

Things We Do Not Know // Truth and testimony • Uncomfortable truths

How To Save A Rock // Change of climate • Sustainable development

#3
NOISES
OFF.

16 • 04 • 2019

03 // COMMENT
ARE YOU STILL WATCHING
 What do you mean?

04 // REVIEW
How To Save A Rock
 Change of climate

05 // REVIEW
How To Save A Rock
 Sustainable development

06 // COMMENT
Daily Discussion

08 // OPINION
Festival Life
 Spaced out

09 // REVIEW
Bost-Uni Plues
 Buyer's remorse
 The best three years

10 // REVIEW
Yen
 Unheard, unsaid, unseen

11 // OPINION
Funding
 What it costs to be here

12 // REVIEW
Bost-Uni Plues
 £9000.00

13 // REVIEW
Things We Do Not Know
 Truth and testimony
 Uncomfortable truths

14 // REVIEW
Things We Do Not Know • ARE YOU STILL WATCHING
 Thank you
 Watching carefully

15 // REVIEW • NOTICES
 Ch-ch-changes
 Technician impossible
 Meme of the day

Editorial #3

It was interesting to hear in Sunday's discussion that we have to make theatre with an audience in mind. An immediate question: Why should we make art for other people?

Is there a danger in this? That only certain artists will feel compelled, by pride or by selflessness (or guilt?), to make theatre for the People. The selfish artists (and for art, this is not necessarily negative) will go on making art selfishly. Why wouldn't they, if other people have the People covered. It won't be hard to ponder who the selfish ones tend to be either. Is everyone allowed, enabled, inclined to be equally selfless or selfish?

At times it all feels so muddled and abstract, so ripe for being torn straight open, prodded, sifted through. Sentences that were spoken over dinner or in the cafe have lingered and grown into conversations. It continues here. And there.

In this third issue, our writers have made a

point of breaking open questions and probing their insides. Emma Rogerson delves into how we find meaning in theatre (p3), Liam Rees documents a conversation on Englishness and nationhood (p13), and Nathan Dunn (p6-7) offers his own response to Sunday's thought-provoking discussion.

As the days meld into the continuum we've long had highlighted in our calendars as FESTIVAL, we've seen so many shows already and we've learnt so many things.

~

NSDF is the place of learning things. We're all still learning. That's true for everyone. We've both been on a big learning curve this week, and in the months leading up to the festival. Learning can feel painful at times, especially when we're learning through mistakes. But every day, we're trying to take something away.

Saturday: the number of pages in a magazine have to be divisible by four. Duh.

Sunday: listen to people you disagree with. Don't put your head in your hands. Hear them.

Monday: double check, triple check and

quadruple check direct quotes for accuracy.

We misattributed a quote in our second issue and spent an hour on Monday madly dashing around Leicester trying to get corrections out. There's a slightly queasy feeling that comes with realising you've fucked something up and trying to remedy it, but as hours pass, it becomes easier to step back, breathe and learn. That's what we're here for. Don't be afraid. Breathe. Learn.

~

Apologies to Chris Stafford and Guest Director James Phillips for the misattributed quote in issue 2. We quoted Guest Director James Phillips as describing the festival as 'a factory of art', but these words were in fact spoken by Chris Stafford.

The conversation continues online nsdf.org.uk/noises-off

Naomi and Florence xoxo
Editors

↻

@noffmag
 noff@nsdf.org.uk

What do you mean?

Emma Rogerson investigates the meaning of meaning in response to ARE YOU STILL WATCHING



The Arden School Of Theatre's *ARE YOU STILL WATCHING* presented a fun selection of impersonations, original writing and characters all based off, or revolving around, popular TV.

It was a lot of fun and giggles, but I walked out not knowing what the show was actually about, what it meant beyond the fun. And then, while I was writing a review, I didn't fully know what meaning itself actually meant. After a quick google search and some philosophical debates in the Noffice, words like purpose, intention, expression and significance kept cropping up. Words that I couldn't seem to match up with *ARE YOU STILL WATCHING* – I wasn't sure how to feel in response to it. And then I started thinking about the broader implications of this. Who determines what a piece of theatre means? Who has that responsibility, privilege, power?

From the roles listed:

Dramaturg?

Although the nature of the term dramaturg demands a degree of breadth, usually the jobs of research, context, text analysis and editing are associated with them. In this case, I presume the dramaturg worked with the various sources of different TV shows to incorporate the narrative and connection between the different sources.

Writer?

Normally, I would argue that the writer is the main architect of any intentional or inferred meaning from a piece of theatre but, in this case, the show was devised by BA Theatre and Performance students at The Arden School of Theatre. As such, devising in such a collective environment limits the extent to which meaning can be collaboratively constructed. A room of people can't spontaneously come up with one singular meaning. I would expect lots of discussion, lots of development and contribution

to come up with a clear direction that everyone can write towards in this environment, but even so, they aren't the sole makers of meaning.

Director?

Interestingly, a director isn't listed in the programme. Usually, directors incorporate all the different voices within a creative team to steer the multitude of elements towards the same goal: a particular artistic vision or moral message. As the play doesn't have a director, there are several directions and messages the play takes as opposed to a singular creative vision, favouring instead lots of different pieces of media to influence and shift the direction of the show, similar to flicking through the channels on TV.

Actors?

In this sort of theatre making environment, the line between actor, writer and director is significantly blurred. However, there was such a rich variety of different acting styles and intentions that the role of the actor seems to shape some of the meaning significantly. One of the standout moments of the show was when an actor, desperately clinging to her persona of Alyssa Edwards, had her wig removed and told a story about being anxious in a Subway. Oddly enough, it was one of the most interesting, vulnerable, profound character developments and monologues in the show. I'd be really interested to know how much the individual actor put into that, because, lovely as it was, the meaning and intention of it seems out of place with what was already established in the rest of the narrative. I suppose the brevity of TV and this generational reliance on superficiality was the main thing I got from the show as a whole, but this monologue seemed to hint at authenticity and writing your own definition of originality. I'd love to see some kind of extension of that monologue as like a one woman show, that would be super cool.

Of course, in this kind of festival context, programming and producing also plays a role in the perception of meaning as much as the show and word of mouth:

Marketers / Marketing?

The blurb which lists the show describes it as "a glorious technicolor dreamshow that shoves high and low culture into a room together and invites us all to watch". That description aptly sums up what it was – a very energetic fun collage of different TV impersonations and references, in this shared viewing experience for all. However, it fails to mention what the show does, what the intent is. Which makes me wonder if it's –

Audience?

Is it my fault that I haven't inferred a meaning from this show? If the piece is about viewing culture and watching and making connections between ideas and picking up on references, have I failed this show? Any meanings that I have got from this show feel like guesses or questions rather than answers. Is that my flaw, is it even a flaw?

I suppose all of these people need to connect and communicated via one central idea or concept in order to convey a meaning. But in the case of this show, I can only draw two possible meanings:

- There isn't a meaning.
- There are so many meanings (because of the extent of topic and material covered) that it's representative of the wealth of TV shows and media out there, and it's actually an act of empowerment for the audience to select their own parts of the show that resonate with them and determine their own meaning.



Change of climate

Sam Ross is enlightened by *How To Save A Rock*

I don't know what I'm doing.

A lot of the time I honestly feel like I'm simply bumbling along, trying hard to keep all the plates spinning. There is my uni work to consider – currently two coursework essays, an oral presentation and a theatre dissertation. Then there's just the simple act of getting by, preparing food for myself. There's also the matter of get my shit together for once I leave uni (see my review for *Bost-Uni Plues*). And on top of that is just the small fact that I'm tasked with writing several reviews and articles for *Noises Off* (hi Florence and Naomi).

Then there's the kind of enormous matter of saving our planet. I alone must stop climate change.

Well actually that's not true. But it often feels like that. Worrying about the environment has played an increasing part in my conscious daily life (and sometimes my unconscious one as well). I try to recycle. I try to use reusable bottles and coffee cups. I take public transport. I eat a vaguely vegetarian diet. But still it doesn't seem like enough. I should live a zero-waste lifestyle. I should stop drinking cow's milk and eating dairy. I should stop buying exported fruit wrapped in cellophane. I shouldn't even have a fucking child.

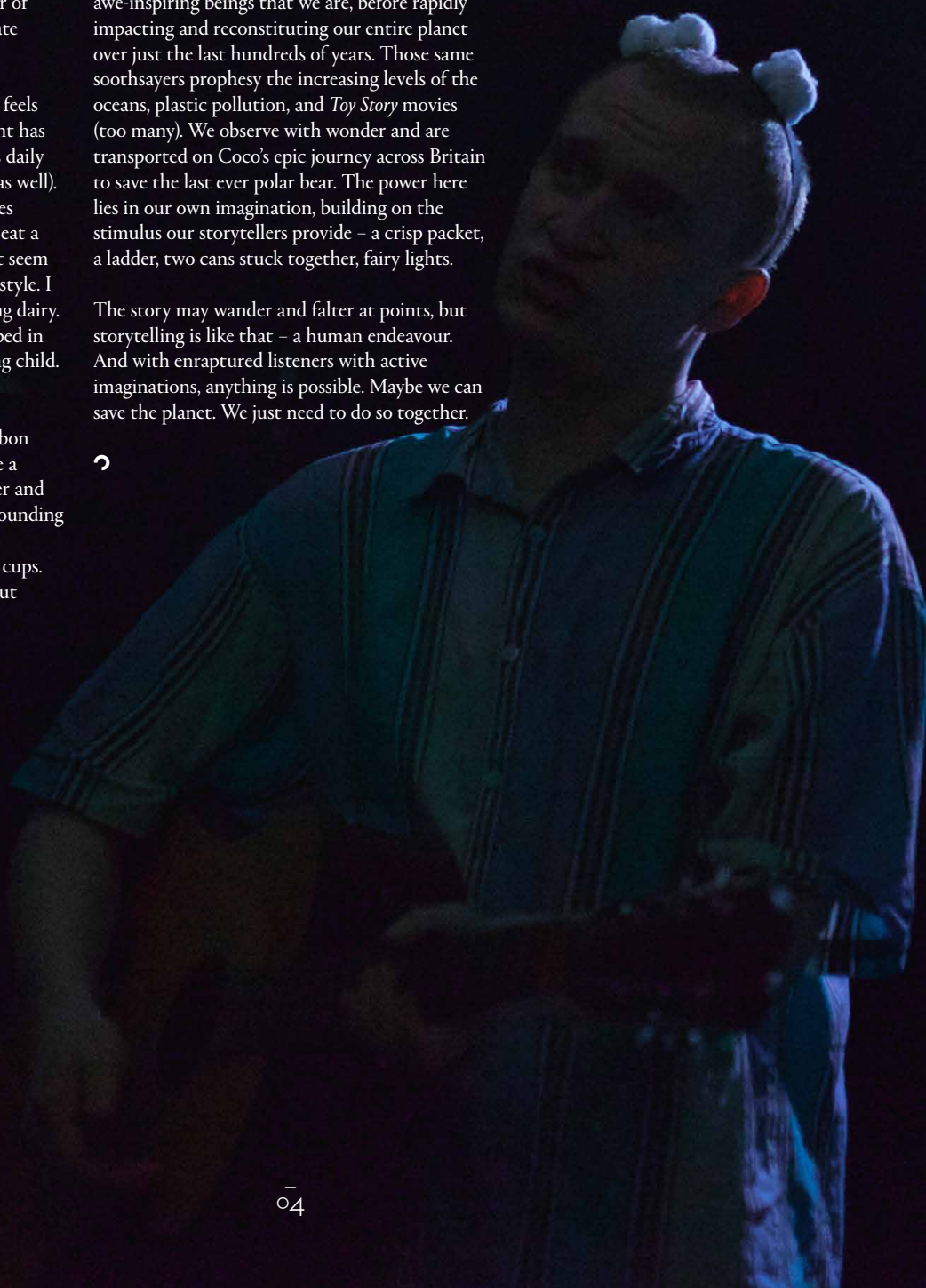
I feel like Pigfoot Theatre recognise this distinctly. In interim sections of their carbon neutral devised performance *How to Save a Rock*, the performers step out of character and admit their concerns and difficulties surrounding trying to live an eco-lifestyle. About the unsustainable consumption of disposable cups. About the pitfalls of using tote bags. About

whether or not to have a child, considering they will emit 10,000 tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere BY JUST EXISTING.

You can really sense a powerful aura of community from sitting in an almost pitch-black room, only lit by solar-powered torches and bike-powered lights. It's almost as if we travelled right back to our storytelling roots, sitting around a carbon-neutral 'campfire' as the storytellers tell us how the rock we live on was created millions of years ago. About how miraculously complex organisms grew from humble base elements that just happened to coalesce here. How we incredibly slowly evolved into the awe-inspiring beings that we are, before rapidly impacting and reconstituting our entire planet over just the last hundreds of years. Those same soothsayers prophesy the increasing levels of the oceans, plastic pollution, and *Toy Story* movies (too many). We observe with wonder and are transported on Coco's epic journey across Britain to save the last ever polar bear. The power here lies in our own imagination, building on the stimulus our storytellers provide – a crisp packet, a ladder, two cans stuck together, fairy lights.

The story may wander and falter at points, but storytelling is like that – a human endeavour. And with enraptured listeners with active imaginations, anything is possible. Maybe we can save the planet. We just need to do so together.

?



Sustainable development

Emma Rogerson found much to love about the eco-friendly *How To Save A Rock*



One of my favourite wanky theatre quotes is 'constraints breed creativity'. Infer from that what you will about me, but Pigfoot in association with Squidink Theatre's *How to Save a Rock* definitely provide themselves with a unique set of constraints, resulting in some really creative solutions. As the festival's only self-proclaimed carbon-neutral show, everything in the show from the lights to set is generated by recycled energy and material.

The premise of a girl travelling across the world to rescue the last polar bear while attempting to keep her own carbon footprint as low as possible was so unusual and gorgeous – I was so invested in this story (I'm also a massive eco freak so this was right up my street). The opening was just fantastic – the bike generating light, a stage literally littered with rubbish which would later become both puppetry and prop, set against a dialogue about how the world was made and how we ended up here, stretching forward into a near, dystopian future of global warming. As an audience member, for the most part, I felt fully

engaged, whether I was participating in making noise or contributing an opinion on global warming or being made to be a sit in protester as a key plot point. The actors monologues cover a breadth of topics from mooncups to having children to tote bags – and all the actors deserve credit for providing interesting, stimulating starting points.

I was so behind this as a premise, and so wanted to love it all. And I did – up until a point. And it was a very specific point that my loyalty to the show started to falter: when it was revealed that the polar bear letter was a forgery by a friend who wanted to provoke protest in her to get her old personality back. In that moment, what was such a unique story and promising premise became something so conventional and flat. The relationship between the characters didn't seem developed enough to justify such a convenient plot twist – I didn't see Coco's struggle or her friend's concern. After that point, I just found the ending a bit too dull, complicated and long. Which was such a shame because I

genuinely loved the show up until then – there was so much warm humour (with jokes from problems with mooncups to year nine's overuse of Lynx Africa) and intelligent observations and compassion. Within the aesthetic and the tools used to tell this story, the zero carbon constraint led to some really quirky, unique moments, but the same constraints weren't put on the story itself. It just became a bit too conventional, especially towards the end. Going forward, I'd love to see some development on the story and the ending, so that it fits in its unusual premise and aesthetic. It's so close to being a completely new kind of theatre, the story just needs to catch up with the style.

?

Culture can be dangerous in the right hands

Callum Walker

This time last year I was frantically applying for every bursary possible to somehow pay for my upcoming Masters degree. I didn't get any. Almost every bursary was for people not like me. They were looking for LGBTQIA+ people, ethnic minorities, foreign students, pretty much everyone who wasn't a white cis man. And it's not that I've never gotten bursaries. My dad is a retired bricklayer, my mum's a teaching assistant. My university offered bursaries at an undergraduate level for people, like me, from working-class backgrounds, to help us finally get a chance to break out of that cycle of poverty and

try and make something with our lives. But all of those bursaries didn't cover me once I reached my MA.

Suddenly reaching a point in life and education where the safety net of those bursaries was dragged from underneath me was rough. It would have been easy to look at those targeted by those bursaries and ask, 'Why not me?', especially when only months before I was one of the lucky few who was deserving.

It was important to take a step back and ask: how did I even get onto a MA course? I have to apply, I have to interview, I have to hand in document after document with my name

printed at the top. And at each of those stages it was clear that I was white. Even when I'm not face to face, my name still carries whiteness and Britishness with it wherever it's printed. And I can guarantee that there have been times in my life where that name and my skin colour have placed me above other people.

My whiteness has gotten me a lot in life. I think it's fair that someone who isn't like me gets to enjoy the same privileges as me after years of not being able to. That might feel like me losing an opportunity, but that's not what's happening. Bringing someone up doesn't bring me down.

Liam Rees and Javairya Khan

Anyone who was at the Theatre, Nation and Community in a time of National Crisis discussion (read: Brexit discussion, read: all the systemic injustices in the UK discussion) will say that things got heated pretty quickly. With a panel that consisted of Alan Lane (Slung Low), Julia Thomas (National Theatre Wales), Tracy Brabin MP (Batley and Spen), and director Roy Alexander Weise, there was a general consensus that things need to change. Vague much? Unsurprisingly Sunday's events sparked many further discussions and this is but one of many.

Javairya: I found your question "Who here's not English?" really interesting because, obviously, as a Northern, British-Asian woman I've got a complicated relationship with Englishness. I

wouldn't describe myself as English, but British. But plenty of people would say I'm not either of them.

Liam: Yeah, I definitely phrased it that way because I noticed when most people were talking about identities and labels they'd talk about ethnicity or gender or class but no one was talking about nationality. I found it quite telling that Englishness was the default that no one had thought to question, especially at a supposedly 'national' festival. How've you found NSDF so far?

Javairya: Well, I'm not here as a student but I'm enjoying it. I'm currently the Assistant Producer at Slung Low but I honestly didn't know producing was a thing until a couple of years ago. I'd studied neuroscience and was completely lost

when it came to what I wanted to do next and got involved with Batley & Spen Youth Theatre Company completely by accident. I had no idea that the skills I had and things I enjoyed doing could be used in theatre and were essentially what producing is. My family still wouldn't be able to tell you what my job title is.

Liam: That's similar to me, I studied languages at uni in Edinburgh and from that and the Fringe I ended up moving to Belgium. It's really strange watching all these arguments as a Scotsman living abroad because, for a start my colleagues are either confused or just don't give a shit. And back in Scotland we already had the whole conversation around what kind of country we want to be back in the 2016 referendum which was amazingly civil. I disagreed with friends and family but there was none of this

division. Also, the way the National Theatre of Scotland operates is so radically different to the NT in London: NTS doesn't have a building, it makes shows for theatres but also for community centres in the Highlands and Islands.

Javairya: I see that sort of radical, different way of doing things at Slung Low. Like Alan said in the discussion, being practical and offering tangible solutions like making sure that the venue is available for hire if someone wants it, for a First Holy Communion or majorettes ceremony or that the van is available for use by the community. There's also what Tracy Brabin was saying – right now social mobility is all about talented kids moving away from their communities. You're only seen as having made it if you get out of where you're from but right now, my ideal is working up North (whatever that's defined as).

Nathan Dunn

Chris Thorpe said something in Sunday's discussion I'd been waiting two years for. Back at a discussion during NSDF '17, someone made the scientifically accurate claim (although arguably misguidedly contextualised in her present argument) that male bodies are better suited to tasks of strength than female bodies. The auditorium, loudly, booed. To roughly paraphrase Chris' remarks this Sunday, he said: if you are audibly making your disapproval of an opinion different to your own known, then you are part of the problem. In print I try to avoid the risk of sounding overly-certain of myself as once my words go to publication, I lose the luxury of revising my arguments or clarifying my points. However, I am comfortable in this instance to say I feel he is absolutely, unequivocally correct.

As I reflected upon in the first edition of Noises Off, NSDF is predominantly a middle-class affair, and if you disagree I'd love to hear from you. I don't say this as an insult. In my opinion it's observable with plentiful evidence supporting my claim. To be unapologetically suppositional for a moment, I believe this in the same way you believe in the damage of Brexit. You believe in that in the same way your peers believe in multi-culturalism as a positive sociological facet. You believe in that in the same way somebody else believes that their opportunities as a white person are being denied by the rise of BAME opportunities. Do you see?

Everyone has a reason for believing something.

Liam: That's fair, London is objectively awful. It's weird there because even though I am white and I am British, because of my Scottish accent I feel quite marked out as an outsider. In Belgium no one knows where I'm from – I'm neutral?

Javairya: I suppose if you wrote or made anything in England it'd be read as "a Scottish play"? Like anything I write/do is inherently seen as political – it would be seen as an Asian or Northern or working class story regardless of what it's actually about. I like what Roy said – all these problems are inherited and belong to all of us so we've all got to fix it, it's got to be allyship and not saviourism, and that means that there will be work that's not 'for' you, by people who are different and have those different experiences.

Liam: To be honest I think the fact that NTS and National Theatre Wales exists is proof that

Whilst I don't agree with the point the member of the audience was making, I certainly think they deserved to be listened to and although their subsequent interruptions were the obvious cause of the collapsing discourse, I think the vocalised response from the rest of the audience played a part in that. It was agitating and hostile, and I think it provoked them. Had they not been collectively shunned by most in the room simply for sharing an opinion, the following discussion might not have been as frustratingly fractured as it was. I believe that no one was deliberately behaving cynically in that room, but if you'd forgive my supposition once more, I think for a festival founded upon liberal values some should perhaps remind themselves of the definition of the word 'liberal'.

To be clear – I am not deliberately purporting to be on the outside looking in here. There will be faults and flaws in this article that I will fail to recognise. But I do have a background that informs this opinion and I think allows me to see things others may not, particularly at a festival predominantly populated by the white, liberal middle-classes. For the sake of clarification: I'm liberal, voted Remain and although I have working-class roots, I am in the more fortunate end of that bracket. The environment I grew up in is best described as being incredibly mixed. I have a close friend who is technically homeless and also one who lives round the corner from Olympic gold-medallist Dame Jessica Ennis-Hill. Half of my friends voted Labour, the other Conservatives and UKIP. Half voted Remain, half Leave. Half into further education, half into apprenticeships and work from sixteen. This overlapping and conveniently even split of demographics enables me to see both sides of

the NT has fundamentally failed – setting up an English National Theatre and a devolved parliament would be one of the best ways to sort this problem.

Javairya: That's another debate!

This is just a snippet of one conversation that ranged from 'fuck institutions, fuck gatekeeping, and fuck barriers' to serious muttering about putting Chris Thorpe forward as UN Secretary General. We hope some of you disagreed with what we've said so please do give us a shout and maybe we can see why we're all wrong. Hopefully that way we can find some common ground.

what is essentially the same coin. It's why I grow increasingly frustrated when I see liberal-minded individuals behaving in a dismissive and arrogant fashion, because it's totally counter-productive and actually works against their (or our) best interests.

Viewpoints like the one expressed on Sunday are obviously unfavourable here, and that suggests most wish no one would think like that. But did people honestly think that by tutting, moaning and rolling their eyes after that audience member courageously shared an unpopular opinion that this showy dismissal would make them change her mind? And if you did, is that not just an example of bully tactics and intimidating someone into silence or suppression due to your own need to virtue signal?

I think it's about time we stop telling ourselves we're right all the time. We can believe we are right, but if we tell ourselves this it will leak into our own dialogues, and we'll find ourselves in a situation ceaselessly revolving around us and our opponents telling each other how right we are – not listening to understand, but to reply. Listening is not synonymous with agreement, nor is it synonymous with platforming, so we've no need to be so fearful of potential association, regardless of how vitriolic we determine their comments to be. Let's be more like Roy Alexander Weise, who despite being directly under fire reacted with tolerance and a desire to reach an understanding. Let's be more understanding, and if we wholeheartedly believe we're right and one of the good guys, hopefully more convincing too.

?

Spaced out

Joseph Winer *on the venues of NSDF, past and present*

How often do we get to sit together as a community of theatre-goers and talk about the work that we see, the issues that we're facing and what we can do together to make some sort of progress?

But discussions, by nature of the term, should be a two-way conversation, and a big part of enabling this is the architecture of the space. Back when the festival was in Scarborough, the discussions took place in the Stephen Joseph Theatre, a purpose-built in-the-round performance space. In-the-round spaces started to become popular in the latter half of the twentieth century, with an aim to create more intimate, open performance spaces. Not only did it bring spectators closer to the performers, but it also allowed them to see other spectators across the space. The idea of the circular space somewhat removes hierarchy, compared to an end-on setup which puts a power emphasis on whoever is at the front.

What does the space of City Hall do to that feeling of openness that the discussions are supposed to encourage? Before we've even got into the room, we're blocked by a security gate.

For the first discussion, the room was set up like a conference space. There was a stage at the front. The panel were sat behind a table. Chris Thorpe facilitated the conversation, also from the front. If someone spoke from the other side, I couldn't

always see who I was listening to.

At one point during the discussion, a participant said they felt confronted by an answer. But perhaps the content of the answer was not what provoked a feeling of confrontation. Perhaps there's something about the structure of the space, the hierarchy that's created with an end-on setup, that means an audience can't help but feel confronted at times by the panel of seniors that are looking down at them.

And this makes me think more widely about the way we occupy spaces at the festival in general. Back in Scarborough, it felt like we were bringing a bit of a buzz to the quiet seaside. The bar stayed open super late. People lost themselves on the beach at midnight. It felt like stepping half a century back in time. There was something strangely exciting about bringing work that felt radical, political and edgy to a town that felt so outdated.

Here in Leicester, we've taken over the Curve. It felt bizarre on Saturday night as the two audiences temporarily occupied the foyer. A mix of Curve and NSDF spectators. The Curve's current programme includes an adaptation of a 1990s novel, a Sondheim musical, and a children's show. We've burst through the doors with shows about identity, sex work, saving the world from environmental disaster, with forms including clowning, interactive, and gig-theatre. The Noffice has taken over the mezzanine, a space which is always open for public access. And actually, despite its slightly alienating conference-esque setup, it feels like an act of protest in claiming an open space for our daily discussions. Many of us are angry at authority right now. We're frustrated by the ways theatre buildings programme their work. Maybe taking up these spaces is, itself, an act of change.

?

Buyer's remorse

Sam Ross *doesn't feel ready for the Bost-Uni Blues*

"Our aim is for every single one of our students to reach their full potential, whatever their background or circumstances. We will support you to feel confident in taking ownership of your future."

I am bricking it about leaving uni. I'm already bricking it enough about completing my many final term assessments (including my theatre dissertation performance). I feel so underprepared. I'm even more unprepared for my life post-uni. I assume I'll have to get a job of some kind to tide me over – whether that is stacking shelves or cleaning the sewers I honestly don't know (I hope not the latter).

"Inspiring people to learn and achieve, we help them make the most of life. Here you can do things you may have never thought possible."

Many recent pieces of clowning that I've seen have used the form very effectively to tackle difficult or overlooked subjects. Silent Faces' *A Clown Show About Rain* for example beautifully explored the nature of chronic mental illness using weather as a metaphor.

Ugly Bucket's *Bost-Uni Blues* achieves a similar effect but with a much wackier vibe. What

makes their performance particularly interesting is the use of audio testimonials from real-life graduates about their time during and post university. These underscore the narrative thread enacted by the three clowns. The clowning in return accentuates and physicalises the emotional truths behind the confessions.

"We want you to have the time of your life."

Three years of university come and go in a flash like a manic turbulent round of Mario Kart. We watch them scramble frantically as they awkwardly meet, party, study, stress-write and eventually make it to graduation. It's a heady hysterical mix of slapstick, techno-raves and hard relatable truths.

What happens after the best years of your life however?

"We believe that a university education should give you more than an academic qualification; it should give you the skills, experience and confidence to succeed in the career of your choice after your degree."

As a soon-to-be graduate, I was haunted by the shared experiences of the post-uni slump. Varied sketches illustrate the general feelings of

abandonment and disillusionment. Graduates stranded out at sea on a comically tiny raft. Job applications getting crumpled in the hands of the boss. September whacking someone repeatedly to the ground with an inflatable hammer.

"Nothing is more important to us than your wellbeing. We provide a network of support services to make sure you're happy, healthy and secure, so you can get on with doing what you do best."

The show achieves a satisfying balance between moments of utter absurdity and reflective moments of vulnerability. There's something refreshing about hearing that others are in the same boat. It's a part of the uni experience that should be discussed more openly – the show facilitates these conversations really well. And is a lot of fun in the process.

"Here's to a new start. Leaving home, making friends, and achieving more than you ever thought possible. It won't always be easy, but we'll always be here. Ready for the next chapter?"



The best three years

Lucy Thompson *talks to Grace Gallagher about the post-uni blues that sparked Bost-Uni Blues*

**BEST BEST BEST – BEST BEST
BEST THREE YEARS
BE BE BE BE BE BEST THREE YEARS**

It's what we fixate on: the uni experience from freshers' week trauma to dissertation hellscape. We're so caught up we rarely think about what's next.

Ugly Bucket's show relives the best and most tragic moments of uni through superbly-choreographed clowning, impeccable comic timing, sophisticated soundscapes and a thumping beat. But among its hilarity the show is painfully probing the post-uni blues that are coming for us all; heading home, losing independence, and losing your community.

Bost-Uni Blues is a way of talking about this. But does it provide solutions? Ugly Bucket's artistic director Grace Gallagher gives us some answers (or doesn't).

Does the show have a solution to the post-uni blues?

"I can't, in this show, slot in 'how you cure it'. We tried, and it was awful... The feedback we were

getting was, 'the show's great but we want actual hard advice. What do I do when I graduate?' So we made this track which was, things you can do to help with your mental health when you leave uni. And it was the most horrible, patronising thing we've ever done. It was us going (to a rapid beat) 'reading writing keeping fit – set an alarm every morning'. And it was awful! We did it for one show and I turned to them after and went, 'that's horrible, it doesn't feel right.'

So if there's no solution – what's the goal? How does it help?

"When it started, we were in the post-uni blues, making a show about post-uni blues. And so it was really cathartic, and quite selfish, in that it was our release, and it was for us. But the show is so different now is because, over time, we've grown – we're not in [the blues] any more. I like to think that a year later the show has got so much more hope. We don't want to scare people. There's a version of the show that is really patronising and I don't think it's helpful to people. I think we're – we're sparking the discussion. We're showing you that you're not alone."

Now you yourself are out of the blues, what happens to the show? Will you move on to a new project?

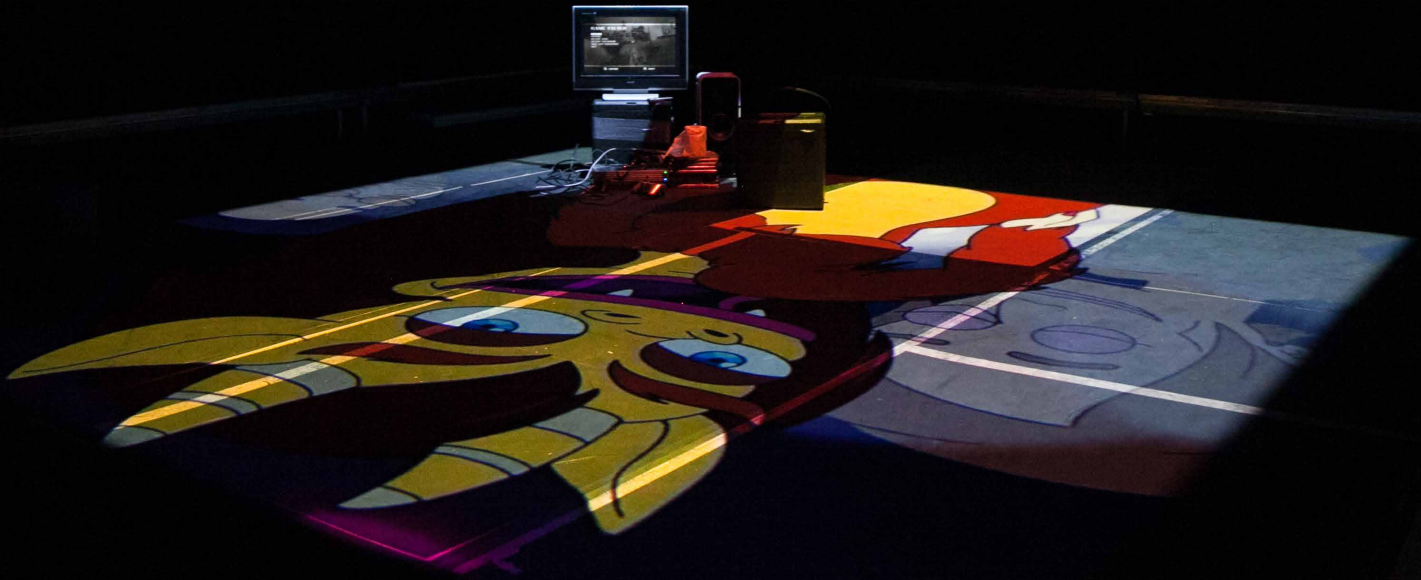
"Not right now. To be honest, I'm really gonna milk it. I'm gonna milk it for what it's worth. And to be fair it's a year old and it's just tipping. This thing that we're tapping away at, getting people to go 'okay, this is a serious topic we should be doing something about.' After a year of tapping away, it's starting to crack. And I honestly feel like we're starting to scratch the surface of something that could be really amazing. So yeah, we're not done. We're so not done with it."

So Ugly Bucket are self-admittedly planning to 'milk it' and keep drawing attention to post-uni depression. For them personally, the show has been cathartic and a way of working through their fears. So on the other side – when they (finally) reach it – will they get post-*Bost-Uni Blues* blues? Maybe – it's another scary cliff – but they'll certainly be better prepared. There's hope for all of us.



Unheard, unsaid, unseen

The beauty of Yen lies in its delicacy, says **Lucy Thompson**



A lot of what goes unsaid or unseen in *Yen* is what you want to be looking out for. It is a fraught play with interconnected questions about family, responsibility, and blame; these lurk under the surface and provoke the painful culminating act which we do not see.

The technical aspects of *Yen* are impressive: the projections, scene-changes, and sound effects (if you've seen the play you'll remember the sound for a particular, gruesome scene). Despite this, the show's emotional heart and the audience's attention remain with the characters themselves as they wrangle with cycles of abuse.

Yen touches difficult subjects, but it does it well. There's a passing reference to their mum's boyfriend giving Bobby a chinese burn, then a few scenes afterward we see Hench using the same punishment to shut Bobby up. The parallels aren't emphasised; Jen mothering the boys sets her up as a younger version of Maggie, but the true weight of this comes later – Jen and Hench's relationship rapidly goes sour when he turns his own shame into anger at her. It works better that this is not explicit; you see how unthinkingly

young people can slip into or recreate abusive situations.

In conveying this, body language consistently says more than lines, especially in the immediate impact of aggression on Bobby's behaviour – in the face of his brother's violence he's as much of a wounded animal as the dog they both neglect. Bobby's growth is disturbing; throughout the play you watch him learn how to treat people and, significantly, develop an understanding of blame and punishment.

Yen passes over the influence of violent video games and porn on the boys. There's definitely more to explore here, but it's almost better that this production focuses on accountability between the characters. Watching them negotiate this pressure is what makes this play so engaging; when Hench's protectiveness of Bobby oversteps into aggression, or when the affection that Maggie lavishes on Bobby leaves Hench (sometimes deliberately) isolated. Even so, the idea that the brothers are responsible speaks to a wider problem in which youths are lost in the system and allowed to be left behind; the absence

of workers from Bobby's unit, or teachers, social care, or local authorities – especially post-incident – speaks volumes.

Although this silence works, towards the end *Yen* needs to recognise its content more. The issue of sexual assault weaves between the boys' porn habits and graphic discussions of women; Maggie's abuse from Hench's father; and finally Bobby's assault on Jen. Other than the brothers talking, we don't see any of this violence. A lot is normalised in this play – racism and homophobia as well as sexual assault – but despite being at the crux of *Yen*, the assault itself is almost lost. This is the only time I felt that *Yen* could have tried harder; the scene between Jen and Hench didn't fully recognise the trauma of Bobby's attack.

This production manipulates what we see pass between the characters, as well as what we can't see. It does this beautifully. The brotherhood is palpable and watching them both grow up and go wrong tugs at the heart.



What it costs to be here

Grace Patrick gives us some hard facts about money at NSDF



Yesterday, I wrote a piece about who can access the arts in a professional capacity, and about how we can widen that access. Clearly, NSDF is an amazing stepping stone, and today I'd like to talk about how people have made their way to here, and the investments people have made.

I'll start with myself. I'm on the *Noises Off* team, and I got a bursary to cover the £60 half-price ticket. In order to secure the bursary, I submitted my entitlement summary from Student Finance Wales and some information about my financial background. I paid about £30 for transport to and from London, and £145 for my share of an Airbnb, which is shared with one other person.

Apart from the ticket bursary, I funded this myself. I think that the festival is worth it, but I can only speak for myself when I say then: for plenty of people it doesn't matter if it's good value or not because if the money isn't there to pay for it, value is an irrelevant question. Given that I'm here to write, there's also another aspect to consider. In theatre press and criticism, tickets would generally be complimentary. By not paying to be there, writers are to detach themselves a bit from the normal consumer/provider model which dominates how we watch theatre, especially commercial shows. If I were paying for my ticket, I would want to declare that alongside every review I write here, because I don't think it's something we can just ignore. I'm not immune to unconscious bias, and money is as much a part of that as any of the other biases that we consider more frequently.

Obviously I couldn't only include my own opinion, so I wandered around Curve and

persuaded people to talk to me about their standpoints on this, and I'd like to offer a few of these as points of comparison.

The first person I spoke with was Jack from the Festival company. He paid £121 for his festival ticket, and £92 for his share of a Travelodge room shared with two other people ("I booked it so I got dibs on the kingsize bed"). Jack told me that he believes that the investment is worth it if you make it worth it. If you actively go and engage with people and take yourself to workshops and talks, that gives you the value for money – the work won't do itself. He funded it between himself and his family.

Sophie, a member of the tech team, is staying at a hotel with whom NSDF has an agreement securing slightly cheaper rates, but is still paying a total of about £470 for accommodation. However, this does include breakfast so it's not all bad. Her festival ticket was covered by the bursary scheme, but she paid about £30 for transport to and from Manchester. She told me that she believed the festival was better value for teams in the past, when accommodation was consistently funded by the festival. By contrast, this year her only accommodation cost covered by the festival is occasional taxis back to her hotel after late shifts.

One individual who I spoke to, and who asked for their name to be kept private, paid £96 for accommodation, but this and their ticket cost were covered by a university grant fund. They personally paid just under £40 for travel, and expects to spend around £20 "just on, like, stuff". They told me that they only felt comfortable writing for Noff because the bursary scheme

exists to widen access, even though their costs were covered by the university. On an ethical level, applying for a position in which bursaries weren't available wouldn't have fostered the same values that this person hopes to stand by as an artist. This person didn't feel that the festival offers good value for money, suggesting that the combination of ticket, travel and accommodation costs are often too much for people to handle.

Finally, I spoke with Florence, one of the *Noff* editors. Out of everyone I've spoken to, Florence is the only person being paid to be here. Her freelance fee for the festival and work beforehand, which started in January, is £300. When this is divided by the number of hours she'll work overall, this is still less than the minimum wage. However, Florence was quick to stress that she's not doing this for the money. Her accommodation (about £120) and travel were covered by the festival. She believes that the festival is good value, but recognised her own discomfort in making this claim.

I was surprised by the fact that virtually everyone I spoke to was being helped in some way. The collaboration starts way before we got here, but instead of with other creators, it's with families, funds and institutions. For a lot of us, finding a path here is the first creative act, and without that work, much of what goes on here just wouldn't be possible.

Thank you to everyone who agreed to speak with me, even I couldn't directly include what you told me in the article.





£9000.00

Bost-Uni Blues jolts Marina Johnson back to the realities of millennial graduate life

I am looking at an empty stage with a banana with a face drawn on it, feeling stressed and emotional and totally unable to stop laughing, whilst thinking, “this is the closest thing to genius I have seen in a while”.

Twice over the course of *Bost-Uni Blues*, I was brought to the brink of tears, once though laughter and once though seeing my experiences played out on stage in front of me. Ugly Bucket are indeed serious about silliness, and the power of comedy to both teach and heal.

Bost-Uni Blues has started a conversation that I feel is important, and I want to continue having. So I wanted to add my sixpence to the discussion and pool of experiences.

Since the university fees were raised to £9,000 a year, the pressure on students has skyrocketed. The universities of our politicians and parents were places where you got drunk for three years and met your spouse. For the fee-paying generation, we are making a huge financial investment, putting ourselves in debt, before we even get started at life. All for the idea that a degree means you will be employed at the end, and you will contribute to society in a meaningful way.

This is the story we are sold.

University itself can be a real challenge. You work very hard and the expectations of your friends and family, your peers and wider society are all overwhelmingly high for graduates. In reality, in this age of austerity and bust – the children of fees are going to be the first children in a while to never achieve the economic security of their parents.

We need to deconstruct the shame, fear and failure around loneliness that the post-uni blues conjure. We are also facing the unpleasant social stigma of returning home. The figure of the adult in their parents' home is seen as the eternal failure. Yet this is the reality of most graduates. (Most but not all, and that really rubs salt in the wound.) There is a silence around the blues that stems from guilt. Graduates feel guilty about letting down their peers and wasting money.

The majority of people often are not prepared for the struggle that returning home can be. You might think going home is easy. When you have spent time away from your family, for significant chunks of time, you've changed, and so have your family. Re-adjusting to a family of changed individuals can be a real struggle, particularly

if parents still see their now adult children as the kids they sent away to uni. The freedom, independence and responsibility you had can be cut away and lost. It can be an emotional rollercoaster to return home, and realise that your house with your family is not really where you feel at home anymore.

Combine this with often having to return to utterly soul destroying jobs, jobs that you had before you got a degree. Where you can feel like the last three years and all that work literally had no effect on your life. BUT OF COURSE YOU CAN'T COMPLAIN. And the cycle of suffering in silence continues.

Ugly Bucket are seeing the harsh realities of graduate experience and letting them be channelled into a show where the frustration and anger becomes comedic, but is never at all dismissed.

?

Truth and testimony

Nathan Dunn is impressed by *Process Theatre's* wisdom and sensibility

My friend once told me that if you are writing about a certain demographic or topic (particularly one of conflict, tension and insecurity) that it is very important to recognise your role in the conversation, and even more important to recognise what you are bringing to it.

That's not to say you need an 'angle' or 'edge' in a tabloid journalism kind of way, but it begs the question of who can speak on behalf of whom, whether that's even appropriate and what the purpose of it would be. It certainly makes the "How Authentic Is Authentic?" discussion a tantalising prospect.

My friend is not an academic, nor a member of the intelligentsia, but it still stands as one of the best pieces of advice I've received as a writer who is particularly interested in the more problematic elements of our shared socio-political sphere. I'd put my friend in touch with *Process Theatre*, but that would be an utter waste of time because they've navigated their difficult discussion of choice with a masterful maturity.

Things We Do Not Know balances a boldness with a sentimentality that knows its place. It circumvents pretention in its modest approach to sensitive subject matter. Most of this is apparent in the intangible elements – favouring simple yet effective transitional techniques and possessing a collective energy that oozes with a settled and sensible attitude. Their movement sequences swell with purpose and precision, being as visually impressive as they are symbolically significant. There is a ubiquity to their unarrogant understanding, permeating the piece at every possible point. The importance of this can't be understated either – there is a temptation often when dealing with the gritty and harsh realities of worlds beyond our own to sensationalise or romanticise. Just as damaging is provocatively professing its pain in a lecture-like way, as if to expose torment in a patronising manner that dangerously flirts with self-aggrandisement and saviour complexes. Yet this piece is wise enough to know better, and is consequentially devoid of such haughtiness.

Whilst it does act as an expertly executed meditation on the extremity of the lives of female sex workers in Bristol, its format suffers from fatigue. In and of itself I found few flaws, as the juxtaposition of presentable performers using the harrowing words from a world beyond their own is a strong one, and they share their moments well. However, in order to achieve this, there seems to be a sacrifice of progression. The early stages of the piece are indistinguishable from the later stages, and ultimately the emotional investment dwindles as the piece becomes more predictable and less is asked of us.

With their sensibility and self-awareness, *Process Theatre* have set the bar appropriately high for dealing with sensitive issues that lie outside their scope. Their recognition of the things that they themselves do not know was admirably resolved by the involvement of *One25* and the testimonies of Bristol's sex workers, and I'm inspired by their appreciation of the truth and their place with it.



Uncomfortable truths

Grace Patrick explores the blistering realities of *Things We Do Not Know*

**Everything here is real.
Everything here is true.**

The words come directly from the lives that people woke up to this morning and that they will return to tomorrow.

It would be pretty easy to argue that this is some of the most tangible and deeply weighing responsibility that a theatre maker can work with: in this case, the words aren't just true, but deeply imbued with a pain and a loss of choice that most people cannot possibly understand.

An element of this production which left me at least a little uncomfortable was the decision to attempt, in places, the accents and inflections in the original testimonies. They didn't seem accurate enough to add to the retelling, and at times they felt closer to detracting from the words. The sections of this that I felt worked the best were actually the ones in which the cast weren't trying to 'be' the women who gave the testimonies. By obviously reading from a sheet or giving priority to the original recording, it felt closer to an act of bearing witness rather than a reenactment. The reason for this is that

I genuinely can't see how anybody could get that right, not just because it's a life experience so removed from that of most people, but because the depths of trauma and emotion are so significant that it feels better to just let the words speak for themselves.

There are three different perspectives in this piece, often straining against one another. There are the sex workers, their clients and the charity *One25*, all of whom have different angles, experiences and bodies of knowledge (to a certain extent). Personally, I appreciated the idea of including the rationale of the clients. It's easy to let them remain faceless, but it seems necessary to offer us at least some of the thinking that sex workers find themselves up against.

The moments of more physical storytelling were intriguing, especially the almost ritualistic series of movements which seems to represent some kind of torch-passing from one actor to the next. The more abstract approach to interacting with the testimonies seemed like a quiet way to express a lot of complex things, not least to remind the audience over and over again that these are actors telling other people's stories, not

actors playing other people. This is literally the suspension of disbelief. I found myself having to remind myself that it's real.

The show's final moments definitely threw me more than I would have expected. The decision to focus on the charity as the play reached its conclusion didn't sit quite right with me. Surely then would be the moment for to draw our minds back to the women at its heart, not to shift our eyes over to an external body. To clarify, that's not to say that *One25* is anything but imperative to the survival of dozens of people. Its work is clearly vital, but do they have a responsibility to step to one side?

In my opinion, *Things We Do Not Know* is good solely on the basis that it gets people talking and thinking about sex work, specifically street based. Perhaps the execution didn't always work for me, but here the value is in the conversation.



like a collage of materials in a space. There's not a clear arc

OPINION

Things We Do Not Know • ARE YOU STILL WATCHING

Thank you

Joseph Winer pulls apart the stories of *Things We Do Not Know*

and there's an evolution of movement: hand *slaps* to wrist, palm to mouth, fingers through hair

{ Statistics that tell stories }

An actor puts a chair on the right spot and another actor thanks them

Audiences as spectators
Witnesses
Activists
Script readers
Participants

Names on paper with black spray paint. There's a permanency to the names. It's not just voices or statistics.

movement: arms stretch, rise and fall and catch anndd reepeeaaatt + run and STOP.

use of reddit use of other people's voices come out of actor's mouths

AUTHENTICITY

This word seems to be in the air this week.



What am I worth? -> Again, the words of other people in the mouths of performers

seven camels a pint of milk a chocolate egg

what is the responsibility of the audience and how is this facilitated?

Responses like this end up getting a laugh or a near-laugh and is this OK or would these answers have been better collected at a later point in the show?

but tonight you belong to me

There's something almost *joyous* about this. Song is uplifting. It promises better futures.

hand washing and it's focussed and there's a voiceover which sort of distracts a little. but the hand washing, the care of the performers, the one on one time, a really gentle intimacy against the violent acts of the text

I wanted *more* of these moments our act in our hands now, my touch is my touch our lives are in our palms

miscellaneous...
the **strength** of the ensemble
the way the piece moves
an opening gallery
offerings of cups of tea
a poem you can read

?

Watching carefully

The one where **Lucy Thompson** reviews *ARE YOU STILL WATCHING*

TV culture: the way we watch, and why we watch: who with, when, and what. ARE YOU STILL WATCHING.

In its own (borrowed) words, this chaotic play is a big ball of wibbly-wobbly stuff. *ARE YOU STILL WATCHING* is haphazard – references are thrown all over the place – and certainly needs tighter structuring. But the sketches are mostly energetic, the props outlandish, and the cast invested in their subject.

In the spirit of this being about TV, I've put some highlights and thoughts in a format recognisable to anyone who's ever had access to a television.

- The One Where to 'get' this play, you need to have watched a lot of TV.
- The One With a really good Jeremy Clarkson impression.
- The One Where Alyssa Edwards tries to engage the (not very responsive) audience.

- The One With Jon Snow rock-star dancing and, like a car crash, you can't look away.
- The One Where audience interaction doesn't work that well, because the play is about TV, so it's not medium-accurate to be interacting with viewers.
- The One With a lot of turnips. And turnips given to the audience. And turnips taken back again and fed to a 'horse'. Not sure why – it felt like an overextended bit without any direct relevance to TV.
- The One With jarring jumps between scenes/characters which are supposed to mimic channel-hopping, but it doesn't work because we (the audience) can't actually choose what we're seeing.
- The One Where the cast literally applied onions to their eyes. A bizarre segway, which didn't feel very well tied-in to the main idea, but I applaud them.
- The One With a nostalgic description of an early-2000s living room, which captured the family experience of watching TV with real warmth.

- The One Where the tension between topic (watching television) and viewer (person watching theatre) doesn't really work because it can't make people self-conscious of their own TV habits or attitudes toward TV.

The Arden School have set themselves a difficult challenge; theatre is inherently not the best art form for exploring television. It could have been slicker, and it could definitely have been funnier. But –

- The One Where NSDF is the ideal place to get this kind of feedback and make changes.

?

Ch-ch-changes

Nathan Dunn reflects on post-uni friends

Bost-Uni Plues was born almost a year to the day it burst onto the scene here at NSDF '19. Armed with a handful of props, three black boxes and plenty of make-up, the cast returned to the stage of Liverpool John Moore's University Drama's primary venue for the first time since graduating. I'm fortunate enough to know Ugly Bucket.

The company graduated my course the year before I did, which naturally made this show (particularly on its debut performance) extra special. But extra is the imperative word here – even beyond my amusement at knowing the people behind the voices and the make-up, beyond the close proximity of their experience to my own, I knew this show had something special. This is the fifth time I've seen this show, and currently it's the only stage show I've seen that I firmly believe I will never get bored of.

It's easy to applaud your friends. Some would argue it's etiquette, but when faced with the choice between patronising compassion and constructive criticism, I've found it favourable to side with the latter. Fortunately, no such decision had to be made – because outside my affiliation with the people behind Bost-Uni Plues I can honestly and proudly sing its praises.

Objectively, the piece is a well-oiled machine. Slick, swift and packing a punch, the task of guiding us seamlessly from sixth form results day to university graduation and beyond is a tricky yet handled expertly. A timeline with so many endings is navigated as if there were none. Physically impressive and structurally robust, the arc of the piece is consequentially triumphant. This journey is pattered with some stellar comedic sequences that are effervescently self-aware and refined. They get away with trying to be funny because their role as clowns demands

that, and their willingness to make themselves vulnerable through jerking routines wins us over from the get-go.

Like all work, it has its flaws – some of the humour dies too early than perhaps the performers would like. Perfect? No – but, (whilst still aware of my situational bias from witnessing its development) it's the closest to maximising its potential as a show could ever wish to be. I've determinedly attempted to scrape my barrel of critical cynicism to pick out more flaws, but my drawing of blanks suggests more about the quality of the performance than my inability to critique (I hope).

My final commendation must fall to the talented cast and crew. Grace Gallagher, Angelina Cliff and Canice Ward spun magic from the dust of a desolate post-grad existence with their electric and vibrant devising work, underscored with beautiful intensity by Duncan Gallagher's techy tracks. A nod must also be made to Carl Fowler, who originally co-created the show and performed in the first shows. All of these individuals gave their all in the articulation of the awkward and uneasy reality of change, yet most importantly they made passionate attempts to reach out and reassure people about the real world revelations they became accustomed to. Thank you for teaching us to smile when we don't feel like it, and then making sure we do.

?

Knock knock.

Who's there?

You. In the Noffice. Coming to talk to us about your next great article.

Meme of the day

teh official noff meme of the day vol.2 - #2



NOISES OFF is
For everyone
For you
For writing
For drawing
For music
For ideas
For fanfic
For the process
For thinking things through

For answers
For
questions
For biting
For celebrating
For critiquing
For talking [to one another]
For NSDF
For more than that
For students

To show the industry how much we're
capable of
To show 'the industry' that we're
coming for their jobs
(and we're going to do them better)

#3

NOISES OFF

16 • 04 • 2019

Editors

Naomi Obeng
Florence Bell

Photography

Beatrice Debney
Brett Chapman

Design

Robin Wilde

Contributors

Nathan Dunn
Marina Johnson
Javairya Khan
Grace Patrick
Liam Rees
Emma Rogerson
Sam Ross
Lucy Thompson
Joseph Winer
Callum Walker

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
noff@nsdf.org.uk

