still trying to do the right thing, but can only copy what they see. The show emotionally wrecked me – specifically because there is no easy answer, solution or happy ending. There is nothing simple about the the questions of responsibility, cause and effect, and who was to blame for the cycle of abuse. We watch the mechanisms in place by our society continually and repeatedly fail these families. Then the creaky arm of the law comes into play and enacts legal responsibility and punishment. In a way that is utterly unsatisfactory. Questions

abound: has Jen become free of the cycle of violence and abandonment though forgiveness? Or is she following in the footsteps of the boys' mother Maggie? And will she in the future tell some broken child they are just like their father?

Tom Kingman and Oscar Sadler beautifully captured the layered bond of siblings in their performances. As Jennifer says, “family's important”. The show team have nicely handled the tricky job of showing both the importance of family, and also its power to be a terrible manipulative source of trauma. Family is far from an unassailable bond of purity and love, particularly in *Yen*. I have personally spent so much of my time helping friends unpick the long term damage and scars enacted upon them by their families. This supposedly secular country is still deeply built around the Christian commandment to 'Honour thy father and thy mother'. It is about time drama and theatre troubled this narrative and showed a variation on this theme on stage.

I have always found the role of Jennifer to be a bit of a plot foil. She sweeps in and tries to improve the boys' lives with this sense of feminine wisdom, and then has a trite and

unnecessary violence enacted on her. Olivia Holmes really captured the fact that she is sixteen, still a minor, but also responsible enough to make her own decisions. Her entrance into the boys' world was a wonderfully captured piece of teenage activism, and desire to do the right thing. Which made it a beautifully awkward and tense scene.

I must admit, after the team did such a nice nuanced job with the character, the staging of the production was weirdly identikit to the last version of the show I saw. Which makes me feel like both were trying to emulate the Royal Court production. However, these similarities melted away under the AV. The floor projection washed the stage in colour and made the scene changes just and absorbing and watchable as the scenes themselves. The images the brothers have been surrounding themselves with literally swamp the stage. The violent and pornographic mixing with animated childish cartoons, recreating the contradictory nature of being a teenager; not quite adult, not quite child.

↻

# Broken Heart

Liam Rees processes the deep-sinking pain of *Yen*

Jesus fuck.

Yen is the first show of the festival where I've had to take a long walk afterwards to process everything. On that walk I felt a lot of feelings I've not felt in a while.

My heart is full of anger

That the boys can never totally relax

That you care more about the fucking dog

"You look just like him"  
and she knows how much that hurts HENCH

Is this a piece of poverty porn?

My heart is full of sadness.

That yet another female protagonist's character development revolves around sexual assault

That he's doing his best and that'll never be enough

Because you can't help everyone

That HENCH's existence is a potential threat

Because trauma seems to beget trauma

That on the walk home my existence is a potential threat

That Yen can't seem to help herself

I know that boy that's struggling to cope.  
I know that boy that doesn't want to turn into his dad.  
I want him to learn to love and be loved.  
I want him to be held and to grow

My heart is full of love.

to any woman walking alone nearby

but I don't want her to have to fix him.  
She's already given enough.

My heart is full of hope.

I've seen broken boys learn to love.

I've seen girls shattered by sexual assault  
rebuild themselves.

My heart is full of Yen.

I hope to see this broken society build itself up again.

## Close questioning

Grace Patrick went and watched – and felt anger

I saw a man standing on a stage, telling us about a woman who he had loved and lost.  
I saw two male musicians supporting the telling of his story.

I didn't see the woman.  
I didn't hear the woman.  
I certainly didn't hear the woman's side of the story.  
I don't know if the woman is real.  
If she is, I don't know if she knows this story is being told.

I held a drink in my hand, and I felt it go warm as the man on stage returned, over and over again, to points in his story where heavy drinking felt like the only option.  
I heard him recognise how ingrained in student culture alcohol has become, and I didn't hear him question that. This story is all told with

the genius of hindsight, and yet the critique of himself is limited.  
So many times, I heard him place this unnamed woman on a pedestal.  
I heard that she liked to read.  
I heard that she gave him a book.  
I heard she often lit incense.  
I heard that he loved her and that she didn't love him, I couldn't feel sorry for him.  
I heard that she was leaving the country for six months, and I couldn't feel sorry for him.  
I heard that he could barely leave his bed, and I couldn't feel sorry for him.

It's not her job to fix him. She didn't offer.

As the play kept going, I felt anger.  
I felt anger for all the people performing emotional labour that they didn't offer to undertake.

I felt anger that her inability to be his anchor was framed as a tragedy on his part.  
How can he be a victim of a crime that didn't happen?

Who was this for?  
What were they meant to feel?  
What was I meant to feel?  
Why?  
I don't know what I was supposed to learn, or what I was supposed to take away.

I don't know anything about the woman at the heart of the story, and I don't trust the narrator.

I don't have a lot more to say.

↻

# We made it, mum

Lucy Thompson talks to Jack Bradfield of Poltergeist Theatre



**Case study:** *Lights Over Tesco Car Park* was at the National Student Drama Festival in 2018. It's now a licensed Samuel French play, has toured venues across the UK, and sold out at the Edinburgh Fringe 2018.

I talked to Jack Bradfield (the playwright of *Lights...*) about what it means to make it for young companies in today's climate.

~

## **Making it:** *Lights Over Tesco Car Park*

**Lucy:** *Lights Over Tesco* is part-scripted, part-devised theatre. How did you create it?

**Jack:** We entered the rehearsal room with nothing. It was a bit risky but we decided not to write anything down before we went in. All we had was, we knew we were gonna do a low-budget sci-fi, we'd seen lots of high-budget but nothing like what we wanted to do. And we had an alien mask.

**Lucy:** Of course.

**Jack:** So in the first two weeks of rehearsal in October 2017, we really got a sense of the story, of the games we wanted to play with an audience. We had this idea of verbatim theatre; we wanted to interrogate what was interesting about that form... Also in the political climate that became a brilliant way of marrying alien abduction stories (are they real, are they fake) with the concept of, let's tell our own story and pretend it's as real as it can be...

So after those two weeks, I went and wrote some attempts at some scenes and these monologues and stories. My writing process came out of the devising process.

You find all these brilliant visual, physical motifs, in play and experiment, that you wouldn't get by sitting down and writing. For example the beginning is Rosa dancing in an alien mask, with the words ALL OF THIS IS TRUE on the screen.

A lot of people recently have asked if that's how you devise, is that how you do it. But it's different for every company.

~

## **Made it:** publishing the play(ful) script

**Lucy:** From there you brought the play to NSDF as new writing. How did the licensing come about?

**Jack:** It was part of the Samuel French New Play Award. It's actually simpler than it feels or sounds. I worked on a polished version of the script, and there are guesses at the improv... It's evoking the feeling of watching the play by reading the script. So in the meetings we were quite insistent that the script felt as playful as the show.

So they typeset it and publish it, and – it's out of your hands. It happened in about eight weeks.

**Lucy:** How did that feel?

**Jack:** I couldn't believe it really at all. And I didn't believe it until we were in Edinburgh and gigantic boxes arrived with our playscripts.

When you think about catching a show on paper...does it limit it? We're doing as much as we can in that playscript to resist possible limitations. To evoke what you saw, what you felt.

**Lucy:** That's an interesting tension with devised theatre – if it's about the physical creation, is that made free for reinterpretation and restaging?

**Jack:** At the front of the text I wrote a mini-blurb saying you don't have to do anything we did: "Here's the blueprint for the show: You need con the audience into thinking you've met a man and an alien. Change the names, change the locations, make it your piece – otherwise the mystery of the piece doesn't work."

We've had one amateur production in Scotland, for one night, for a drama festival. And they changed the names, the locations, they re-recorded everything. For me and for all of us, it was about really giving the power to those making it.

~

## **'Making it': can we ever?**

**Lucy:** What does success mean as a young company? What does 'making it' mean?

**Jack:** I think we're still growing and working out what we are. The difference after NSDF – which was an amazing platform – was that with our next show, through applying for grants and awards, we've puzzled out space and time where we can make our next show outside of university.

At uni you can make a show, you've got free rehearsal space, you've got places to put it on, you've got people who at that moment are managing their time in a way to make space for theatre. And that's really hard when you leave.

Making it isn't the question to ask ourselves I think – and I think it means different things to different people. I'd rather focus on putting in the structures to make work sustainably and safely. And in this climate that's really hard to do, and is a problem that needs to be sorted out from higher up. There needs to be more opportunities to showcase work and develop work. More risks need to be taken on young artists.

I think we're all still learning, basically. We're making theatre. That's what we're trying hard to make.

↪





REVIEW

*Standing Too Close On Our Own In The Dark*

## Rough night

**Nathan Dunn** is on hand with some early hours advice

**Right. I'm gonna speak candidly and pretend we're mates for a minute. For two reasons: firstly, you all seem sound and I reckon over a few pints we probably could be mates.**

Secondly, I don't want to use my platform as a critic to talk down to you as if I am the sole arbiter of theatrical opinion. I'm not going to patter this review with extensive qualitative analysis and deny you the opportunity of responding because my words are published in physical and online copies. It's an open letter; and a conversation.

Theatre is also a conversation. It's easy to forget that, particularly as it's a medium where one person (or more) seems to do all of the talking. But that's the art of theatre, it subverts this preconception in various different ways that all lead to the same end goal – the audience being internally active whilst being externally inactive, usually with some intellectual or emotional reward being attained by both parties in the process. I didn't know until writing this that the words spoken on stage by you, Jack, actually belong to you, Jake. It's a good job Jamie didn't get a large speaking role otherwise this would be well fucking confusing, so when I say 'you', treat it as more of a collective address – it'll make our lives easier.

*Standing Too Close On Our Own In The Dark* is the best show title I've heard in a while. It made me really keen to see what you had to offer, so I'll give you that. Although your title may have lured me in, I'm not totally convinced by the content – or more specifically our role in it. I appreciate you quipped early on in the piece

that you knew how self-indulgent it was, but I'm afraid the recognition of your own stunted self-awareness isn't a valid justification. It was unadulterated, clichéd self-absorbance that we simply bore witness to.

Break-ups are shite, lads. Lost, fleeting loves are shite. Not being one of the cool kids is shite. We know this. So what else are you telling us? I suppose what I'm trying to say is: why are we here? What is our role in your lament? To sit and gawp at how quirkily endearing your poetic sentimentality is?

This girl as well – I appreciate she's special to you, but what are we to gain from your platitudinous presentation of her character? Who is she? Why should we be arsed? I can't tell if the show is about you or her, but it's definitely not about us, so again: why are we here? These words look crueller than they sound but I don't say this with venom; I say it with the rough encouragement of a mate sat on the curb outside a nightclub trying to pick up his other mates' bottom lip off the floor. I appreciate your desire to embrace your own vulnerability and respect it. I see exactly where you're coming from, but I think you might have backed the wrong horse to carry the weight of your emotional torment.

Music. You flirt with it in the piece – it's undoubtedly gig theatre and a format that works for the most part, but your songs do more justice than your performative protestations ever could. Why is this gig-theatre and not a song-cycle? Or an EP? Or even an album? For listeners, music is short and armed with an undeniable sensory emotional trigger. The investment is small and

affordable. Theatre is a different beast; far more demanding and fragile. You're fucking great musicians (assuming Jack can play – give him a triangle if not), I don't think anyone would've complained if there were more songs and less wailing.

Within your 'romantic' ramblings too, you neglected the more interesting, provocative points of discussion that would've offered us the beginning of a useful discourse. Anxiety was raised at one point, with an emphasis on how bad it gets, yet dropped immediately and not properly readdressed. This is not to suggest your pain for my pleasure, but it's clear you are very (arguably too) comfortable talking about your lost love and how much her absence hurt. However, the universality of heartbreak doesn't automatically make it inspiringly relatable. Instead, I feel I would have been inspired and moved to see you talk about the things you probably don't want to. Although, I would only encourage this if it would promise to be a cathartic and beneficial experience for you. Trauma as spectacle is bollocks.

You might feel that me initially claiming to be your mate doesn't justify the content that followed. You might also feel that by making this a dialogue between me and you, I've neglected the interests every other person reading. If you can identify that, then maybe you can also see something similar occurring in your own work. I've asked a lot of questions, and at this stage in our dialogue it's up to you if you want to answer, but I'm listening.





# That's what I call murder

**Nathan Dunn** recounts his wild night at the *Club de Pompidou*

**I don't care much for fossils. Kevin Coprolite, a short and astute individual, looks passionately unimpressed at this. He's standing with a clipboard outside the Club de Pompidou, which inside lives up to its fanciful glam-trash name.**

The cast talk to themselves as much as they talk to you. The environment is real. They are real. We are all part of something. A club night. A theatre performance. A murder investigation.

Boys are girls and girls are boys, and beards are fashioned by Crayola felt-tips. Hair is wild and colourful. Costumes are wilder. This world is as real as a dream, which is as real as we feel it is.

Relationships are fraught yet fun. We walk across the tension between them not like a tightrope, but a gapingly wide road that leads to some awkwardly amusing rebuttals.

The desire for resolving the crime seems more rooted in the trivial pursuit of settling one's curiosity than for an emotional striving for justice, but the bouncer is called Studley and he has hair like Sonic the Hedgehog, so it doesn't really matter, I suppose.

The music is good. Brilliantly bad in fact, as it usually is at club nights. In my exceptionally investigative mood, I sussed out the instrumental tracks serving as the soundtrack to our travels to be derived from classic noughties pop. I'm so clever. I bet no one else figured that out. I'm the elite scholar of *Now That's What I Call Music* 57 to 71, and there's absolutely nothing any of you can do about it.

People do a lot of investigating though. They talk to people. They look at things. They look in things. Sometimes they find things. Someone found a card that was taped to the arse of The Great Alonzo. Someone else found a pebble.

We talked about who we think did it. We all had different choices and different reasons for our choices. So did the suspects. In the words of Stuart Lee: "Time passed...and something happened. Some music came on at the end. It's finished now. But they can't say that nothing happened because they can see it did."

↪





## It's magic

Emma Rogerson is obsessed with the mystifying  
*Magic Hour*

**"I hope it's just, like really fun, really smart and just like a really good time. You know? Not too heavy. But like, still good, you know?"** said I to a mate, after a very long day that seemed to bleed into night as I sat mulling over a (grim) plate of potatoes at the Encore.

"I won't spoil it for you" he said. "But you're right".

Quick Duck Theatre's *Magic Hour* was absolutely everything I wanted it to be. With a gigantic cast spreading a ton of fun, gender-bended caricatures that interacted with the audience before the show started and an engaging story told through an intricate set, the show wasn't only a masterclass in improv, but also a clearly well thought out performance. The story was simplistic enough with a fairly easy conclusion, but the actors all did a good job in bringing the characters to life and giving the story energy. While the standard was generally high, I want to throw some particular praise at Abigail Greenwood as Alan Totters (who's sweet sweet dance moves and generally endearing vibe made me want to be her best friend forever and always plz) and Antonia Strafford-Taylor as Kevin Coprolite (can honestly say I've never been more attracted to a fossil expert. Brilliant storyteller with some fab fab improv).

As we were led through the different rooms in order to engage with the actors and solve the mystery, we had the opportunity to listen as our guides asked questions which would give us key info about all the plot points, alongside the chance for the actors to improv and for us to come up with our own lines of inquiry. Really smart choice by the director here, as it perfectly struck the balance between ensuring a narrative and delivering all the necessary exposition alongside empowering the audience and giving them a chance to get involved. If I was feeling negative I might criticize the logic of the ending (no spoilers), but honestly I'm not, because the show put me in such a good mood. Theatre for fun will never lose its importance, and I appreciated it a lot for what it was and when I saw it.

↪



## Confidential: not for public release

DCI Sam Ross submits his investigative report on  
*an eventful night at the disco*

**In all my experience as Detective Inspector for Noff PD, I haven't faced a case as tough as this in my life. I have seen the good, the bad, and the pretentious, but nothing has perplexed me – NAY! enthralled me! – as much as the Club de Pompidou Palava of '19.**

I arrived in the club with my trusted associate and partner in crime (Jokes! I'm not a criminal!) DCI Emma Rogerson. We arrive on the beat as ordinary club-goers looking for a little boogie and some sweet sweet vibes. We passed the bouncer outside the club easily, one Studley 'spiky blue hair' Davis. He didn't seem to be that good at his job – we were in!

On the dancefloor we began our work. We heard of some tension between rival club owners, one national treasure Samantha Di Pompidou and one Cecile Foxtrot. We were there to gain intel, resolve the tension and get lit. But what started as a simple reconnaissance mission turned sour when the lights blacked out. In the darkness, I heard mutters of confusion, overdramatic bickering and a GUN SHOT. This shit just turned into a HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION!

The victim: one Sterling Dollair, noted philanthropist and philanderer. Just earlier he presented Mme Di Pompidou with a cheque for ONE MILLION DOLLARS. Moments later his chest was covered – NAY! soaked! - in red marker pen BLOOD!

The twists just kept on coming. It turns out I was not the only undercover DCI on the case – the place was absolutely OVERRUN with them!

With such large numbers, Chief Inspector Gurnings had to split the team up. Each was headed by senior members of the force; the forensics team, Dr Colin Bradford and Dr Betsy Conybere led my team around the building, scouting for clues. They would grill the suspects first before we had a chance to get stuck in. I wanted to jump in and challenge them with my year of detecting experience, but each time I did was told off by stern Conybere.

Y'see, I don't play by the rules of the authorities. I follow my own lead; the only rules I obey are my own rules (and MOTHER JUSTICE!!!). Even so, I kept my notes in a handily-provided notebook. I put together the pieces of the puzzle, trying to untangle the threads and weave their narratives into the truth. But truth be told, I was getting nowhere.

But then it hit me. A business card here; a misplaced shopping list there; a suitcase full of money DOWN THERE. It finally dawned on me who the real culprit was: the friends we made along the way.

↪

# Darkly detailed

Alexander Cohen praises the talents of *Yen*

**Matt Owen's *Yen* is the theatrical equivalent of drinking five cups of extra strong coffee: jittery, intense and quite distressing.**

Pound of Flesh theatre company have done a commendable job of bringing the story of Bobbie (Tom Kingman) and Hench (Oscar Sadler), two teenagers whose hobbies include watching porn, playing *Call of Duty* and fighting with each other to life. This production's attention to detail is outstanding, with the creatively designed set perfectly complimenting some strong but sometimes over the top performances.

The relationship between the brothers is instantly convincing. Kingman and Sadler succeed in capturing the constant fluctuation between physical violence and brotherly affection as they circle an unmade bed and glowing television. The perfectly minimal set did well to create a sense of claustrophobia that complimented the disturbing themes of the play.

Both performances are highly nuanced and thought through: Sadler is animalistic as the authoritative Hench, he plods around the stage like a bulldog and snorts like a pig. This initially added depth to his character's fractured psyche, but this characterisation soon becomes out of place and slightly bizarre, especially when interacting with love interest Jennifer (Olivia Holmes). Small details, such as a facial tick, felt like a substitute for nuanced characterisation and depth. A particularly questionable moment came when she described him as "gentle" despite his erratic physicality.

Kingman's Bobbie is easily able to portray the inner mentality of someone, whose lack of a loving upbringing has led to a scarily disturbing individual, that becomes more and more depraved as the play progresses. Only someone with talent such as Kingman's could portray someone who is so deranged yet so endearing. However, he suffers from a similar issue. Whilst the performance was teeming with adrenaline and vivacity, leaping through the air with excitement at the thought of seeing his emotionally manipulative mother, his intensity soon became grating. The lack of more relaxed sequences meant there was no juxtaposition between the moments that demanded heightened emotion, ultimately leading to poignant moments being lost among the furore. This tension was also not helped by the lack of an interval. In theory, it makes sense given the right emotional arcs each character undergoes, but in reality, the lack of a break in a two hour performance was demanding given the energetic performances. The audience literally and metaphorically did not have a chance to breathe.

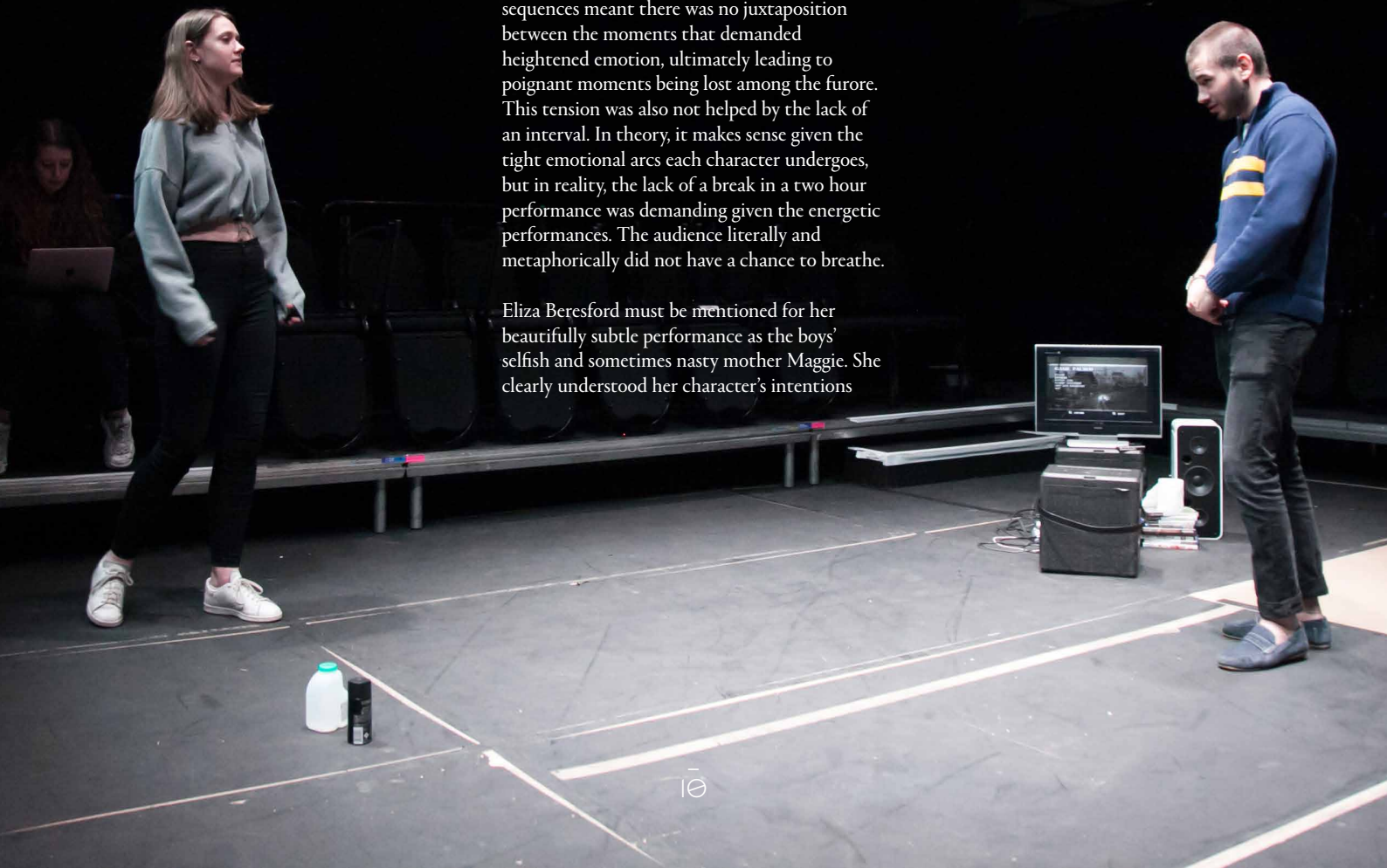
Eliza Beresford must be mentioned for her beautifully subtle performance as the boys' selfish and sometimes nasty mother Maggie. She clearly understood her character's intentions

and desires, hinting at a character whose story is worth a play of its own. This made her performance one of the standouts.

Perhaps the best directorial decision was to use a projector to mark the passage of time between scenes. Seeing the set suddenly flow with colour was a perfect way to mark scene changes feeling natural and creative; the use of images relating to and further suggesting the boys' viewing material again did well to fortify the twisted world in which they live.

*Yen* is not an easy play to digest nor to produce, but Matt Owen and his team have created a darkly detailed story that is worth seeing for the powerful narrative and talented cast and crew. However it's overreliance on high energy becomes a noticeable weakness that unfortunately takes away from an otherwise powerful production.

☞





## Tired of standing

Liam Rees is feeling fatigued after seeing two shows back to back

**Back in high school my English teacher said something that's stuck with me ever since: "The opposite of love isn't hate but indifference." and I keep coming back to that in relation to *Standing Too Close On Our Own In The Dark*, a love story to which I am totally indifferent.**

To be fair some context is required. On Monday evening myself and everyone on the green track had to go through an emotional rollercoaster. Emerging from *Yen*, hollowed-out yet full of anger and anguish, desperate to hold someone and be held, I (along with my fellow greens) had to rush from the Curve to zFunky Music Cafe to catch *Standing Too Close On Our Own In The Dark*. In case you couldn't tell, the 30 minute gap between the two shows was far from enough to process it all and get in the right headspace. A lot can happen in half an hour. I could have a cup of

tea. I could watch an episode of *Bojack Horseman*. But I couldn't do the emotional reset required to watch *Standing...* on its own terms.

In an earlier interview with Helen Goalen from RashDash, she warned against getting weary after seeing multiple shows back to back because everyone's put in so much work (and paid so much to be here!) that they all deserve our undivided attention. So consider this an apology and an admission of defeat at the hands of festival fatigue.

As pints poured and lights dimmed, the band started and performer, Jack Chamberlain, waxed lyrical with some faux-philosophical musings for which my dazed self simply wasn't in the right state of mind. After watching people try and fail to deal with trauma and abject poverty for 2 hours and caring so deeply for them, I had

nothing left to give to Just Club's evening of (self-professed) self-indulgence.

This skinny, speccy, twenty-something, white gay boy with depression listens to another skinny, speccy, twenty-something white boy talk about anxiety and a girl who doesn't love him back. Surely some common ground should make it easier to relate and feel for him? Instead it's created a gulf of disinterest, the territory he's treading rendered familiar unremarkable. Yet the world of *Yen*, alien to me, and an actor from the University of Warwick pretend to be a deprived boy living in squalor connects so much more. How we can care about fictional characters more than real people? Humans are weird.



## Magic hour and a bit

Joseph Winer gives us a tour of *Magic Hour: The Murder Mystery Disco!*

**A murder has taken place at the infamous Club de Pompidou. For this show, we will take on the role of the detective to help solve this crime. We'll need to work together to gather as much information as possible. My group is guided through the show by two detectives (and lovers in a dispassionate romance) Chief Inspector Gurnings and Alan Totters, played with absolute commitment by Kat Forbes and Abigail Greenwood. Their improv is sharp, and they build a rapport with the audience that makes us feel really immersed. As we move through the different areas, we're introduced to each of the potential suspects and offered the chance to ask them questions ourselves.**

The setup to the show is really intriguing. We're in a club and the bar is open. The characters are roaming around the space and the drama has very much began. It sort of feels like we've been thrown into a cartoon, with the actors dressed in absurd wigs and outfits. Tufts of hair have been scribbled onto chests and faces with what

looks like crayon. Eyebrows have been defined or exaggerated. Glitter has been generously applied. The space is queered with cross-gendered casting.

The scope and ambition is highly commendable. There are more than twenty characters, each and every one clearly defined by the script. Whilst we're focused on a particular scene, we can look around to see everyone else still playing their respective parts. The Q&A sessions test each actor's knowledge of the show as a whole, and clearly huge amounts of work and detail have gone into fleshing out the world of the show, the back-stories, and character relationships.

One of the struggles with this type of show is that it relies heavily on audience engagement – a quiet audience left us with a few awkward silences. Forbes and Greenwood did a good job to fill in the gaps. We're told at the beginning to explore each of the spaces to help find clues, but quite a few of these are completely missed in my detective group and the characters have to quickly fill us in on the information we've failed

to find before we move on to the next space.

That being said, this is a highly ambitious project and is incredibly successful in much of its execution. The opening sets up such a high threshold for expectations and it's really tricky to maintain this buzz for the full two hours. Each section could do with some tightening on the interactions. It runs the risk of becoming a little repetitive and I want something to happen to shake up the format a little bit.

It also has the issue of being a club-performance for an audience that's not committed to the club night. The atmosphere is sober. Many of us are carrying backpacks and it feels sometimes more like a walking tour than a club night. This is by no means the fault of the company, but I wonder how an experience like a club-performance is affected by the structure of NSDF itself.



## Embedded critic

How **Emma Rogerson** got on as embedded critic with the Festival Company



**Disclaimer: it's not really possible for me to be even remotely objective about the NSDF Festival Company. As an embedded critic, I couldn't watch the rehearsal or consider the process or think about the concept of making theatre in a week without being reminded of how formative short summer schools I did as a child were to me as an adult, or being a really little kid having a finite Sunday afternoon with my cousin to recreate scenes from *The Lion King* to show our parents before we went home.**

Obviously, this is a much more professional affair. But what they do share is a simplicity, and an authenticity – to make theatre for the pure sake of it, for the love of it, and for the desire to connect and collaborate with other young, brilliant theatre makers. On a Tuesday morning on the mezzanine level of the Curve, 90 or so actors are being led in a warm up, and I'm struck by how deliberately and carefully the week has been constructed and facilitated. This morning, the warm up incorporates vocal exercises – each day, the focus is on a different aspect of actor training, and today, voices project and echo off the curves of the theatre. I'm watching the company and I'm struck by how engaged they look; how energetic they are at 9:20 in the morning, how jealous I am of this.

Peter Bradley, the director of the NSDF company, puts this down to a sense of “generosity” which runs through the company at every level. We chat while the actors warm up, and he fills me in on the brevity of the process and the willingness of everyone within the company to contribute with no expectation or entitlement. The scripts were written yesterday,

with no brief or theme, only imagination as the starting point. There are 15 short plays, each ranging from 12-30 lines long, with deliberate attempts to evenly distribute the lines between all the actors involved. The directors were then introduced to “birth” the plays with the actors. A phrase Peter uses that resonates with me is describing the process as “cascading levels of kindness”.

The warm up finishes and the Company splits into their respective groups. The sense of kindness, of generosity is extended to me as I flicker in between groups, awkwardly asking to watch rehearsals and being welcomed in without question. Even in the context of simple, short pieces, it is clear how engaging, interesting and well-structured the narratives are. They are capable of depth and weight, and everyone in the team engages with the text fully. The conversations between actors and directors bounce, backwards and forwards, gaining in momentum and force as each of them work with each other. The performances are rich and diverse – Peter calls it a “giant sweetshop” of styles and stories.

Another phrase that resonates with me – Peter describes the set-up of the Company, of combining strangers with different experiences and skill sets a “weapon”, and I'm immediately unable to separate this Company from how it fits into the rest of the festival. Over the week, creative power has shifted from Peter and the rest of the selectors that are working at NSDF to all the young Company artists themselves. That shift of power and autonomy has really important implications for the democracy of the festival, and also the social power in these large

scale arts community projects. And it's popular too – the event has gained both momentum and people as the week's progressed. It demonstrates the necessity of process alongside product. That we, as theatre-makers, appreciate the opportunity to reflect on our practice in a “really practical concrete breeding ground for new stuff” (Peter) alongside absorbing and presenting pre-established work.

We didn't get time to see all the pieces rehearsed today, but that's alright, because tomorrow the work will carry on. And I think that encapsulates the spirit of what the Company does. It provides a starting point for new connections and ideas, regardless of where people geographically or ideologically come from. And it'll carry on – last year, the Company focused on showcasing actors engaging in extracts from *4.48 Psychosis*. This year, writers and directors are being engaged in the process. Next year? There's a possibility of expansion, of engaging an embedded critic to work with the company all week. Ultimately, the selectors will gather at the end of the week to see what could be improved and how the Company can evolve going forward. What they've achieved so far is admirable – engaging writers, directors and actors from around the country to create work in a week is something entirely wonderful and unique – even the National Youth Theatre is only a platform for actors, and one that blatantly neglects the contributions and voices of emerging writers and directors. I don't think the generosity of spirit and kindness created in this environment will be confined to this week. I don't know where it will lead, but it feels like an open door.





## Wtf is a dramaturg?

You may have asked; **Liam Rees** is here to answer

**There's an urban legend that the reason Britain has Literary Managers rather than Dramaturgs is because it sounded too German and foreign. Is it true? I don't know. Do I care? Not particularly – it still paints a pretty clear image of the confusion surrounding what this somewhat wanky word means. Especially when it's bandied about in reviews and theatre seminars in which everyone has a different definition.**

Well never fear, after a few months working in continental theatre and a Q&A with the Donmar Warehouse's Literary Manager, Clare Slater, I'm here to enlighten you and settle the argument once and for all.

In British 'writers' theatre' Literary Managers read scripts, develop relationships with writers and do a lot of, well, management on a

programming level. An inside tip from Clare: the Literary Manager is one of the best people to talk to because they're not as busy as the Artistic Director and more likely to fit you in for a chat over a cup of tea.

Across the pond, in the land of 'directors' theatre' where the concept is king and the text knocked off its pedestal, the Dramaturg has a significantly wider remit. Somewhere between an in-house critic and researcher, a dramaturg focuses on the making-of, working on the production as a live theatrical experience, providing feedback and ensuring the concept and intentions of the writer or director or whoever it may be is as clear as possible. They make the work more like what it's trying to be. Kind of like an assistant director that doesn't make tea and coffee. However, depending on the nature of each show their role will probably change. Devised piece? They're probably giving constant feedback and providing

the show with an overall structure. New play? A lot of researching and assisting on redrafts. One-man *Hamlet* set in a Slovakian toilet? Well I'm not sure where they'd start on that but they're going to have a lot of work to do in making sure that concept is solid.

And that's not even touching on their role on an institutional level! A significantly wider remit indeed, some literary managers are also dramaturgs but not all dramaturgs are literary managers. But also some directors and producers are functionally dramaturgs even if that's not their title. Arts job descriptions are hard...

Sooooo....after all that... it kind of can mean whatever you want it mean...



## Humming and whirring

**Lucy Thompson** marvels at the lights and sounds of *How To Save A Rock*

**Don't you wonder sometimes  
About sound and vision?**

What struck me as most enjoyable about *How To Save A Rock* were the visuals and soundscapes. As part of the show's goal to be carbon-neutral, standard SFX are eschewed in favour of creating sound with props and voices (wind-rushing, humming, and described landscapes), while the lighting comes from solar lamps, lightbulbs, and the bicycle generator.

Going in the audience are faced with a dystopia of litter onstage; to me, a familiar trope (for reasons unknown, I've seen quite a lot of fringe theatre about climate change – and much of it had a similar set-up with rubbish scattered around the set). *How To Save A Rock* sets itself apart with its integration of light; being given solar lights and picking your way through the detritus made it feel like we were navigating this world. The glowing light bulbs among the rubbish add a fairy-tale feel, albeit a fairy tale in which all the polar bears are dead, the 100 companies who produce 71% of greenhouse gas

emissions haven't been stopped, and the ozone layer is torn to shreds.

The obvious downside in this creative approach to lighting is that your play is at the mercy of an unreliable bike – which is not a position you ever really want to be in. It's an uncertainty that reflects the play's central concern about the future and how it will look, but nonetheless it's also distracting, and when the bicycle broke you often couldn't see the characters clearly or tell what was happening.

Even so, I did like the use of light bulbs to imagine the Blackpool illuminations. It felt ingenuitive and beautiful, and especially effective in the darkness (or maybe I just enjoyed the shiny). That's another note; given the noise made by pedalling the bike whenever the lights were on, darkness was often accompanied by silence. This allowed the play to have real moments of stillness; in the peat bog, the lack of sound or movement generated an eerie sense of place.

Occasionally litter was reused in other forms in the play – a whole character (or plot device –

hard to have depth when you're a puppet) was imaginatively constructed from crisp packets, coat hangers, and plastic bottles, and train noises were recreated simply by rattling a tin. Although not the most effective, these choices suited the slightly surreal vibe of *How To Save A Rock*. And also occasionally the actors used their own voices to layer sound, with mournful humming over their descriptions of landscapes.

*How To Save A Rock* has brief moments of beautiful storytelling, glimpses of something intriguing in what otherwise felt low-energy and had an over-contrived, unconvincing plot. I'm being generous in counting lines as part of the soundscape, but specifically when the characters were describing their surroundings (the "gigantic celestial garden" of offshore wind turbines, or the ancient vastness of the Scotland bogs), I felt far more willing to be brought along on the journey and – in those moments – I enjoyed it.



# The power of community

Art can change the world, says Slung Low's Alan Lane



**It was an extraordinary experience sitting on the stage during the first discussion watching the student and Roy Alexander Weise have that conversation about opportunity and race and class and in the end, I think, fear and comradeship. It had, like all worthwhile difficult conversations, its sense of danger, the tension palpable – but, led by the two people speaking, we just held on to our collective good faith – the promise of this special week maintained – that there is something to be learnt by all those listening and by all those speaking.**

And it's important that as a large heavy footed white middle-aged man I don't go blundering into the conversation any more than I already had. I kept quiet.

But the first half of the discussion, before we moved to race and opportunity, contained a number of things that I wish there had been time to circle back to.

The idea that we don't give money to theatre makers who don't hold a liberal, left-wing ideology is not true. We can discuss if we give money to literal fascists another time and there's no need here to go into the personal politics and connections of various leaders of the British theatre industry, because at its heart the structures of our theatre industry are inherently conservative and consciously and unconsciously designed to uphold a set of values that are entirely political. And entirely not liberal and left-wing.

As we discussed yesterday the industry continues to fail to recognise and celebrate the work, craft, stories and lives of people of colour, the disabled community, and LGBTQ+ and women artists. The reliance at the highest levels in our industry

on the demonstrably false justification of meritocracy is based in a right wing belief system (in no way is this to suggest the left isn't riddled with these same cruelties). The locking out of narratives from so many communities from our theatres is reliant on the belief that if you value it you will pay for it, and that our white male dominated canon and therefore content of our stages are based on the disingenuous and wicked belief that talent rises equally from a people. The majority of our public funding goes to organisations who are built on these beliefs and have boards who are charged with maintaining them.

These things are not politically neutral – a set of beliefs that rest on the pillars of capitalism and historic imperialism, rife with ableism, sexism, homophobia and racism. No wonder we don't see more disabled people, people of colour, queer performers and women on our stages and in our programmes. These are realities based in political beliefs – and you accept them or you don't. But accepting them, however passively, is still a political choice. No matter how many recyclable coffee cups we insist on in our green rooms, our industry's institutional structures are based on those cruelties, not as accidental side effects but as the scaffolding. It isn't politically neutral.

And so when we have a conversation about whether art can change the world in order to start to believe such things are possible we have to overcome centuries of value systems and hierarchies that tell us that it isn't. And that is hard. It requires us to overcome the fear of looking foolish, of looking naive, of hoping and having that hope squashed by the much easier sneer of cynicism. The sarcastic snide of 'oh, you thinking you're changing the world.'

Yes I do. So do many of my colleagues. Art,

theatre, culture, stories can change the world. In buses, in pubs, in community centres, on high streets, in schools and occasionally even in theatres – but not as often as anyone would like.

The belief that this activism, cultural democracy and engagement is separate from 'excellent' art is increasingly old fashioned and unsustainable as a belief in the face of evidence.

The nation's most exciting, most inventive and political theatre makers are community theatre makers; from Emily Lim at National Theatre (London), Company Three, Kully Thiarai (National Theatre Wales), Sheffield People's Theatre, James Phillips, Jenny Sealey and Graeae and on and on. There are writers, directors and companies making work with a different set of values at their heart which are reaching national audiences, critical acclaim and people in a way that our traditional models can only dream of.

The very finest piece of political theatre I've ever seen was the Opening Ceremony of Paralympics Ceremony of London 2012 – an act of community theatre of extraordinary entertainment, impeccable principles, the highest standards of engagement and a belief in the power and purpose of each individual that it remains the benchmark to which I aspire. It was watched by millions.

The idea that community theatre can't be used for the highest artistic and political purposes is an aggressively conservative one. It is a political one. As is the sneering belief that art can't change the world. And if nothing else you should always question the motives of those that would snide you into thinking that.





## Meme of the day

director simon



- passive aggressive
- cool and confident
- once more with feeling

goatee simon



- big on game of thrones
- insecure
- is trying his best

dramatic simon



- playwright of a generation
- visionary
- loves space

lengthy simon



- contemplates on the daily
- never finds trousers in his size
- one certified longboi

cheeky simon



- absolute unit
- popular with the lads
- lives for the gossip

sexy simon



- loves ur eyes
- good taste in upholstery
- u like edward bond too?

## Notices

*Happy birthday to Darcy Dobson! Many happy returns from the TANYA cast and crew.*

*Can the Curve please get a playlist that's more than 4 hours long? Seriously, I've heard "Suddenly I see" 12 times in the 4 days I've been here.*

## Overheard in the Noffice

"I love culture. I love reading. I love books."

"Not to be overly critical but it made me want to die."

"If you can't see it it doesn't exist: that's theatre criticism"

"We're going to have to Stalin him."

"Are you actually okay?" "Oh, I'm fine. I'm just very good at acting."

"Does anyone need anything?" "A hug."

*Stage dooring Simon Stephens stage dooring Simon Stephens stage dooring Simon Stephens*

"Amazing! We've solved journalism."

"I think we should write an article about it, and then we should put it in our magazine, and then we'll print the magazine, and then no one will read it."

"En dashes. Endless joy."

"I'm vetoing anything I've said about Chris Haydon"

"I don't know if we can publish this. We'll do it anyway."

"I finished someone else's grapes. There were only two left. I thought someone had eaten all of my grapes."

"Now everyone will know what cool kids live in the Noffice. They'll want to be part of us."

"This isn't even my pen and I put it in my fucking mouth."

"That's my pen."

↻

**technician impossible**

*Every day of the festival, we scratch our heads and do our best to set the Technical Team an (im) possible challenge. They have 24 hours to complete it, should they choose to accept.*

Wow! You've built us a beautiful home, and a proper television for all our watching needs. We're so impressed by all your hard work we think you should have a space where you can take some time to relax in a soothing environment.

**Inspired by the interesting soundscapes we've heard in shows so far: we'd like you to bring the calming sounds of the sea to the Curve.**

Mmmmm.

#4

# NOISES OFF

17 • 04 • 2019

## Editors

Naomi Obeng  
Florence Bell

## Photography

Beatrice Debney

## Design

Robin Wilde

## Contributors

Alexander Cohen  
Nathan Dunn  
Marina Johnson  
Alan Lane  
Grace Patrick  
Liam Rees  
Emma Rogerson  
Sam Ross  
Lucy Thompson  
Joseph Winer

## Thanks to

Mark Shenton  
Michael Grandage Futures  
Sonia Friedman  
Michael Codron  
Cameron Mackintosh  
and Dame Rosemary Squire  
for their support

@noffmag  
[nsdf.org.uk/noises-off](http://nsdf.org.uk/noises-off)  
[noff@nsdf.org.uk](mailto:noff@nsdf.org.uk)