

SCRUBBERS

// Full marks, Maggie • Scrubs up • Noffsted report

ISSUE #2

# NOISES OFF

NSDF 2021

Not Near Enough

// VR's more than enough • Near and Far • Impatiemment, Camus

Feature // Get movin' • Surfacing

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## Editorial

**Time flies, a festival scattered across computers and countries. Shows made through fibre-optic and 4G. A magazine assembled over email, Zoom, messaging and fuelled by coffee.**

NSDF is always an exhausting and packed week that, at the best of times, fills us with hope and, paradoxically, with energy. This issue of *Noises Off* hopes to capture this duality with reflections on the admittedly tiring experience of a Zoom festival (p3), the creative intentions behind new work (p6, 7) and how new pathways can inspire us to our own selves to be truer (p15).

So much of this festival has given us pause for thought. The words "I wanna break stereotypes" at the *Beneath the Surface* Q&A still resound, a panel called 'Is Theatre Shit?' makes its ripples known through the conversations we have in the virtual Noffice, and conversations about what criticism has been and should be have never felt more urgent.

- what permission can you give yourself in responding to the work?

- the expertise you need is just to be a human
- creative criticism is just expressing your critical functions in a different way
- what is the work of honouring the show?

Just some of the notes we made from Maddy Costa's workshop on creative criticism.

This festival doesn't exist in a vacuum, of course. It is shaped by the world as it brings in practitioners and guests. This is why it is important to never stop questioning and to make space for uncertainty. And the festival will go on to shape the world too, through the way it impacts the young people who come to learn and write, be inspired and be challenged to create.

This year NSDF is on at the same time as the Trans Week of Visibility, and there are many deeper questions that the festival can still ask itself about how to be an inclusive and accessible space for trans and non-binary people. At the 2019 festival, a participant raised concerns over the lack gender-neutral bathrooms at venues. In this online festival, festgoers and workshop leaders have made efforts to include pronouns in Zoom names – an exciting step forward.

But it's important to recognise that some

members of the LGBTQIA+ community are still discovering their identities and might not be at a stage where they're ready to publicly commit to pronouns. Actions speak louder than words within this industry, and actions committed to funding and resourcing underrepresented groups are those that speak loudest. We want to see NSDF being supportive and welcoming of emerging trans and non-binary talent. When we can see what is being done, we will know that allyship is real and the impact will be visible.

There are so many ways in which critical skills are valuable in this world, and in big and small ways we try to make this magazine one which celebrates the analytical, the difficult, the taking time to digest and – the care with which we must all use our words to speak with the world, and to place ourselves within it.

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

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



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# In confidence

Following Lucy Hinds' workshop on status, value and confidence, **Elisha Pearce** has something to say

Status, value, confidence:  
three words I feel not quite connected to just yet.  
I can pretend I have confidence but internally I  
am screaming.  
But I am getting there.  
I will get there.  
People always tell me things like:  
YOU need to raise your voice  
be a little LOUDER.  
up  
Speak a bit more!  
we can't hear you we can't hear you we can't hear

you we can't hear you we can't hear you we can't  
hear you we can't hear you we can't hear you we  
can't hear you  
We can't hear you  
Are you on mute?  
Or maybe you weren't even speaking.  
And,  
I will admit,  
sometimes I am not the most confident.  
But I think for now that's ok.  
If I just take a deep breath

In.....

Out.....

Remind myself of who I am,  
how far I've come,  
I can be confident again.  
Because Lucy Hind says I can.

## On repeat

**Sam Ross** *is feeling the exhaustion of an online festival*

I stare at the screen  
I write  
I struggle to write

I grab my dinner and sit with the rest of my family in the living room to eat it  
I get up from my desk  
run upstairs and sit behind my desk  
I watch another show  
I stare at the screen  
I WhatsApp the Noff team  
I stare at the screen  
I spend so much time I start scaring at the screen  
I watch another show  
I stare at the screen  
I close my laptop  
I am shattered  
I am exhausted  
at NSDF before  
I actually being there at the festival  
I am sick of this all

I don't think I have ever felt this exhausted  
It's not the fun kind of exhaustion from life and seeing my cool friends and having lifelong connections and dancing the night off  
I wish I was in Leicester right now seeing all this great work in real life and seeing my cool friends and having lifelong connections and dancing the night off  
I prepare my clothes for the next day  
I put my pyjamas on  
I brush my teeth  
I get into bed  
I turn the light off  
I wake up  
I get out of bed  
I shower  
Dad brings me a cup of tea  
I brush my teeth  
I take Sertraline  
I grab some breakfast  
I sit at my desk  
I open my laptop  
I stare at the screen  
I do a workshop maybe  
Or I write  
I struggle to write  
My OCD is particularly severe at the moment due to the stress of it all  
I stare at the screen  
I watch a show  
I stare at the screen  
I WhatsApp the Noff team  
I stare at the screen  
I talk to Florence and Naomi in the Noises Off drop-in  
I get up from my desk to make myself a peanut-butter sandwich  
I sit at my desk again  
I stare at the screen  
I reply to some emails  
I stare at the screen  
I write  
I struggle to write  
I stare at the screen  
Dad brings me a cup of tea  
I get up from my desk  
I go outside to dig compost into a wheelbarrow for my aunt's vegetable garden.  
It's probably the only time I trundle the trolley, listen to a podcast as I desperately wheelbarrow from the compost heap to the vegetable garden. I think that I desperately need to go for a long walk.

I head back inside  
I sit at my desk



## Full marks, Maggie

Katie Kirkpatrick sets a multiple-choice quiz for the SCRUBBERS audience

### Which is your favourite Gemma Collins moment?

- a) When she fell over on Dancing on Ice
- b) When she fell over at the Teen Choice Awards
- c) "I'm claustrophobic Darren!!"

### What do you think about interactive theatre?

- a) It's fascinating as a form because it leans into the idea of theatre as a 'collective experience' and blurs the lines between performer and audience.
- b) I have gone to one too many pantomimes in my life. Never again.
- c) It's very cool as a concept but I am simply too anxious.
- d) It's so fun!!!!

### Which of the following is more valuable as a form of culture?

- a) Opera
- b) Zoom comedy interactive theatre
- c) Tweets

### 6% of young people in the UK are privately educated. What percentage of BAFTA winners went to private schools?

- a) 42%

### Why can interactive theatre feel so uncomfortable?

- a) Going into a production as a performer and as an audience member are two very different mental states: when as an audience member you are asked to perform, there's a feeling of self-consciousness no matter how confident you'd be in your own show.
- b) We are so used to being alone, inside.

### Is sexual innuendo funny? Is it liberating for women?

- a) Yes, and yes. Men do it all the time, so why shouldn't we have just as many jokes about boobs?
- b) It's often funny, sure, but using references to

rits to get a laugh doesn't always sit right with me and I can't quite pinpoint why.

### Roughly how much would it cost to go to ten drama school auditions?

- a) £500

### Which of these is more iconic?

- a) Illegally Conned, a musical about Margaret Thatcher parodying Evita
- b) The 'Vogue' music video, but about the problems with the drama school system, with the chorus becoming "What a joke!"
- c) Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive' reimagined as a Shakespearean monologue

### Can a quiz be a review?

- a) Yes
- b) No



## Scrubs up

Elisha Pearce reflects on her Scrubber experience

After hearing my fellow *Noises Off* writers respond with delight to *The SCRUBBERS Guide to Drama School*, I wonder if I might have missed a trick. *SCRUBBERS* attempts to tackle the issues of classism rife in British drama schools. This show should speak to me. Whilst I have never auditioned for drama school, I did attend an audition day at a high-brow university and felt unwelcome, as my Birmingham accent and working-class background made me stick out like a sore thumb.

In *SCRUBBERS*, Lydia and Caitlin Scrubber guide us through S.L.A.G.S – an imaginary drama school that eliminates some of the barriers stopping the working classes, working-class girls in particular, from gaining places.

I respect Caitlin Magnall-Kearns and Lydia Crosland for performing live on Zoom, especially with a show that relies on an audience that is up for a bit of fun interactivity. After a ten-minute delay to the performance beginning,

I was encouraged to become an honorary scrubber, quite literally editing my name in the Zoom room to reflect that, as Caitlin Scrubber and Lydia Scrubber encouraged. This was a nice touch, but it seemed to undermine the objective of them taking me through the steps of a successful audition process for S.L.A.G.S. Why do I need to audition if I'm already a part of this new drama school? Am I both a S.L.A.G and a Scrubber? It was a lot to get my head around.

Whilst I thoroughly enjoyed the show's concepts, (as drama school needs a bit of a shakeup!) I think too many ideas cluttered my ability to connect with the more intimate themes in *SCRUBBERS*. Some really lovely

moments were buried under a few too many Gemma Collins quotes, rounds of compliment bingo, and Jane McDonald fangirl moments. One moment which stood out to me was where Lydia Scrubber opened up to us about an audition in London where she could not afford the train fare and instead decided to get on the TV show *Coach Trip* to get a free lift down there. This was one of the most engaging moments for me, but no sooner had it come, it was over.

*SCRUBBERS* gave me a good laugh. It was a nice break from the serious nature of the shows before it. I just wish it had slightly less Gemma Collins, and even more of the class and gender politics behind the performance.





# SCRUBBERS Live Acting Graduate Scheme (SLAGS)

Drama School

**Inspection dates**

29 March 2021

**Overall effectiveness****Good**

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Outstanding |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for learners                        | Good        |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | N/A         |

**Summary of key findings****This is an outstanding provider**

- Leaders of this school (Lydia and Caitlyn SCRUBBER) promote values of inclusion rarely seen at other drama schools inspected.
- Curriculum addresses diverse skillset suitable for contemporary SCRUBBERS everywhere, with extra-curriculars including informative day trips to cruise ships.
- Students appear to enjoy their courses and derive great pleasure and mirth from the lessons taught by their tutors.

**Inspection judgements****Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding**

- The head tutors at this school run an efficient and inclusive operation.
- Both of them have charming and approachable personalities.
- They have a sophisticated grasp of working over video link without major technical faults.
- Their teaching style is hilarious and engaging throughout.

**Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding**

- Students have a significant level of contact time with the tutors, and are actively involved in educational activities ranging from warm up sausage roll mouth massages to vocal intonation.
- Tutors deliver a wide-ranging curriculum delivering classes in diverse practitioners, from William Shakespeare to Gloria Gaynor, Jane McDonald to Gemma Collins (the GC herself).
- Teaching covers a great breath of texts from respected Northern Irish/Northern English playwrights, featuring such respected works as *Trouble in Paradise* and *Eee By Gum*.

**Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding**

- Students feel welcomed and included at all times during the show lessons.
- Through the teachings of the SCRUBBERS, students learn how to live their best life, break free from the self-doubt and become that BITCH.
- Students are encouraged to wear the mandated school uniform of leopard print and glossy makeup, but it isn't strictly enforced.

**Outcomes for learners are good**

- Students learn to become empathetic for other drama students from less well-represented backgrounds who try to make it into other mainstream drama schools within the country.
- Okay, I'm gonna level with you – this isn't an actual (N)Of(f)sted report. I mean you know that already.
- And Lydia and Caitlyn level with us that the SLAGS school doesn't really exist, before they discuss how inaccessible most drama schools are to people like them. The way they did that was a little jarring.
- To be honest for a second, there's something a little disconcerting about trying to review a show within the school inspection format. Especially as the subject of the show is about how elitist and inaccessible these schools can often be.
- So having said that, this show was a great deal of fun, and a memorable example of how inclusivity can make the theatre industry a better place.



# Joy = an act of resistance

Shamsa Kiwanuka interviews Seen director Annie John



**How could I not interview Annie John? The co-devisor of the incredible, thought-provoking *Seen* that forces you to reflect on the issues it presents. I was particularly interested in the devising process and the concepts behind the movements. Whilst watching it, I would take notice of each actor using their body to portray an emotion or breaking the fourth wall. Annie shared that the team knew from the beginning they wanted to involve the audience as much as possible. They asked themselves: “How can we engage people and really speak directly to them?” I definitely felt spoken to and often felt like the actors spoke for me.**

The piece had awkward moments where you sort of don't know where to look; I remember thinking 'oookay', but then I thought deeper about the questions being asked. These were Annie's intentions of “taking it a little bit too far, making it a bit uncomfortable, not just for the audience but for the actor as well” which they certainly managed to achieve.

The group from NewVic Arts started the piece in October 2019, conscious of Brexit and the upcoming general election, but when asked to

present it for NSDF 2021, it didn't feel current or that relevant anymore. 2020 will forever remain a year that challenged society's strength, and young people had a lot to say. I considered if they ever questioned the sensitive topics they chose to perform, but Annie passionately replied “They did not want to hide their stories, it had been a difficult year. This was a chance for their voice to be heard.” It was as if I could feel the urgency of the young actors in the pace of her own words.

After 10 weeks of Zoom calls to make an attempt at devising a piece through a screen, the company decided to meet for an intense 3 days of socially-distanced rehearsal in which they successfully filmed on the afternoon of the final day. It must not have been an easy task – we can see the show thrived on physicality, no contact was a rule they were not exempt to. Inspired by Frantic Assembly and workshops, Annie reminded them to “be authentic”. “They're not dancers,” she told me. “It doesn't have to be beautiful and it's not choreographed, it has to be raw and speak from the heart.” Some gestures we saw were crafted from a line of their own writing. How electrifying.

If it had been live, does she think it would

have had a greater impact? “Yes, you can't beat the electricity between the performer and the audience.” ‘Never have I ever’ questions were supposed to be a chance for spectators to raise their hand and look around for the similarities and differences. The company performed in schools, giving children the opportunity to get involved. Moses asks us “Do I look like a threat to you?”, and a small kid perched on the carpet (with their legs presumably crossed in the way we all had to do when we were at school) shouted back, ‘NOOO!’. That made me chuckle. If only we all saw Black men in a similar way.

This piece was of the moment. “It marked the time and how it impacts them on a daily basis.” If performed in two, five or 10 years into the future, the outcome would have been entirely unrecognisable. The ending scene, with the actors bopping about to the beat of the music, this was a shock to me at first because of the sudden change of atmosphere. “There is something political about being joyful and the cast did not wish to be seen as victims.”

2





*Beneath the Surface*

# Surfacing

*Big Creative Academy's show is one step on the road to a more inclusive NSDF; Elisha Pearce finds*

***Beneath the Surface* is a testament to how incredible generation Z are. The show highlights how much of an impact young people can have when given space, time, and resources to use their voices creatively. To hear their versions of reality, we have to be willing to listen.**

I spoke to Nima Taleghani – an associate of the National Student Drama Festival and a facilitator for Big Creative Academy's *Beneath the Surface* to gain behind-the-scenes information about how this Zoom-Facetime-texting hybrid show developed from initial idea to end product in just two weeks. We also dove into how much more the industry can do to make young people's voices heard.

Big Creative Academy should have been involved in the 2019 National Student Drama Festival but planning and logistics made it impossible to get to Leicester. They also should have been at the 2020 festival, but Covid-19 happened. Finally, with *Beneath the Surface* we get a short, intense, and intimate glimpse into the issues faced by five Black teenagers from a college in Walthamstow. We follow them as they navigate life in a virtual world. Of NSDF Creates, and NSDF Lab – the initiatives which helped birth

the show, Nima said “it’s part of the initiative that James [Phillips, Festival Director] set up to make the festival truly national”. On NSDF previously, Nima explained, “in the past, it has been primarily Russell Group universities with drama societies who are informed and have the finances to come to the festival and we wanted to change that”.

Andre Davis, Rebecca Opesanwo, Serena Ajiiginni, Jeremie Kuyu- Tshiosbi, and Jael Godwin- Mekwuye – all drama students at Big Creative Academy “devised the whole thing, with all the content, all the ideas, everything in just twelve days” explained Nima. On the show’s quick turnaround time, he added “it was a brush against time to make a piece of work when you’ve never made a piece of work before”.

Creating and performing a piece that existed entirely on Zoom was a challenge, but one that these inspiring young people rose to. On creation of this digital hybrid show, Nima elaborated “they would film record a lot of the content every day and send it over to me and Ray virtually every evening”. He continued: “they would send loads of videos, and voice notes and content”. This ended up forming *Beneath the Surface* which “tells the story they want to tell”. This focus on short snippets of digital content allowed the stories of characters Crystal, Joshua, Naomi, Ruth, and TJ to resonate with an audience. Nima explained, “the reason they chose to do that is that it’s their reality”. Big Creative Academy’s students did not want to stray too far from their reality nor do something pretend, which is very commendable. Beneath

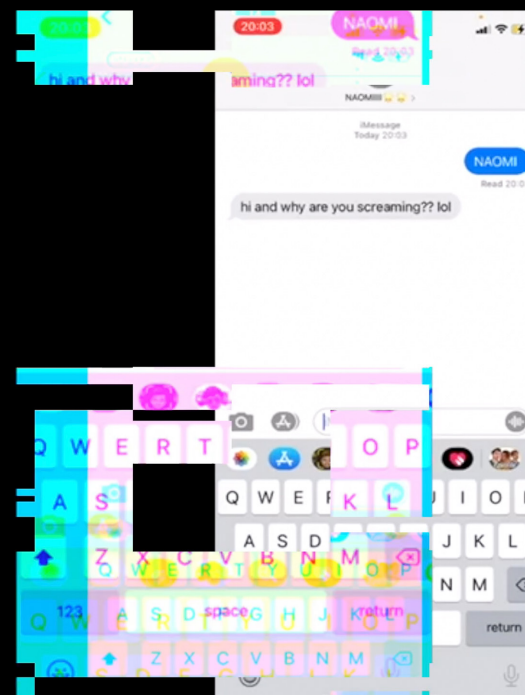
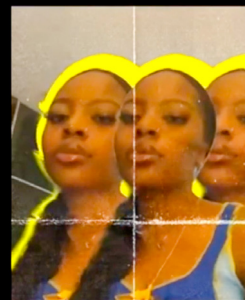
the Surface allowed Andre, Rebecca, Serena, Jeremie, and Jael to realise “their stories are stories that aren’t normally told: this is what is beneath the surface for them”.

One question that has stuck in my head since experiencing *Beneath the Surface* is what more can the industry do to allow all young people equality of opportunity in theatre? For both Nima and I, this was an exhilarating question.

The young people of Big Creative Academy, according to Nima, are “used to having to work twice as hard for half as much”. As, frustratingly, “that’s how the industry is structured, for them not to thrive”. As we head towards theatres opening back up again, in Nima’s words, equality of opportunity is about “creating free and accessible tickers”. Some people are lucky enough to inherit culture, but it also boils

down to the vibe in the theatre and the staffs’ attitudes towards you. As Nima puts it so well “We need to do the things you can’t tweet about and the things that you can’t get a pat on the back for”.

For the students of Big Creative Academy, the journey to get here might have been difficult but the payoff was phenomenal. *Beneath the Surface* is a show that both Nima and I firmly believe, can, and will go anywhere and everywhere after NSDF draws to a close.





# Home and dry

Mark Smith gets to the heart of where home is

Home is a slippery concept. You can't pin it down, or wrap your arms around it and give a good squeeze. With *Home*, Undereaves Theatre interpret that home cannot be concrete. Thinking of home, we most likely picture the four walls around us. Shelter. The roof over our heads. Where we sleep, eat, laugh, cry, make love, spending most of our days with the ones we care for. Undereaves Theatre present a different perspective, with home existing in the relationships we have with parents, friends, siblings and lovers. Undereaves Theatre stage separate stories, knitting together vignettes of home being presented in distinct, unexpected places. A romantic dinner, a kettle boiling, pregnancy, childhood memories. *Home* allowed me to realise that our understandings of home are fluid, ever-changing. Just as easily as home is bestowed upon can it also be stolen away. Undereaves Theatre organised their scattered narratives through a natural structure of building, balancing, breaking. The relationships formed begin to fracture, childhood memories are painful as much as they are nostalgic. Death is inevitable; *Home* forces us to confront the way our connections can fade, those who made us feel safe and comfortable being lost forever. What struck me most about *Home* was the realisation that home is never a promise. Undereaves Theatre explore the nuance of how we understand home, steering away from the cushy, secure expectations we might have already. It is undoubtedly an unnerving shift in thought. Building, balancing breaking. It leaves me to wonder: in a difficult year, defined by distance and separation, has it given us a stronger sense of what, or who, we consider home?

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## Home is where?

Emma Robinson unpicks the stitches of Home

*Home* is a montage of memories with curved edges. It's gently emotive, drawing the audience in, through affecting music, and when it accepts and leans into its slowness it can be beautiful.

However, there is an evident self-consciousness in the ordering of the piece. Littered amongst scenes of profound intimacy, wherein characters directly address the camera and unravel their subconscious, are emotionally heightened, narrative based interactions: a date, an argument, a confession. During these dialogic scenes, the honesty and rawness seems compromised, and I felt most aware that I was watching a performance.

Perhaps this was inevitable as the 'snapshot' form means any attempt to create a narrative

are within a scene must be compressed, either heavy in exposition or emphatic in scene-setting. Perhaps, they are apologetic from the start. And, trying so hard to be intense or dramatic, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that they stretch for conventional conflicts like break-ups or pregnancies, feeling more cliché than universal. These scenes lack the detail and specificity of truly personal experiences.

It is only when the writing abandons this need to be understood narratively with distinct characters and gravitates instead towards emotional communication that *Home* suspended my disbelief.

Watching someone's gaze flit, mapping out or pinning down thoughts which defy vocalisation is transfixing. It is the power of subtlety that

film, as a medium, can achieve beyond theatre. And, at numerous points within *Home* this detail discovers a level of truthfulness I have not yet seen in NSDF21.

But I wonder whether the piece, to its on detriment, was too preoccupied with the fear of losing the audience's attention, or nervous to explore the mundaneness which is interwoven into the very notion of *Home*. The impression I got was that this piece tried very hard to maintain its freshness, but was that at the compromise of its coherence?

?



## Fizzing

Shamsa Kiwanuka sinks into Rum & Coke

The poster with the hues of skin tones, I love. To see shades of diversity drew me instantly towards the show as the title doesn't give too much away. Rape, unfortunately, is an issue we are still widely dealing with. We shouldn't be, but we are, and performances such as this push for change and re-educating our society.

The unit of friendship between all four characters was refreshing, I could relate to the importance having fewer friends who will check up on you to see if you're okay no matter how much you hide yourself. Aditi is caring and observant of her friends, she keeps everyone level. I could appreciate Ayla who doesn't take any nonsense and speaks up when she feels is right – it was like watching myself. Jay was a character I would have liked to see explored further. In his monologue, he revealed depth to his story but it was nearing towards the end and I knew we weren't going to find out.



From the fluorescent strobe lighting setting the scene of party and chaos, it foreshadowed a dilemma, an off-feeling inside me because of how long it dragged on. I did feel, as though, the music lingered in moments where silence would have better suited to help me hear what love wanted to share. It was clear she was confused and was looking for someone to talk to and as there was no one in that scene with her, she broke the fourth wall with her questions and I felt close but the music didn't let me connect with her. I can forgive the poorly-timed voiceovers and sharp scene changes, we are not in a real theatre and we have to adapt, but, love's story sort of spewed out all in one go. Some lines were blatant in their words, and told not shown. Even though, most would have guessed abuse or rape as soon as she turned her arm to reveal the bruise, it would have been nice to be kept waiting until she decided to open up about it.

After reading the title, I thought of a bunch of 20-some year olds getting drunk and trying to navigate their way through life. After watching it, it brought to light the power of the family you choose and who you surround yourself with. I am intrigued to see the strength of the friendship tested and the dynamic progress.

?



## Mixed up

Katie Kirkpatrick gets to grips with Rum & Coke

**Rum & Coke is an ambitious production. It seeks to be a lot of different things, but ultimately it is a show about identity – about a diverse group of young people forming a 'found family' at university. It's also a show that delves deep into the complexities of sexual assault: how it's treated by society, by our friends, by its victims, by its perpetrators.**

In the aftermath of university student love being sexually assaulted – perhaps raped – by her boyfriend, we follow the way her friends react through different forms of media. The real strengths of the piece lie in its use of form: the rap and spoken word songs given the characters the opportunity to express themselves

in a way we wouldn't see otherwise. These are also where the performances are at their best: while performing remotely means some of the group dialogue feels slightly stilted, the musical moments allowed the actors to really sink into their characters. The use of video calls helps to creatively handle a plot that involves people who live together – and while some of the tension we would have got from watching this group of people interact in close living quarters fades away, it doesn't have too drastic an impact on the experience of watching it.

There is something deeply unsettling, though, about how the sexual assault/rape plotline is handled. *Rum & Coke* never offers its audience

a clear account of what happened, and some of the characters say that it's not their business if love says there's nothing to worry about. Since the victim does not report the event, it's simply left to linger in the air. Don't expect a satisfying conclusion, confrontation or processing, and don't even start to think about justice. This might feel like a limitation when you watch it, but the more I got into *Rum & Coke*, the more I realised that this is an exact mirror of how these events often play out in real life.

?



## VR's more than enough

Beth Edwards gets fully immersed in *Not Near Enough*

If you're anything like me, then *Not Near Enough's* 360° video turned you into a child. At any chance I got, I was spinning maniacally in the middle of the virtual room like a four-year-old after one too many artificial sweeteners. Once my inner child was suitably appeased, I began to admire that the 360° video wasn't used as a gimmick. There were no attempts to use the technology as an excuse to get lazy with the narrative.

The team didn't use their advanced tech to boast, but to enhance a performance that didn't solely rely on that one stunt. It's been a crazy year, and so to see a performance that so seamlessly incorporated new, futuristic technology into theatre was so exciting. It's nice to be reminded that we're still moving forward.

The set was really effective. A particular favourite was the section with the doors. This

could've been done without the 360 video, onstage, but when the technology was integrated, it became hypnotic. Because I had to discern where the voices were coming from, I was paying complete attention, and was utterly in the moment. I was constantly waiting for something to jump out at me, as I caught sight of the distorted hands pressed against the door's windows. The screens were used to their full potential; a priest shouting down at you that God's always watching becomes much more sinister when disembodied eyes on the walls that surround you begin to blink.

The atmosphere created was this piece's greatest asset, but its construction only began once the prologue ended. The exposition before the performance slightly dulled my enthusiasm. The explicit explanations of the different sections of the piece limited its subjectivity, and I felt I wasn't free to interpret the piece however I wanted once I'd been told how best to approach it.

Being in the disarming environment of the body of the piece was a wonderfully disquieting experience, and this was when my opinion of it started to hit heights. I only wish this powerful environment had been established earlier on. Throughout the main piece, the fantastically crafted tension made me feel I was always being watched. I may have been spinning around like a Catherine wheel on speed, but I was always watching the edge of my screen for something creeping out of the shadows. I felt incredibly alone and vulnerable, whilst simultaneously feeling constantly watched by a million eyes. My paranoia throughout serves as testament to the fact that the students at Falmouth University can, and did, build one hell of an atmosphere.

## Near and far

Esti Bragado was interested, and uncertain, about *Not Near Enough*

This is a play devised by Gwirvos Theatre, a group of Falmouth University students, and directed and designed by Klaus Kruse. A blend of Albert Camus' *The Plague* and the current pandemic are at heart of this experimental piece of immersive theatre, bringing death, religion and infection into the virtual world.

We don't really know who the characters are, we merely get a tiny insight into their lives; we get short videos, movement recordings, screen panels, songs and French accents instead. It's

a colourful performance of the narrative of a pandemic. The images and discourses get highlighted by the rich use of technical resources which turn it into an interactive experience, as we, the audience, have the freedom to change in which direction we look within the performance space.

This freedom does however feel powerless at some moments, as we are surrounded by images moving in circles around us, almost hunting us: the ones who have survived the plague so far. Red background recordings of religious voices

and glimpses of what seem to be infected people accompany us as we travel through this virtual reality into the unknown, the futureless, and the despair. Although, these are just concepts, hence impersonal and hard to relate to for the audience. This play has so much to say, and it is so original in its form, and yet we cannot feel it. Like a beautifully decorated promising gift box that happens to be empty somehow.

Esti Bragado responds to *Not Near Enough* in a different way

Wow. I mean. The plague and an immersive video. And the lockdown. I don't know what it is really, but I think it may be a story. Characters. Scenes of situations. Dialogue. I don't know what I think about this. Wow. I mean. It is original, the design is great, and the story—perfect timing—although, I missed something. I don't know what it is really, but I think it may be a story. Characters. Scenes of situations. Dialogue. I don't know what I think about this. Wow. I mean. It is original, the design is great, and the story—perfect timing—although, I missed something.

# Impatiemment, Albert Camus

*Albert Camus (Anna Mahtani) pens a letter to the Not Near Enough team about their adaption of his novel*

Aux étudiants de Falmouth,

Les métaphores se réalisent, l'expérimentation émeus, rien de ce que j'ai vu dans votre pièce *Not Near Enough* n'est banale. Les moments audio et visuels me font frissonner, et je rêve de voir la pièce non seulement sur l'écran, mais comme vous l'avez envisagé, me plongeant dedans.

Voir mon œuvre toujours vivante, est magnifique... soyez courageux, saisissez les possibilités de ce nouvel art, ne vous limitez pas à mon œuvre. Mon œuvre est Oran, Algérie – mais aussi Thèbes, et Paris. La votre ajoute le Royaume-Uni à cette liste; cette expérience est toute aussi valable que la mienne. Vous capturez le côté malaisant de la religion et l'hostilité des survivants: les portes se ferment sur vous, des fausses actualités se propagent, il n'y a simplement pas assez de lits. Les moments de pure adaptation, par contre, distraient du magnifique chaos que vous créez. Pourquoi pas laisser le bleu éclatant d'Algérie dans *La Peste* se transformer en un gris britannique oppressant. J'espère voir le particulier de votre expérience se transformer en l'universel.

Alors que les regards torturés de ceux qui non nulle part autre où regarder se battent pour se situer, des fragments de chants nous pétrifient l'âme. Votre innovation fascine, pourtant je sens les moments d'adaptation pure de ma philosophie briser la magie malaisante de la pièce. L'Homme est absurde. Il se lève pour répéter les mêmes tourments au quotidien; parce que, en répétant on peut oublier qu'il y a une fin. Mais c'est par la révolte que l'on brise ce cycle, que l'on reconnaît notre mort et que l'on se bat pour le bien d'autrui. Sans révolte, tout ce qu'il reste est ce cycle infernal. Peut-être que c'était votre but. La bataille entre théâtral et digital est aussi un combat entre adaptation directe et réinterprétation complète.

Ne sous-estimez pas la force de votre allégorie. Ayez confiance en votre spectateur de reconnaître l'âme d'Oran, et le reflet du monde. Dans tout son surréalisme, l'œuvre capture une réalité terrifiante. Et, sans le savoir, je reconnaissais la pièce, non comme mon œuvre, mais comme une expérience de la condition humaine.

Détachez-vous de mon histoire. Ceux qui ne peuvent être saints, s'efforcent cependant d'être médecins. Vous êtes médecin. Votre patient est votre passion. Offrez-la-nous. Offrez l'espoir. Offrez-nous la solidarité. Parce que, seul, on ne sera jamais assez proche.

Impatiemment,

*Albert Camus*

To the students of Falmouth,

Metaphors are realised, experimentation moves us, none of what I saw in your production *Not Near Enough* could be described as ordinary. The visual and audio moments send shivers through my soul and I dream of seeing it not simply on the screen, but how you envisaged it, surrounding me everywhere I turn.

It is wonderful to see my work still stands...be brave, embrace the possibilities of this new art form. Do not limit yourselves to my work. My novel is Oran, Algeria – but it is also Thebes, and Paris. Yours adds Britain to the list; that experience is just as worthy as mine. You capture the uneasy edge of religion and hostility in times of need: the doors slam in our faces, false news is spread, there simply aren't enough beds. The moments of pure adaptation, dialogue from the plot, felt like distractions from the wonderful chaos you were creating. Why not let the sweltering sun of Algeria in *The Plague* transform into the oppressive grey of British skies. I would love to see the particulars of your own experience translate to the universal.

As tortured eyes fight for place with nowhere else to turn, fragments of songs chill to the bone. Your innovation excites, yet without engaging in my philosophy, the moments of simple adaptation shatter the unsettling magic of the rest. Man is absurd. He gets up every day and repeats the same torments, because in repetition we can pretend the cycle continues forever. But it is in revolt that man breaks the cycle, recognises his death, and strives for the good of others. Without revolt we are left only with a ceaseless and absurd cycle of torture. Perhaps that was the point. The struggle between theatrical and digital is also a combat between direct adaptation and complete reinterpretation.

Do not underestimate the force of your allegory. Be confident that your viewer will recognise Oran and its reflection of the world. For all its surrealism, the piece captures a terrifying reality. And I found myself recognising it not as my novel, but as the experience of the human condition.

Escape my story. Those who cannot be saints, strive to be doctors. Your work has shown you to be doctors. Your patient is your passion. Give it to us. Give us hope. Give us solidarity. Because alone, we will never be near enough.

Impatiently yours,

*Albert Camus*



# Resoundingly real

Beth Edwards felt seen, understood and moved by Jigsaw

When I read the synopsis for *Jigsaw*, I seriously considered giving it a miss. My brother, Jake, is autistic, and I knew if I watched *Jigsaw*, I would cry. A lot. I didn't know if I could deal with a story so close to my life experiences. I'd need to hug Jake and my parents and my sister and I'd be a sobbing mess. It sounded like quite the emotional upheaval. But at 7:30pm, I sat down to watch. Once it had finished, and I'd had a moment to recover, I felt a responsibility to write about it.

This show meant so much to me because it felt like it could have been written about me and Jake. Our stories aren't identical, but as Molly stood there, describing Max and Josh's morning routines, I saw myself in her. We share the need for people to see what our families are going through, and that desire to get through to our brothers. Molly talks a lot in her show about how nobody really understands her situation, and, before watching *Jigsaw*, I would've completely

agreed. But in making this show, Molly's shown me someone who understands.

Now, if I'm being honest, I was a sobbing mess through all of *Jigsaw*. Real, unattractive, sniffling crying. But there was only one moment when I had to pause the show and take a minute. It was towards the end, when videos of Max and Josh were projected on the wall. It was a lovely moment, a chance to match faces to stories. But there was one video that hit me like a ton of bricks. Molly is filming herself and Max, and they've got the dog filter from Snapchat on their faces, the one where you have dog ears and a tongue sticking out. Max reaches for the tongue on his face. And I broke. I have at least 17 videos of Jake doing exactly the same thing. Jake will reach out for the tongue, and sometimes go and check in the bathroom mirror that his ears are still very human and Jake-like. And so when Molly showed this video, just a sweet video of siblings hanging out, I was a mess. Because it was us, me and Jake. And someone understood.

Friday 2nd April – Autism Awareness Day. I always post on my Snapchat, something to bring any common unconscious biases to light. Yet I'm always trying really hard not to offend people, or make anyone uncomfortable. It's weaknesses I have like that which makes Molly so amazing.

She's written and performed a show that is so entirely focused around her brothers that there's no excuse for any sugar-coating. She has set out to make the world a better, more understanding place, and she does it with such enthusiasm and such passion. I could see a little of myself in Molly, but I also saw so much of what I should try to be. Compassionate, kind, understanding. As my screen fades to black, I hear Jake run around downstairs. I smile, as *Jigsaw* has reminded me that me and Jake aren't alone.

?

## Moving piece

Esti Bragado reacts to Jigsaw

Personal emotional response: I just want to hug Molly.  
I want to hug tight the whole team.  
Hug tight all the team member's families and friends.  
I want HUGS.  
Because Jigsaw is a moving piece.  
Of theatre. Of a jigsaw.

A testimony

### A PIECE OF SOMETHING BIGGER

Of many.  
It feels as a conversation Molly has with the audience.  
It is tender, honest and calls on everyone's empathy; which I like.

It becomes more direct at the end of the show, in the way she addresses the audience and asks us some questions.

So we reflect on who INSPIRES us:  
Brothers. Mums. Dads. Grandas. Grannies. Malala...  
The performing part of it is simple.

effective.

Yet

It feels the right way to tell this story.  
And the music is so nice.  
Like, so nice.

It creates a warm atmosphere that feels like home.

It gives this performance a calm and 'safe' touch.

I cannot imagine how hard it must be to live in a word I don't understand and which doesn't understand me.

Nor how hard it must be to love someone who is in that position.

The position of not being able to understand how people love and get hurt.

BUT.

This performance has given me an idea of what it is like, and I feel grateful for that.

SO THANK YOU MOLLY AND TEAM.

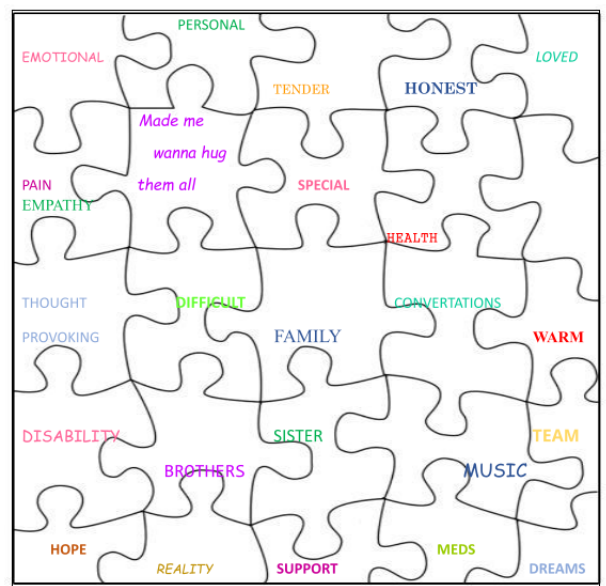
You have told a meaningful, enriching and thought provoking story.

A story worthy telling -and watching-

I hope I would encounter stories like this more often.

REAL stories.

Of our world, our people and us as a community.



## The pieces fit

Emma Robinson reacts to the 'profoundly beautiful' *Jigsaw*

*Jigsaw* is profoundly beautiful. It is expressive and articulate interchangeably – and yes, there is a difference. At points Molly Parker explains her perspective on the vital need to alter our vocabulary surrounding the actions of people with autism, to refer to it as the individual's preferences rather than symptoms of their autism. She does so with clarity and evident rehearsal, selecting the right words to assert her view with conviction. At other points the performance takes on an unrehearsed style. The intimacy and honesty of this –

I am trying to have control, to be clear, and articulate, to have thought this through and ordered my thoughts into a linear response. But it is not honest to do so. I'm not lying; I'm just walking around the edge of my feelings, hoping I can spiral into the centre.

I'm still doing it now.

This is what I would like to say...

There was so much love. It swelled and pulsed throughout *Jigsaw*. It was caring and careful and so kind, so overwhelmingly, affectingly kind. It was humbling and made me want to be a better person. Society does not merely need to pay attention to these marginalised experiences to accommodate them, it needs to allow itself to be altered by the empathy these relationships epitomise.

I would like to tell you...

I've worked with children and young who have special needs for a few years, and the days I've spent with them have been some of the most joyful and formative of my life. Because they are joyous

and beautiful and kind people. And sometimes they're sad and distressed too. And because I cannot always understand their feelings, without the prescribed and limited way of communicating that is words, it is not easy to help them. They can express, but I long for them to be articulate.

I would like to admit...

I've never really thought about what will happen when the young people who I work with no longer have their parents. When they are grown up, who will support them? I've not thought what happens when there isn't family.

I would like to thank the creators of *Jigsaw*, the bravery of Molly, the medium of theatre, all of it, for reminding me how to feel gratitude and hope and love, for reminding me why we share.

I would like to apologise...

I feel solipsistic. Having watched a performance which is so emphatically about family and relationships, I have said the word 'I' twenty times. I didn't mean to, but it would be a false to avoid introspection. It would be too easy to distance myself from a play that gently pleads for engagement.

There are so many aspects of this performance, from the ordered-disorder of the set design to the accessibility, from the meta quality to the notion of testimony, which deserve consideration. I have no words left for this, but I hope you can understand now what I mean when I say it is profoundly beautiful – I hope I have expressed myself clearly enough.

## Putting it together

Lydia Kendall-McDougall pieces together Pound of Flesh's *Jigsaw*

This is less a review than it is a love letter. *Jigsaw*, written and acted by Molly Parker, retracing her experience growing up with two non-verbal autistic brothers, is the best example of digital theatre I've seen at NSDF21. Authentic, imaginative, intimate and energetic, *Jigsaw* doesn't feel like theatre adapted for screen, but theatre meant for a digital platform. The emotional intensity of the show stays with you long after you've seen it.

The show is a powerful blend of spoken word and music. The band, superimposed on four jigsaw pieces behind Molly, blend into and emotionally emphasise her story. The volumes and intensities of the music both respond to and influence Molly's emotions. For instance, Molly's first mention of her brother being non-verbal coincides with the slow deconstruction of one of the songs. I was completely moved.

The camera does not merely film the show, but adopts an active role, held by director Matt Owen. It moves with Molly, following

her as she walks across the stage, zooming in and out, being spoken to. In part four, Matt's voice is heard behind the camera – it is never something that we pretend isn't there. In an on-stage, meta-theatrical conversation between Matt and Molly (producer Kate Chalmer's voice offstage) about the process of creating *Jigsaw*, there are three cameras at play, two of which we see. There is literally nothing hidden from us here.

Molly's acting is energetic and arresting. The ebbs and flows of her emotions feel completely real, and her body and voice is in constant conversation with the music and her surroundings (it helps that there is also so much to look at onstage, such as clothes, crumpled newspapers, chairs, bottles, and jigsaw pieces covering the walls).

From Molly's writing, to music composition, to the band in jigsaw pieces on the wall, *Jigsaw* is a labour of love. Every creative aspect of this play works in conversation with the others. It is utterly brilliant.

↪



## Get movin'

Mark Smith tests the limits of Zoom

### The dreaded Zoom call.

One of the most notorious zeitgeists in the age of Covid-19, epitomising the absurd reality we have stumbled into. Now commonplace, being able to spend time with family and friends involves enduring Zoom's imminent frustrations: the delays, the glitching, the dodgy Wi-Fi booting you out of the server. Gawking at colleagues and loved ones on a screen – or, in my case, using my Zoom square as my own personal Narcissus pool – has quickly become claustrophobic and draining. With many of the NSDF shows this year succumbing to the Zoom format, one issue coming to light is how we translate physical theatre and movement direction to the tricky, unpredictable language of a Zoom call. Elin Schofield, NSDF Associate with a range of credits as a movement director, wrestles with this issue in her workshop, 'Movement on Zoom: Limiting or Limitless?'

Already cramped into my modestly sized bedroom, experiencing the cliché of London

living conditions first-hand, I worry how my space will operate with the exercises Elin is about to set us. As I've learned the hard way, dance classes and yoga sessions are already out of the question. As we begin, however, Elin is quick to reassure us all that each participant should feel comfortable, diving head on into these exercises, but only insofar as our parameters and restrictions will allow. Split across breakout rooms and tasked to devise a collaborative piece of physical theatre, we discover that our individual limitations can be manipulated to our advantage: play with furniture, play with levels, play with angles, play with depth, play with *everything* at your disposal. For Elin, our environments should be our inspiration rather than our obstacle.

The end results became a mix of whimsical, yet oddly touching, moments: disembodied arms reaching across screens in the hopes of finding another, hands passing through one screen only to phase through the screen underneath, and – my personal favourite – the "foot ballet"

underscored by Vivaldi. The process I was initially cautious to throw myself into, became a child-like joy as we experienced new ways of turning our little Zoom squares into its own stage. Elin's workshop allowed me to reconsider a lot of shows taking place at NSDF this year. While each show demonstrates well-crafted, promising new writing, I worry about the slog of repeatedly watching eyes staring back at me. I see these actors desperate to connect with each other, but can any script rise to the challenge of the disconnect inherent in every Zoom call? The platform is designed to bring us together, and yet every call seems a relentless reminder that we are more alone than ever. Perhaps we could all benefit from expanding our horizons beyond the confines of our Zoom windows. Perhaps each show taking place during this unconventional year at NSDF deserves to experience the freedom Elin Schofield nurtured today.

↪

MacBook Pro



# Mirror Mirror

Issy Flower looks into *The Light Catcher*

*The Light Catcher* is a play of dualisms and reflections | snoitcelfer dna smsilaud fo yalp a si rehctac thgil eht

It dwells on the themes of how we view ourselves in art, how we manipulate others to make it, and the ramifications of being seen and framed | demarf dna nees gnieb fo snoitacifimar eht dna, ti ekam ot srehto etalupinam ew who, tra ni sevlesruo wiew who fo semeht eht no sllewd ti

In having one actress play all characters, we see shades of the lead character's personality in every persona, ventriloquising their experience as she sought to possess it in her photos | sotohp reh ni ti sessop ot thguos ehs sa ecneirepxe richt

gnisiuqolirtnev, anosrep yreve ni ytilanosrep s'retcarahc deal eht fo sedahs ees ew, sretcarahc lla yalp ssertca eno gnivah ni

The use of one space, too, suggests the singular space of the artistic mind which can occupy multiple places at once | econ ta secalp elpitlum ypucco nac hcihw dnim citsitra eht fo ecaps ralugnis eht stseggus, oot, ecaps eno fo esu eht

The correlation between form and content here matches that of the photos: the audience views what is ultimately a reflected image, containing a snapshot of memory, but one that possesses many shades of grey | yerg fo sedahs ynam sessessop that eno tub, yromem fo tohspons a

gniniatnoc, egami detcelfer a yletamitlu si tahw sweiv ecneidua eht: sotohp eht fo that sehctam ereh tnetnoc dna mrof neewteb noitalerroc eht

Overall, the show is an engaging representation of the artistic experience, containing the dualities of multiple languages (visual, English and Hindi), places, people and perceptions | snoitpecrep dna elpoep, secalp, (idniH dna hsilgnE, lausiv) seguagnal elpitlum fo seitilaud eht gniniatnoc, ecneirepxe citsitra eht fo noitatneserper gnigagne na si wohs eht, llarevo

...ansmUH

Humans...

## A path less travelled

Lydia Kendall-McDougall gets inspired by Tamsin Greig

**When Simon Godwin introduced his conversational masterclass with Tamsin Greig as a focus on classical theatre, my heart sank. I was anticipating a discussion that wouldn't translate to students with little to no experience in professional theatre, let alone classical productions across National Theatre and the RSC. But Tamsin Greig is incredibly, well, normal... and she had a lot to teach me about taking the path which suits you best and putting yourself into your work.**

When asked about her journey into acting, Greig explained that she'd never been to drama school. Yes, she'd tried her luck with ten different schools, but no one was willing to take the leap with her. Instead, she went to university, where she studied no Shakespeare. None. She wasn't 'in rep', but performed in fringe shows and one-off plays, one of which happened to be her first step into Shakespeare with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Now she is an extremely prominent classical actor (among many other things), most recently in *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet*,

both directed by Godwin. What Greig stresses here is that no route is the 'right' one, and she is an example of success coming out of less conventional pathways.

She begins her approach to Shakespeare in the same place many of us, guiltily, do too. Step one: Shakespeare for kids. Step two: Sparknotes. Step three: allow the language of Shakespeare to elevate you. She doesn't admit this because there is no shame. The necessity of starting out simple with Shakespeare is—and no one can truly deny this—necessary. And she doesn't hesitate to admit what she still doesn't get about Shakespeare either, mentioning that when playing Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, she cut a line from her dialogue after still not understanding it six months in. This was comforting to me as an English Literature student who feels compelled to 'get' Shakespeare from the get-go. From this perspective, a refusal to adapt Shakespeare to contemporary contexts can become a rejection of inclusivity. It appears Greig shares my sentiment: when discussing playing Malvolia in *Twelfth Night*, a production

aiming to adapt Shakespeare for the modern day, she mentions that people responded that they were excited about not being stupid, about getting it, about participating in it.

Which is why Greig isn't focused on her predecessors when playing a role. She maintains that if she's been offered a role, it's her's to have a go at: she asks herself who she feels the character is regardless of who else has played them. For me, this is a lesson about bringing yourself, your experience and your interpretation to a role, in spite of (and maybe even in defiance of) what other people have chosen to do with it. I think that what Tamsin Greig taught me this afternoon is that becoming and being an actor cannot, and should not, be treated as a homogenous experience. People find different routes, and once they arrive, must bring themselves to their roles. And most importantly, do not be afraid to say 'I don't get it'.



# Memes of the day

curated by **Sam Ross**

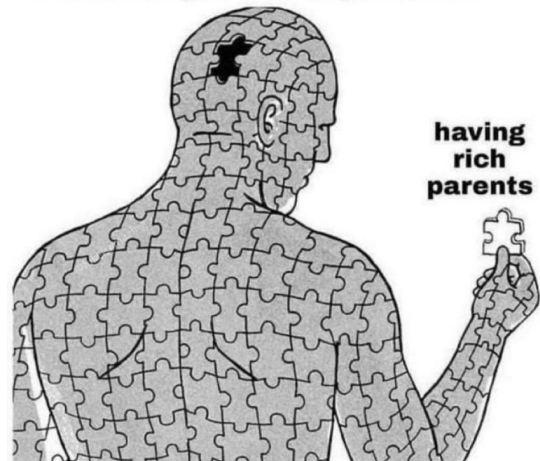


Sam Ross



Lydia Kendall-McDougall

**Sometimes what a theatre-maker needs is just one piece...**



Florence Bell



Day 1 of NSDF // Day 2 of NSDF  
 Anna Mahtani



Beth Edwards



Robin Wilde



Writing a 300/word review



Signing up to yet another workshop  
 Anna Mahtani





ISSUE #2

# NOISES OFF

NSDF 9091

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