

NSDF // Oldies and goldies • Things you did not know • Ask yourself

The economic accessibility of the festival

Knock knock, who's here?

#1

# NOISES OFF

14 • 04 • 2019

Rotterdam + A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing

// Not 'n' am dram

Interviews // Meet a selector • Tech vs. critic

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## Editorial #1

There's a tingly feeling of excitement in the run-up to NSDF. What could be better than a week of exciting young voices in theatre criticism and exciting young voices in theatre? It's like Christmas every day. Excitement, yes – but it's equally normal to get nervous before NSDF, it's part of the routine of the festival. Here's the thing about nervousness: the only thing in your life you ever need to deal with is the next hour. Live by the hour if you need to. There's no shame in it. Feel free to live this week in baby steps.

At the end of last year's festival Florence wrote a note reminding herself of that Christmas feeling.

*nsdf is over for another year; as always it was tiring but so so invigorating. i feel excited about theatre again for the first time in a while. i got so much from all of the performances i saw and all of the conversations i had. thank you everybody. it has left me feeling whole again. i always feel so nourished by everyone and everything at the festival; it supports*

*+ challenges me and helps me grow in a way uni doesn't.*

*and genuinely, i think this year's nsdf was the most egalitarian one i've known/heard about. it was a week that was all about discussion and engagement. i feel so so proud of the whole noff team; thank you for everything. we made a great thing.*

There are so many ways in which a person can come to NSDF, and through the mill of time and the timelessness of the theatre, come out changed. That's the wonder of it – passivity is an impossibility. Uniformity a futility. There's this sense of malleability: we all have a part in what can happen and a voice in what's to come. The smallest whisper can resound. Stepping into the festival space always reminds us of how much the world is made by people. And how people are just you and me. Us. All of us. However nervous or excited we arrive.

We've been planning this first issue of *Noises Off* since January, and although we're nervous for you to read it, we're very proud of it. It's packed full of interesting thoughts from an amazing group of writers on everything from interviews

with shows and selectors, audience interaction, the relationship between technicians and critics, the financial cost of getting to the festival and thoughts on what NSDF is for.

Everyone at the festival should be proud of what they've done. Whether we've come of our volition, in the Company, with a show, or on Management or Tech Teams, we've done well to get here. We're spending our Easter engaging with art, engaging with debate and being part of something. In the milieu of student theatre, it's easy to forget we're all over-achievers. We'd like to thank Mark Shenton for his fundraising work that's made *Noff* possible this year. We also owe our thanks to Michael Grandage Futures, Sonia Friedman, Michael Codron, Cameron Mackintosh and Dame Rosemary Squire for their generous support.

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



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## Oldies and goldies

Lucy Thompson tries to settle the debate about whether NSDF is looking for old plays or new writing, once and for all



**This festival, of the 12 plays being staged at NSDF, seven are devised or original writing and five are published plays (or adaptations of published works, like *Tanya*). Last year this ratio was 10 to six, and in 2017, of NSDF's 14 shows, 11 were new content and three were performances of published plays.**

The online archives only go back to 2013 (when four pieces of new writing were selected, and seven existing works) but NSDF has been running since 1956. It would be interesting to know what kind of performances have been staged in the last sixty years. Without more information I can't ask the question I really want to: is this move toward new writing a trend? And is it a trend that's worth reading into?

The play selection each year raises (and suggests answers to) questions about what NSDF is supposed to look like – and by extension, what NSDF wants from itself. The mission statement is straightforward: “to empower and inspire young talent and ambition, to teach skills, to help launch careers and build the audience of tomorrow”. Why are we here? Individually, we're here to learn, to network, to improve, and to challenge ourselves in our theatre practice. Collectively, we prove that student theatre should not be a stigma in the arts – we're not just the audience but the professionals of tomorrow (bold claim, but we ought to back ourselves). The play selection reflects NSDF's understanding of what constitutes young talent.

If I were to suggest a narrative for the changing choices, it would be this: when NSDF was first established way back when, the focus was on bringing new blood and new life into the British theatre scene. But ‘new’ is relative. What challenges, or what counts as ambitious theatre in the 1950s, is well-worn ground for us (Albee's behemoth *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Year	New Writing	Published Works	Total
2013	4	7	11
2014	5	6	11
2015	5	7	12
2016	7	4	11
2017	11	3	14
2018	10	6	16
2019	7	5	12

is now accepted as a solid classic but drew ire and scandal in 1962). And so, maintaining this ethos, NSDF changes with the times. At NSDF '70 anti-establishment feelings took hold, and students demanded that the following year there should be no prizes, and exclusively original plays. Although this idea was short-lived, it shows NSDF has a long history of keeping up with and pushing for new ideas. As far back as I can tell, this principle has remained. In 2001 then-Festival Director Nick Stimson noted, “We are seeing fewer and fewer classics...Students want to invent their own productions and that can be dangerous, but I want dangerous things to happen.”

Now, in 2019, it's interesting to see the mixture of new or devised and published works, especially as one show this year (*BARRY: a work in progress*) is, would you believe, a work-in-progress rather than a fully-conceived production. The image of NSDF is evolving, but in doing so it remains faithful to one idea: we are trying to make exciting theatre.

Curiously, despite NSDF's legacy of “dangerous” theatre (thank you, Nick Stimson) many critics and journalists seem compelled to legitimise the

student drama festival by referring to famous or respected alumni. Harold Pinter broke out from NSDF, they say. Ruth Wilson, Stephen Fry, and Nick Clegg (although that's a bit of a rogue one) did NSDF. Is this to prove that NSDF works, if it successfully springboards talent into mainstream theatre? I'm not saying this is bad, if it's true. I'm not saying young theatre is only valid if it's fringe, or that it's less worthwhile to work on mainstream or canonical plays. What I am asking is: what does NSDF want?

It's an answer that changes year on year, but doesn't change at all. This year, it seems NSDF wants to see how we take plays (existing ones, adaptations, ones still in progress) and make them our own. In 2017, NSDF seemed to want to start a dialogue around original writing. Consistently, NSDF wants to maintain its heritage – the ethos of the new, of challenging ideas, of a creative community.

NSDF is supposed to look like what we want it to. What we think it's important to be experimenting with, discussing, and celebrating.





# Ask yourself, empower yourself

Emma Rogerson meets the audience at NSDF...and the audience meets itself

**Welcome to the National Student Drama Festival! Talk to me about who you are. Where have you come from and who are you with? Why are you here and what are you hoping to see? What do you expect?**

[Insert Answer Here]

Setting the bar nice and low then. Haha. Nah, I'm only joking, it's gonna be fantastic. So, with that in mind, what kind of theatre 'generally' do you enjoy? What do you go to regularly?

[Insert Answer Here]

And what about the relationship you have with the actors, like when they're performing? What do they give you, and what do you give them in return?

[Insert Answer Here]

Are there any expectations, as audience members, that you find unreasonable or unjustified? What are they – and how do you feel about them? Why?

[Insert Answer Here]

What do you do before a show to prepare? Do you have any pre-show rituals or traditions? How about post-show ones? Tick as many as you like.

- |                                    |                                              |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Show  | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't Be Ridiculous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mid-Show  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Post-Show |                                              |

Will Jackson of Quick Duck Theatre Company will be bringing *Magic Hour: The Murder Mystery Disco!* to NSDF. He describes the audiences as the "heroes of the show. They're the protagonist, it's up to them to look for clues, grill the suspects and solve the case. The audience is the beating heart of it all." How does being such a vital and integral part of the show make you feel?

[Insert Answer Here]

As an "integral part" of the show and the festival in general, I'd hate for this to be so one-sided. Anything you want to ask them?

[Insert Question Here]

Nice. They'll get back to you. Jackson also says: "I love interactive theatre because when it's done well it prioritises the audience's experience above everything else, which is how it should be. After

all, they're the ones paying to see the show." How much of theatre, do you think, should be for your own enjoyment? What are the social duties of theatre beyond audience experience, if any? How highly should the enjoyment of the actor be prioritised, if at all?

[Insert Answer Here]

How does your financial situation affect the theatre you engage with?

[Insert Answer Here]

You don't have to lie.

- |                                               |                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not              | <input type="checkbox"/> Mind your own business |
| <input type="checkbox"/> It's not that simple | <input type="checkbox"/> Okay. Actually:        |
- Okay. I hear you.

*Magic Hour* is an interactive show – to what extent will you engage with and interact with actors? Why?

**[Insert Answer Here - if you want to. You don't have to. Up to you. Write a novel in response if you like. Or tweet us @noffmag :) Fax me? Your call]**

On the initial listings, *Things We Do Not Know*, from Process Theatre, is the only show listed that provided trigger warnings. They provided them for sexual assault, violence and trauma. As an audience member, how does that alter your expectations about what you're about to watch?

[Insert Answer Here]

Things We Do Not Know have also said they will provide an usher to enable you to leave the performance if you need to. How does this make you feel?

- |                                      |                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good        | <input type="checkbox"/> Nothing                                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bad         | <input type="checkbox"/> Lots of things but currently unable to articulate them |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent |                                                                                 |

In a broader sense, what value do you think trigger warnings have, if any?

[Insert Answer Here]

*Are You Still Watching*, performed by The Arden School, is a show that explores the act of spectating, particularly when watching TV. How do the other forms of media that you engage

with influence the way that you look at theatre?

[Insert Answer Here]

*Standing Too Close On Our Own In The Dark* from Just Club Theatre, is a self-described "half-gig, half-play, half-stand up". How does this mix of genres affect your role as an audience member?

**[Insert Answer / Response / Thoughts / Feelings / A Dance of Words Here]**

*Noises Off* has an open door policy: anyone can write for it, anyone can contribute / offer an opinion or creative / critical piece. What would you like to contribute to that, if anything?

[Yes]

Sorry lol. Kidding.

[Insert Answer Here]

NSDF brings together creatives from across the country. To what extent is the act of watching and forming an opinion a creative act?

**[Now it's time to do something cool]**

Every single person who participates in theatre, by making or watching, brings something different, unique, interesting and valid. What will you bring this year?

**[Now. Like, right now. Let's go. Time to start.]**

What will you do?

[...]

↻

## Meet a selector

*What's a selector? Who's a selector? How's a selection? Liam Rees gets some answers from Helen Goalen of RashDash*

**RashDash have been hailed as “the punk princesses of late-night theatre” (The Guardian) and recently joined the NSDF team of selectors. Fanboy, Liam Rees, talked to one third of the company, Helen Goalen, about the selection process, ripping up the classics, and what to look forward to at the festival.**

**So I'm total newbie to NSDF, what does a selector do?**

We go to shows up and down the country, give feedback to the show teams, and write up a report. I saw 5 shows in 1 day in Hull and saw a real range of devised work, new writing, and extant plays which is great to see such breadth, but you have to be careful to reset after each one and make sure you're not becoming weary. Everyone's worked really hard so they all deserve a fair chance. Then there's this big meeting where all the selectors have a really thorough conversation, championing different shows and coming up with the NSDF programme.

**And what are you looking for?**

Exceptional quality. To be surprised and delighted. For the programme we want to show the range and breadth of exceptional work being produced across the country: devised pieces, things with interesting political statements, great productions of extant plays. This is my first year as a selector but it [the programme] changes each year in response to the work we've seen – there's no preconceived notion of what an 'NSDF play' is.

**Chatting to friends who've been to NSDF, the question came up if it's more**

**important for a piece to be interesting and conversation-starting or 'good'?**

These are really hard questions! I thought we were just going to chat about RashDash! Ideally they're both but there is that question: How do we judge quality? It's not something that can be pinned down. You get some devised shows that are quite rough around the edges and that do take a long time to really hone but sometimes that's the intended aesthetic. Also if NSDF only showed well-made productions of extant plays then it wouldn't be showing the breadth of work that students are making.

**Let's chat about RashDash then! How did you get started? NSDF really helped get things started for you, no?**

Absolutely! So Abbi [Greenland] and I were friends on the same course at uni in Hull and we both had a similar work ethic – we always wanted to make our uni work better than it needed to be – and we saw a lot of work together. Our first show 'Strict Machine' was selected for NSDF and that was huge for giving us the confidence to start a company.

**Looking at Tanya, which is an adaptation of Eugene Onegin by Pushkin, I was wondering how RashDash went about doing Three Sisters after doing so much devised work?**

Well, *Three Sisters* really felt like a devised piece. We started off with the intention of being totally irreverent to the text – early on we thought we'd just make a punk show about me, Abbi and Becky [Wilkie], call it *Three Sisters* and let people

draw their own significance at some point. We'd had a lot of conversations with artistic directors who said if we wanted to get on bigger stages we'd have to do the classics so this was a big punk gesture, 2 fingers to success being getting onstage and repeating the words of a dead white man. But after talking to Sarah Frankcom (Artistic Director of Manchester Royal Exchange), who really loves the play and knows its intricacies we decided it could be stronger to know what what we were taking on and dismantling. But we still decided not to bring ourselves to the text but brought the text to us and only used the bits that shouted to our life experiences.

**Finally, what are you excited for at NSDF?**

I've read *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* but didn't manage to see it at the Young Vic so I'm really excited to see that. I'm excited to see the work and meet theatremakers, but the most useful thing at NSDF is the conversations you have in between shows and the things you can't plan for. Also I'm going to be MCing a cabaret with Marc Graham so we're going to have an open call-out where you can do anything so that'll be a lot of fun!

**Dammit, now I need to come up with a cabaret act!**

?

Rash Dash's 'Three Sisters'



# Nott'n'am dram

Sam Ross traces *Rotterdam* and *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* back to their student-run source

**Approaching the Nottingham New Theatre (NNT), what may first strike you is how the building's structure stands independently from the rest of the buildings on campus. "The building we're so proud to call home wasn't created until the 1960s," the current president of NNT, Miguel Barrulas, explains to me, "Back then, it used to be part of the Archaeology and Classics building, but became its own free-standing building in 2012." This structural independence is also reflected in its status as the only student-run – and student-owned – theatre in England.**

Walk inside the NNT in the run-up to a production, and you feel a buzz of activity about the place. The theatre boasts an 86-seat auditorium for its main shows, as well as two rehearsal rooms that double up as alternative performance venues. Alongside these, the building also includes extensive technical and prop storage facilities, and an on-site workshop for set construction. These capabilities allow the theatre to stage more than 30 different shows over the course of a year.

"The production teams are given complete creative freedom," notes Barrulas, "which we believe fosters an environment that promotes risk-taking, boundary pushing and excellence. Add to this the specialist support of a 17 strong committee which assist with everything from set building, technical design, publicity, and welfare, to ensure that the production team's vision is realised as successfully as possible and you've got the recipe for success."

"I think we are so lucky to have the resources that we have!" remarks Andrew Houghton, the director of the NSDF-bound production of Jon Brittain's *Rotterdam*, "I have so many friends at other universities which do not have a building or even a designated space which exists solely for theatre and performances."

Houghton became enthralled by Brittain's comedy celebrating transsexuality and queer voices almost immediately. "I started reading the script and after the first scene I registered my interest for the performance rights online before even continuing with the rest. I only ever wanted to direct a piece I was entirely passionate about, and as a gay man I knew I wanted to stage something with strong LGBT+ representation. To stumble across a play like this which is witty whilst heartfelt, and gives a voice to important struggles without ever feeling like a lecture, it felt like an opportunity too good to pass up – and I made the decision to propose the play mere days before the deadline!"

For Houghton, the NNT committee were "a phenomenal aid" in helping him to stage *Rotterdam*: "The committee work so hard to support each production team and the whole reason I felt comfortable enough to direct my first large-scale production was because I knew that there would always be somebody around who knew the answers I didn't, or could at least point me in the right direction."

"I feel like we're uniquely autonomous as a collective of people," reflects director Amy Crighton, "and having this responsibility for a society as well as an entire building gives a sense of camaraderie, so everyone has a big love and loyalty for the society and all the people in it. It's like a mini-community."

With regards to her production of *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* – a staging of Eimear McBride's haunting debut novel about a young woman's upbringing in rural Ireland – the support of the theatre's committee was equally vital and valuable. "I have no idea what other theatre would let me tip a tonne of rubber crumb over their floor so that was a very supportive move by the NNT!"

Because there's no theatre degree at the University of Nottingham, the NNT provides invaluable experience for students interested in

working in the industry. "It's helped me work out what exactly I want to do as a career and has given me a platform to experiment and explore this," comments Crighton.

"Perhaps the most unforeseen [thing] is that it opened my eyes to careers in theatre beyond acting," explains Barrulas, "I may very well waste my Natural Science Masters by setting out to pursue a theatre management career which is mad and would not have happened prior to the NNT."

At the heart of it all, the NNT has left a significant impact on those who are involved: "Being a part of NNT was such a core element of my university experience," Houghton affirms, "It provided me with my closest friends and a network of people who came from different backgrounds and different levels of theatrical experience. From each other we are able to learn so much."

In Crighton's words, "It has given me a supportive network, arguably a family, of people who I hope I will keep as close friends for the rest of my life and will be collaborators in future work. The NNT has honestly been invaluable and I can't express that enough."



# Things you did not know

Grace Patrick talks to the team behind *Things We Do Not Know* about working with charity One25

**Since its conception on the Bristol student theatre scene in 2016, *Things We Do Not Know*, a piece of verbatim theatre exploring the lives of street based sex workers in Bristol, has already existed in a variety of iterations, including a run at the Bear Pit, an open area in which the audience could come and go.**

A total of ten cast members have been involved during its short life, and during a very chaotic Facebook messenger voice call in which I could hear director Davina Chao and producer Cassandre Pouget of Process Theatre but they could not hear me, it became very clear that every one of them had left their mark on the piece, reinforcing its collaborative nature. I'm told that the play used to involve re-enactments of sexual acts, but moved away from this under the direction of Kate Wyver later in its life. This specific change was made due to a desire to focus more on the sex workers' lives and less on their work, which to me suggests a definite commitment to framing the subject matter without resorting to shock factor.

It's definitely important to recognise that the cast and creative team of *Things We Do Not Know* have never asked to be seen as fountains of knowledge. They're not inviting us into their space so that we can be enlightened or somehow reborn. Of course, it's inevitable that every audience member will bring their own knowledge and experiences into the space. For example, I can't disregard the fact that one of my flatmates is a sex worker, and that my relationship with him plays into my wider understanding of the industry. This isn't something I can leave at the door, it's simply another lens through which I'll experience the piece. We all carry our own lives into every show we see, presenting a particular challenge for such a sensitive topic.

Happily, we're all coming in to learn. They've been given access to certain knowledge and stories as a result of their collaboration with One25, a charity which aims to support street based sex workers with dangers relating to their work and with problems in their wider lives, and that knowledge isn't something that should be kept secret. The sense I got was that it doesn't

necessarily matter why people enter a space or choose to watch a show, once they're there, that's an opportunity to educate or to bring to light different angles that they may not have considered.

Additionally, there are things you can't understand just by reading them, and there are experiences that are all but impossible to recount through words, which is clearly a challenge for a piece of verbatim theatre. The team mentioned to me that they plan to use moments of more

Going into my conversation with the team, I had concerns about the use of testimonies with a charity acting as a middle man, but it's pretty clear that the team has gone to some significant lengths to ensure that their work is produced ethically: not all of the testimonies are now entirely traceable, but all the providers originally gave consent for their words to be used in the creation of educational material and other work.

While it's obviously not something I would hold against the production at this stage, I am

a little suspicious of how a lack of contact can really be replaced through research. Although this show is built around the words of some of Bristol's street based sex workers, that's as far as their insight goes. The creative team have met frequently with their contacts at One25, and made sure to build their feedback into the play itself, but contact with the sex workers themselves has not taken place. It's definitely easy to see why: anonymity is of vital importance, and involvement with a project like this could easily make that hard to maintain.

A question my mind has returned to a few times over the last day or so is: whose story is whose to tell? In my efforts to compile my preliminary thoughts on *Things We Do Not Know*, I've been finding it ever harder to get past this hurdle. The short response is that I don't know if this is Process Theatre's story to tell. But then again, would I prefer for it not to be told at all? Probably not. It's of such obvious importance; in personal experience, I've never come across any other shows taking this particular angle on this particular issue. All too often shows about sex work seem to be exercises in shock and horror, so if nothing else it's refreshing that

Process is placing such emphasis on the people behind the headlines and storylines.

I'm extremely aware that I've offered you more questions than answers here, but I think that's okay. I'm happy to wait, with my mind open, and to share in what they've built.

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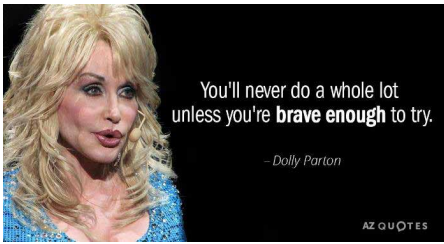


experiential performance – inviting the audience to physically share in certain small sections of the play – and I'm intrigued to see how this works in practice.

There are interesting little aspects of this piece to watch out for: for example, the all female front line team at One25 inspired the decision to have an all female cast. All of the testimonies used in this production were given on the clear understanding that they could be used and made public, on the condition of anonymity.

## All taking and no giving?

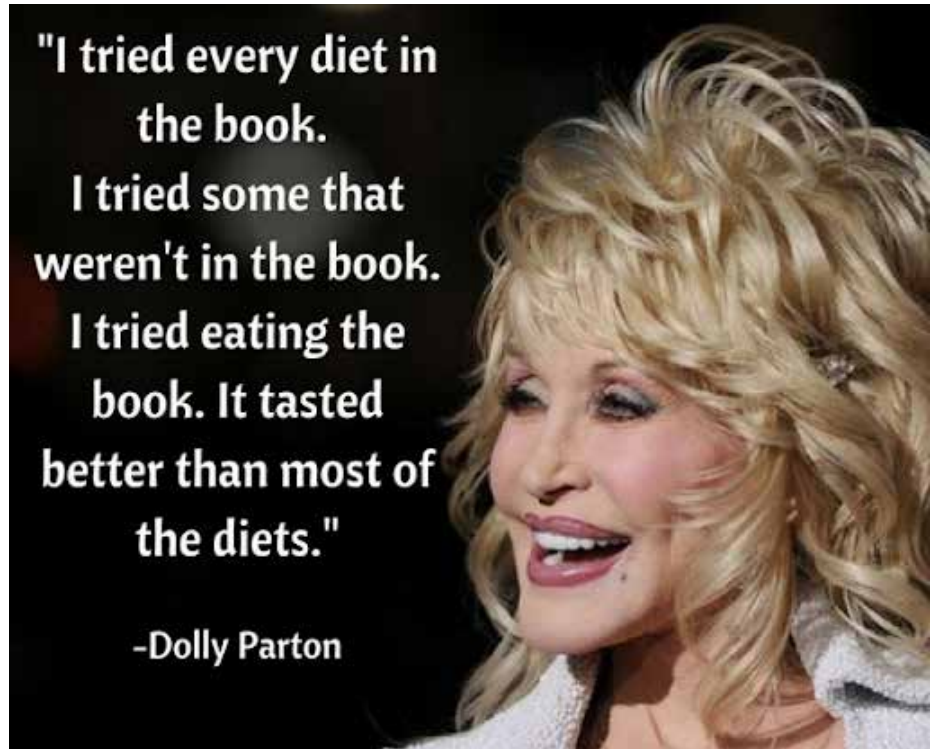
Joseph Winer gives some advice on looking after yourself at NSDF (with a little help from Dolly\*)



I'm super excited to be back at NSDF! I was here in 2016 and 2017 as a general punter – seeing stuff, doing workshops, writing a bit for *Noises Off*.

NSDF is one of the best weeks of the year for me, but it can become a little easy sometimes to be swept up in all the drama. We need to remember to look after ourselves and each other. This industry feels broken sometimes. The world (/country) right now is one big divide. With a little help from Dolly Parton, here's some tips for surviving the week...

Jump into things! Join in on conversations. Speak up at discussions. Write for *Noff*. Chat with the facilitators/artists/makers/workshop leaders. Chat with other participants/students. Maybe put yourself a little bit out of your comfort zone (I did this in my first year and it was scary but well worth it). Remember that your opinions are valid. Your voice is important. Let it be heard! ((and perform at the open mic night))



EATTTTTT. Eat some more. Eat some fruit. Have breakfast (although maybe not a full English before your foam movement workshop...made that mistake a few too many times). Carry around some snack bars for a quick fuel top up whilst you're running from one show to the next.



EAT THE BOOK. Do some reading. Have some quiet time. Find some grass / a bench / a park. Come read in the Noffice. Read anything. Read a book. Read a magazine. Read *Noff* (...seriously, PLEASE read *Noff*)

Spread the love! Spread the support!

You're hopefully gonna see stuff you love. You're probably gonna see stuff you're not so keen on. But I think there's a way to review/reflect/be critical without being cruel.



Check in with each other. If someone's on their own, say hi. It would've meant the world to me when I came alone in 2016.



It's a tough week with long days and often a lot of mixed emotions.

Let's build a community.

**Have an incredible week!  
Remember why you're here.  
What's it all about...really?**

**\*Memes I found on the internet. Not necessarily actual Dolly Parton quotes.**

?

## Tech vs. critic

Joseph Winer asks Roma Radford (Tech Team) whether stage managers get the recognition they deserve



*I'm sitting in the audience of a dress rehearsal for a show at uni. I hardly know anything about the show. I notice one of the students is standing at the end of the traverse. The show starts and she hasn't done anything yet. I wonder when she's going to enter the playing space and who she might be playing. It's not until I get halfway through the show when I realise, she's not in the cast, she's the stage manager.*

*She's rather brilliant (both as a person, and as an SM) and we've since worked together pretty much non-stop since November last year. I write this as we come to the end of our third show together. She also happens to be letting me stay in her spare bedroom during NSDF. She's on the Tech Team this year, and I'm writing for Noises Off. I think this is the perfect opportunity to get a critic and an SM together for a little conversation. And it goes something like this...*

**JW:** How are you feeling about going up to NSDF this year?

**RR:** Very excited! Looks like a really great opportunity.

**JW:** I often find that critics sometimes ignore the role of technicians. I think we're getting a little better at it? But stage managers are basically always ignored. Does this bother you?

**RR:** I think the SM is a slightly less creative role? Lighting and sound technicians have a more artistic, creative perspective. Stage management is more about the logistics. When people are critiquing or watching theatre, they're looking for what's creative rather than what's actually making the machine work. Sometimes my ideas about creative stuff are taken into consideration. I prefer the logistical side because I don't feel I'm a very creative person.

*To what extent is the SM a creative role? I think Roma is more creative than she takes credit for. A decision/idea can be both logistical and creative; the two often work hand in hand in a rehearsal room.*

**JW:** But there must be something that urges you to work in a creative environment still?

**RR:** I enjoy working with creatives and being part of the process.

**JW:** Is it frustrating that stage management teams don't get the same sort of applause as the actors?

**RR:** I think audiences appreciate what's in front of them. When I started going to the theatre, I didn't think about what was happening behind the scenes or the process...It would be a bit weird if SMs came out and bowed.

*We talked about this. I think SMs could definitely come out and bow! They usually work just as hard as everyone else has. They certainly give up the same amount of time. If we're clapping the work, why not clap for them too?*

**JW:** Have you ever seen a show where the SM team are intentionally made to be visible?

**RR:** I saw a show last year where the SM had to move a set item, but they were in costume. Even the fact that SMs and technicians are asked to wear black clothing suggests we're meant to be invisible.

*We talk about the function of theatre as leisure. The fact that we go to the theatre as a means of escape, to forget about our work lives, but that we ironically do this by watching other people work, but that this work is hidden (behind costumes, set pieces, wings, etc.). We talk about the repetition of emotional labour and the*

*'magic' of theatre. When an audience applauds its actors, what is it actually applauding? Does it consider the makers behind the scenes?*

**JW:** Are you an SM interested in theatre or a theatre person interested in SM?

**RR:** Growing up, I didn't go to the theatre that often. Our regional theatre was good, but I never really went. I went to go and see pantomime and family shows and got involved with a youth theatre. There was a little bit of everything there. I got involved with the set painting and building. I always knew I wanted to work in the arts and came across an assistant stage management placement opportunity and haven't looked back since.

*We talk about access to these unpaid opportunities. We talk about to what extent you need to be able to work for free to get a foot in the door of this industry. Even here at NSDF, we're encouraged to apply for the opportunities, to essentially help launch our careers, but (bursaries aside), we're all paying to be here. What kind of message does this give to those who are interested in getting involved in this kind of work?*

~

This conversation didn't go how I was expecting it to. I was ready to write up an article fighting for more recognition of the work of stage managers and theatre technicians - and I still think we should be doing this - but I suppose it's also worth considering that some of those who work behind the scenes are very happy to keep themselves out of the spotlight (!), 'behind the scenes'. So how can we still appreciate and value this work without applause? Perhaps that's a task for the week ahead.



# Knock knock, who's here?

Nathan Dunn reflects on the economic accessibility of the festival

**The first time I attended NSDF, I didn't pay a penny to be there – but it was an experience you couldn't put a price on. And if you did, I wouldn't be able to afford it.**

This is my third consecutive year attending the festival and my first year being a regular contributor as part of the *Noises Off* team. My first visit was made possible by my university lecturer funding the experience and last year I could just about afford a day ticket. We subverted any other expenditure by commuting to Leicester from a friend's house in Birmingham. This year, Guest Director James Phillips' decision to reduce ticket prices and raise the number of bursaries to 100 has enabled my full attendance, for which I am extremely grateful.

My background is typical in many ways. As a working-class Yorkshire lad I spent most of my time growing up trying to shrug off the unimpressed discouragement that burdened being openly interested in the arts. Naturally, this made me reluctantly quiet on the subject, and understandably my parents were confused when I insisted I wanted to study drama at university. I had options, but again there were some restrictions. I couldn't afford drama school, I couldn't afford to study in the capital and I definitely needed to get a job too. Like many, those first two things are still out of reach for me, but that's normal. There are loads of people who can't afford those things – there are loads of people who come from similar backgrounds to me. So why then, when I first came to NSDF, could I not find anyone of said description anywhere?

Myself and my uni peers rolled into Hull for NSDF '17 with all the excitement of kids at Christmas. If you happened to attend that year, you may have noted an echoing cackle round the campus of Merseyside twang littered with patterns of Mancunian, Sheffield and Northern Irish – that was us. You might have been slightly disturbed by this cacophony of accents, but that's okay – likewise we were thrown off by everyone else's regional inflections (or specifically, their lack of).

I've always known I belonged to a class, but NSDF was the first time I ever felt working-class, and it aroused a lot of unconscious insecurity about my status. It was never a case of judging other people or possessing some resentment towards their received pronunciation and presumed economic prosperity, but it quickly became a case of judging myself. People sounded more eloquent here, so they must be more intelligent than me – people referenced artists



and shows they saw on the West End or in other places I couldn't afford to go, so they must have a better grasp on theatre than me – people could afford to be here and they paid for it with their own money, so they have more right to be here than me. Fortunately, these doubts didn't last too long, but all traces of working-class familiarity persistently evaded me. It didn't make sense. So I did what anyone would do – I put out an advert.

I thought I'd take this opportunity in our first edition of *Noff* to shed some light on the importance of having a National Student Drama Festival that is economically accessible and inclusive for all young theatre-makers



11 April 2017

Nathan Dunn is on the hunt

Wanted: Northern accent. I can't seem to find one anywhere. If found, please find me by following my own Northern accent. It shouldn't be hard to find given the circumstances.

Send your reviews, thoughts and jokes to: [noff@nsdf.org.uk](mailto:noff@nsdf.org.uk)

@noffmag

posted 11 april 2017 • posted by richard tanov • humour

in the country. The key word is National. If ticket prices block access for those suffering from restrictive financial freedom, then we all miss out, the festival loses its integrity as a national platform due to its imbalanced representation and there will be discussions not had and work not seen. Bursaries are a step in the right direction. In fact, this year has been notably successful as the designated allocation of bursaries was exceeded: a grand total of 105 tickets were given out. That means on top of there being 105 extra people at the festival who likely wouldn't be here otherwise, at the time of writing (10/04/19), no one who made themselves and their situation known to the NSDF was denied attendance on financial grounds.

That's an amazing start – but it isn't the final piece to the puzzle.

Kicking off the festival on a positive note in recognising there will be attendees present who under previous circumstances would not have been is great. It's a successful pre-drinks, but when this festival's greatest gatekeeper is the cost to get in we can't pretend that just because there's people on the dancefloor that there's no one at home. Travel, accommodation and living costs all play a huge part in the total cost, and there's also the selection fee young companies have to pay just to be considered.

For most, getting a show off the ground is an economic strain in and of itself. All of this is concerning, but not damning. Concern is care, and in caring about these issues we are already on the right track to diminishing their negative impact. It also begs wider questions – should people even pay to attend the festival in the first place? If not, how could we then ensure the festival survives? Is it all really that important?

This festival promises to be rife with electric discussion. From discussing the talent on and off-stage to socio-political debates to chatting nonsense over a few bevs at the bar, every word will shape our experience. Here's to hoping we all leave this festival enriched and enthused, and to hoping every single one of us with our collective presence at this festival will raise the bar for the next one.

So, with all that said, let's get this party started – and let's make it a good one.



# In memory of Stephen

Pat Wolfe commemorates the life of Stephen Jeffreys, NSDF selector and *Noises Off* editor

**Stephen Jeffreys was an eminent and influential playwright who died of a brain tumour in September 2018. He was editor of *Noises Off* and a literary associate at the Royal Court Theatre for ten years where he nurtured the talent of many young writers.**

Stephen first popped up at the festival when it was in Southampton in 1971. He quickly resurrected the daily festival newspaper *Noises Off*, which had been dormant for some time. It was merely one sheet of A4 paper but was full of incisive comment and, memorably, packed with humour. Under his leadership it started to metamorphose into the more professionally produced paper we have now – but he never forgot the all important jokes.

From then on Stephen continued to be an influential presence at NSDF but his own play, *Like Dolls or Angels*, about stunt performers, did not appear until NSDF '77, held in St Andrews, where it won the hastily invented Best New Play award. The two student actors served the play perfectly but were replaced by professionals when it went on to be successfully produced at the King's Head Theatre in Islington.

Stephen became one of the festival's most valued friends. Over the years he served his time as selector, workshop leader, judge, *Noff* editor, board member and one of the writers of the Festival's history, *Raw Talent*. Much of the festival's development and success can undoubtedly be attributed to Stephen. His vision, wisdom, wit, laughter and ability to calm

sometimes tempestuous situations were all pervasive in making NSDF what it is today.

Many of today's established writers owe a debt to the totally unselfish support he gave them in their early days. Those of us who like to think of ourselves as his friends miss him hugely.

*Stephen Jeffreys, 22 April 1950 – 17 September 2018*

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## OPINION

*Art Post-#MeToo*

## What now?

Florence Bell reflects on art post-#MeToo

**I have a personal story to tell, a knotty investment in #MeToo. A friend who I loved a lot was accused of making sexually inappropriate comments to younger women in the industry in which he worked. He doesn't work anymore, and we aren't friends anymore. It's easy to write that in a way which feels surface-level and clear-cut, but, of course, the truth of what happened is messier. It took a year of me being friends with him for the truth to bubble to the surface, and the statement I just made is a wrapped up, easy to swallow pill that disguises another messy year of arguments and indecision.**

The prolific post-#MeToo surge of redemption and pointed fingers in the industry hasn't materialised in the way some of us anticipated. There was more holding up of hands and admitting mistakes than many expected. I can only presume that somewhere, behind the scenes, there were whisperings and arguments and the deletion of some potentially damning email chains.

But one thing that might have been easy to predict was that two kinds of art would emerge in response:

(1) an intersectional feminist multi-modal festival/collage/everything that doesn't just stand against the art of Bad Men (more on this species later), but seeks to structurally redefine the art itself, a la *Dismantle This Room*, a Royal Court and Bush co-production, a theatrical escape room that asks its participants to "interrogate the established power structures in theatre".

(2) a big white art daddy writing a play within those established power structures, a la David Mamet's *Bitter Wheat*, a 'black farce' inspired by Harvey Weinstein. John Malkovich, the starring actor, has promised something "at the crossroads between pain and farce". Sounds appropriate.

There are, obviously, some things that fall outside these categories (cf. Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham: "There are two types of people in this world: those who divide the world into two types, and those who do not"). Robert Icke's *Wild Duck*, which analyses

the link between Ibsen's master-story and the dramatist's unsavoury actions, asked big questions about what we do with *The Art of White Dead Men*.

There's been another, under-the-covers, sneaky way *artists* have been responding to and engaging with the cultural wave of thinking about art post-#MeToo – by telling stories about art and about *artists*. It's difficult to negotiate the stories of the Bad Men: how does a writer navigate something that emotionally knotty? I increasingly find myself just as interested in the story of Georgina Chapman as Rose McGowan, in interviews of Soon-Yi Previn as Dylan Farrow.

As a human, how do you navigate a situation like that? The irrevocably messiness of the web of your life being pulled apart. As a culture, we have an obligation to pay attention to the stories of people – like Rose McGowan and Dylan Farrow – who we have long ignored. But the issue is more three-dimensional than that. Rose McGowan has made transphobic comments, there was debate about the implications of an allegation made against Aziz Ansari, and a year



and a half on, many men accused in #MeToo haven't faced any repercussions in the criminal justice system.

The cultural moment created by #MeToo was ephemeral – we still can't agree on much. As nice as it would be to be able to draw a clear line between the good and the bad, that isn't always possible. These things always come with a hundred other facts, histories and dramas, to the extent where it becomes increasingly tricky to make a moral judgement on anything. So perhaps we aren't yet ready for *American Crime Story: Harvey Weinstein*. In a few years, maybe. But for now, those stories about art, *artists* and writers are what's gluing us together. Anthony Neilson's *Tell-Tale Heart*, on at the National Theatre over Christmas, spoke to how we talk about *artists* without touching on the sexual harassment and rape that defined #MeToo. Characters talked about how cool and great *artists* are, how exciting it must be to be an *artist*, and even let *artists* get away with murder. Although not explicitly about Weinstein & co., the analogy is clear. Glorification is a way of blinding ourselves, refusing to see the obvious.

In Robert Icke's *Wild Duck*, one character relentlessly pursues the truth with such blind virtuousness that he causes the death of a child.

In Henrik Ibsen's *Wild Duck*, one character relentlessly pursues the truth with such blind virtuousness that he causes the death of a child.

Once digested, Ibsen's play is perhaps didactic: if knowing the truth is going to cause an irrevocable amount of harm and hurt, perhaps the happy lives on the surface are best left undisturbed. The truth should be left to wallow and die at the bottom of the dark lake with that beautiful, brown-feathered duck.

Of course, in Icke's production, this message is slippery. It's drawn from a story written by Ibsen, who, we are told at the outset of the play, had an illegitimate child like the one we see on stage. For him, it would have been far easier if the truth had been left to wallow and die. As Icke's version reminds us, Ibsen was forced to pay child support until his child was thirteen, then never saw the child or the mother ever again.

Icke's production argues that there is a grey area. How can we judge these things? One character has to make a decision – tell a father his child is not his and ruin three people's lives, or allow one person to carry on (happily) living a lie? But the character, Gregory (Gregers in the original, you know – the real one, the true one) who is so obsessed with exposing the truth of this family, no matter the collateral damage it might cause, is also the character who exposes Ibsen's life-lie. "The *Wild Duck* is a lie," he tells us. Truth is a messier, harder kernel than any of us expected. Swallowing it is bitter. In Icke's version, Gregory can't handle the pain his truth has inflicted.

Sometimes I feel like I'd rather watch an analogy for the times we live in, like anything more direct would be a little too blistering. Sometimes I feel like I'd rather push myself to watch the art of a Bad Man just so I can think about it. Thinking about it feels important – for me to do on my own. To take time to think and pause and reflect. Sometimes I feel like I don't know the answer, but I know that thinking and talking – in a way that is honest, and open to discussion, and kind – is important. For all of us.

Sometimes I feel really angry – angry at the state of affairs. Both sides, if we can call them that, make me angry. Sometimes it is better to sit and think quietly, feel centred, feel secure and happy,

rather than take part in big public debates. It is relatively easy, I think, to finger through the silt at the bottom of the lake and find the truth of now. Harvey Weinstein, Woody Allen, Donald Trump. We are aware of the truths of all these men.

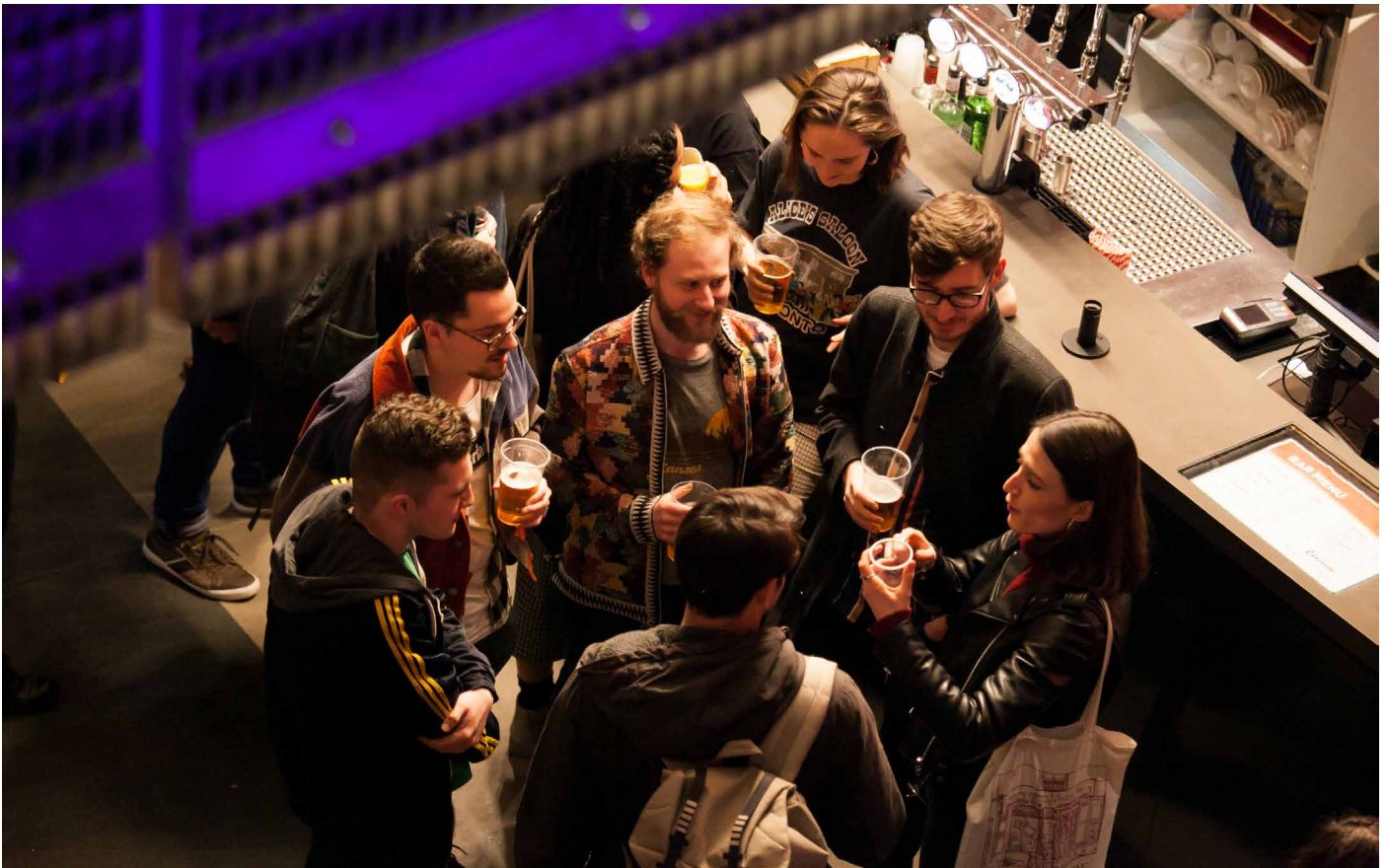
The truth of the future is a longer search. Pegged in to all the public debate around #MeToo is a wider cultural concern about art. Who is represented in it, who gets to make it. We don't know who will be artistic director of the National Theatre in ten years' time. We can try and influence the future with what we talk about as a culture and as a society, but things are still left up to chance, and circumstance, and the messiness of human lives. If the artistic director of the NT in 2029 is still a white man, I won't be angry. Increasingly I think the only thing we can really do is make the art. And I don't want to fetishize that too much, harp on about The Art and The Work, but it's the only thing we can make and change. And from where I'm standing, the things people have said with their art have stuck in my brain much longer than anything on Twitter.

The work we make has value. The things we say also have value. And different people find value in different things. That's alright. This feels like a big thing to say, and it shouldn't, at all: I think the art is more important than things we say or promises we make on Twitter. In fact, the art is of far more value. I don't want to say that the art is more important than people. But I think the art is how we reconnect, think together, in a way that feels safe. The art that goes into deeper waters about the moment we live in is what'll help us think – and move forward.



# Jump onboard

*How to get involved in Noises Off*



**Here at *Noises Off* HQ (also known as the Noffice), we're looking for people who have things to say. About NSDF, higher education, theatre, or the wider plane of existence. Whether you want to write a review, article, feature, interview your friend (or yourself), compose ornate poetry, make jokes or redefine the art of theatre criticism, we're here for your thoughts. If we can print it or put it on a webpage, we'll take it.**

*Noff* is your magazine. It belongs to everyone at the festival, and it's here if you ever want to contribute to it (and we hope you do). If you're keen to write something and need a bit of advice, feel free to drop by the Noffice. We're here all week to be your sounding board and lend a helping hand. On Friday, we'll be making a zine, so it's all hands on deck to put together an old-style retro *Noff* that our predecessors would have been proud of. Come along to the Noffice to get cutting, sticking, stamping and gluing.

We think criticism is equally valid in lots of different forms. A Twitter thread matters as much as a two-thousand-word essay. If you've got a doodle, or a screenshot of an interesting group

chat about a show, we'll publish it. We're here to showcase your thoughts, your criticisms, your ideas, your wildest fantasies. Think the festival could be better run? Written some fanfic in response to a show? Want to levy some hot takes on a show you've seen? Ready to sing someone's/ something's praises? Written a diary of your time at NSDF?

A few guidelines to help you along the way: we're happy to publish anonymous articles, especially if you're saying something personal. The one thing we won't publish anonymously is reviews – regardless of what you're saying, if you're assessing someone's work, it's important your name goes on it. The other thing we won't print is people reviewing their own shows. If you're involved in a show, we'd love for you to write a piece on what the process has been like, but you can't review it.

We publish as much as we can on our website, [nsdf.org.uk/noises-off](http://nsdf.org.uk/noises-off), as well as our daily print edition. You're more likely to be included in the print magazine if your piece is 350, 500 or 800 words long, but we do our best by every piece we get sent. We're delighted to read everything that

gets sent our way. And if we don't get back to you straight away – bear with us! Sometimes life at the festival gets hectic and busy. On that note: the Noffice isn't just a place for highbrow reviews and lowbrow editorials. It's a bubble away from the chaos of the festival with some friendly faces. If you ever need to take a moment somewhere quiet and peaceful, we're always here. Please come and visit.

*Send writing and other items of interest to [noff@nsdf.org.uk](mailto:noff@nsdf.org.uk) or get in contact on Twitter @noffmag. The Noffice is on the mezzanine level of the Curve foyer.*

# What if I don't have anything to say

*Some words about feeling like you don't have words, from Naomi Obeng*

NSDF is all about ideas bouncing off rooftops, through doors, over stages, through workshops, discussions and past festgoers lost in the streets of Leicester. Right? It's about the ideas, they say. About the conversation. About the chat into the night. That famous chat in the bar (which, I mean, find me in the Noffice with a cup of tea and a packet of dark chocolate digestives, okay? We can share the biscuits but bring a mug maybe). But 'what if, what if...', I sense a couple of you at the back who have not raised your hands because you, like me, are wondering the very thing that is preventing you from asking the very thing that is on your minds: 'what if I don't have anything to say?'

Outrageous. Unheard of. Nothing to say?  
Preposterous. At NSDF? What are you here

for then? Feel free to NSDF-off out the back of Curve and onto the next train home.

No one ever said that. And not just because NSDF-off is a very laboured comeback (though, if it does catch on, you heard it here first, I charge commission xoxoxo).

I remember last year getting to a point midweek where I just thought: 'God. Maybe I've just thought quite a bit and now I've run out.' For someone who was there to think in black on white (sometimes white on black, oooh) through my fingers every night it was a bit...scary. All these shows saying things that I'm sure are really very Interesting and Important and I just, can't, respond, right now. I don't know what to say. How is everyone else saying things? With their mouths even? How do I get mine to do that?

A good thing about having a cup of tea is that in between blowing on it as if that helps to cool it down, feeling it pleasantly scald your fingertips and the sipping leaving your mouth otherwise engaged, you don't have to talk. You can just listen. (You can do that without the tea, granted, but the tea's a soothing anchor.)

The thoughts, the comments, the intentions – it's fine if they're offered by other people, let them swirl around you. You don't have to have something to say every second of the day, or any second of any day. Just because you're not talking doesn't mean you're not experiencing it all in your unique way. I find a whole lot more fuel for speech from listening than I ever would from talking anyway.

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## NOTICES

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## Letters

I am really bloody sick of those pesky students at NSDF getting all uppity, on their high horses, about 'theatre' and 'drama' and 'festivals' and 'plays'. I say abolish NSDF. Tear it down. I want an immersive app experience instead. I want to experience the viscosity of four hundred students' pores in 4D. I expect nothing less from Our Royal National Student Drama Festival.

Sir David Hare

~

### What is this *Noises Off*.

*Noises off.*

Noises off what.

Noises of.

Noises is, noise is.

All just noises. We want your noises.

Noise is off without you. Noises needed.

Noises needing noises.

Come write for *Noises Off*.

Is this a poem? Is this an art?

This is publishable in *Noises Off*.

A p p a r e n t l y.

You too could write an uncategorizable collection of words in *Noises Off*. Noise is yours. Noises no longer looks like a word. Pls hlp. Come write for *Noises Off*.



*Every issue, we scratch our heads and do our best to set the Technical Team an (im)possible challenge.*

**In 2012, King Dick's skeleton was found under a car park in Leicester by a group of (probably) very surprised archaeologists. To celebrate the heritage of this historic city and its car parks, we'd like you to find us something similar.**

Technicians, you have been issued with your first challenge: **find us a ghost that's worth digging up a car park for.**

#1

# NOISES OFF

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*Why are we here?  
to learn  
to network  
to improve  
to challenge ourselves in our theatre practice*

*we're not just the audience but the professionals of tomorrow (bold claim, i  
kno)*

*~many critics and journalists seem compelled to legitimise the student drama  
festival by referring to famous or respected alumni~*

*what does NSDF want?  
[ It's an answer that changes year on year, but doesn't change at all ]*

*NSDF wants to see how we take plays (existing ones, adaptations, ones still in  
progress) and make them our own.*

*NSDF wants to maintain its heritage;;;  
the ethos of the new  
of challenging ideas  
of a creative community*

*NSDF is supposed to look like what we want it to*

