



#### Editorial

The festival flies on. I can't help but feel impressed. With everything. Everyone. We sometimes catch glimpses of a world outside all this. The news of the French elections. The war in Ukraine. Our government's doom-spiral inducing injustice. It feels strange to even mention them here. As though it's spoiling something. But it's also still happening, even if it goes unspoken.

Resist the urge to keep scrolling. Then snap back. Fold down a seat and sink into another world. A new story. For a moment.

The last couple of days have raised many questions, and so this issue begins to take those questions' shape. What happens when realities do go unacknowledged? What happens when it is too soon to share them? Who takes responsibility for redressing these imbalances? Who has the energy? Who has the time? Who has the money? Who is allowed to simply be joyful? Who has the energy to ask these questions in the first place?

I hope these pages help you think and reflect on what you've seen and experienced of the festival so far. On page 2, Beth Bowden offers a heartfelt and honest response to unkept pandemic promises, and on page 3, Taiwo Ava Oyebola offers a much needed perspective on the pressure artists can feel to tell traumatic stories on stage. *Noff's* own Florence Bell writes on the exhaustion of having to advocate for your access requirements in an industry that prides itself on progress (page 3). It feels difficult to know how to feel sometimes, but sometimes feelings are so strong that it feels difficult not to share them.

The reviews and responses to shows are just as intricate and sharp, capturing the challenge not only of responding fairly to works in progress - something that hasn't been without substantial consideration and discussion around the Noffice table - but also of processing work that meets you somewhere you weren't expecting to be taken. Clodagh Chapman, Zoe Callow and Nathan Hardie offer up their different experiences of Dull Thuds of Love, and Beth Bowden gives a resounding response to Reservation. The creative team behind Them offer us an insight into what it's felt like to create a show during the pandemic. Their hopeful words were sent in at a time when they were much needed. We must feel hopeful. Without hope the better future isn't imagined, let alone built. But

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hope does not mean averting your attention in case an idealised vision becomes spoiled.

There's still time for you to contribute words to *Noises Off*, and to put the upcoming *Noff* zine session in your diary (15:30-17:00). I'll be handing my editor hat over to Emma and Florence for the zine-making, as my festival experience gets cut short on Thursday. But we have paper. We have scissors. We have pens. We have glue. We're waiting for you. It's always a slightly chaotic thing to create a magazine together from scratch, but a beautiful one too, to hold each other's words in our hands.

Noff love, **Naomi Noises Off Editor** 

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

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### **Rant Vibes**

Beth Bowden argues for a more accessible theatre landscape post lockdown

I'm gonna rant – and I'm sorry about it, but I am. As a young theatre-maker, it felt like, (and forgive me if this was *naïvely idealistic*), like something might actually change in the theatre industry as we emerged from the pandemic.

Throughout the lockdowns – there were talks. Actual discussions. In tiny *Zoom boxes* all over the world. There was a global space emerging: international practitioners were in creative dialogue, ruminating together, and **daring** to imagine a better future. There was kick-ass refreshing honesty – about what was working, what should be killed off, about the woeful treatment of freelancers, about ongoing structural inequality... I dared to dream – was it somehow possible, in this enforced pause, to dig into the guts of the theatre industry collectively and collaboratively, and to reset and *'come back better'*? At this point, I was back in my childhood bedroom, and in my small, suffocating town, and yet *somehow*, I felt creatively *alive*. The creative solutions coming out were ELECTRIC.

For example, my lovely mum – who is chronically ill and largely housebound – *finally* had access to digital theatre. Largely, since she felt ill, she hasn't been able to watch theatre. Through livestreams and online content, the explosion of digital theatre was finally opening up provision. Provision to those who have been traditionally excluded from our cultural life – rejected by extortionate pricing, inaccessible architecture, theatre etiquette, cost of public transport and location. I have to note here: accessible theatre work is not a new idea: academics and theatre-makers like Kirsty Sedgman, Nikki Miles-Wildin, Bree Hadley, and Hannah Simpson have been talking about how to ensure genuine accessible provision for years. Suddenly, in the pandemic, some change was FINALLY HAPPENING (not nearly enough, but some).

Whilst many arts organisations disappeared (ARGH) and shut up doors, there were emerging creative leaders who were actively working with resilience, bravery, and faith. Slung Low in Holbeck had turned themselves into a social referral unit and were feeding their local community. Doorstep Arts in Torbay were working tirelessly to ensure creative provision for vulnerable young people and their community. These FAB pockets of creative ingenuity were grinding day in day out, carving out joyful moments amongst the crisis, **all whilst** supporting their communities' mental and physical well-being. What is art for, except for this? Where were the buildings and organisations with triple, quadruple their budgets?

It felt like, amid this awful global crisis, the UK theatre industry was choosing seeds of growth. I hoped and I hoped that these conversations, these examples, these creative ideas would **spark** action. That as the theatre industry gently restarted, we wouldn't just return to normality – **it would be different this time**. These were the promises.

But the reality so far isn't promising. I'm saddened that so far digital provision seems to have slipped away. Most organisations are STILL not creatively embedding access requirements. Organisations like Doorstep and Slung Low continue to courageously support their communities, but the balance of ACE funding is still prioritising big traditional buildings, not reflexive grassroots work.

I'm writing this at NSDF (the National Student Drama Festival) – which has a digital hub of work running alongside the festival, is free for the first time, and in consultation with Nikki Miles-Wildin has largely embedded access into the festival, with captions, BSL interpretation and audio description. These are extremely commendable changes, and it is joyful to walk around a space where mostly everyone has been considered and supported. NSDF is one of the organisations that have actioned *some* of the ideas floated during the lockdowns. But truthfully, I feel like I shouldn't have to pat NSDF on the back for doing the bare minimum in terms of making spaces accessible for everyone. Don't get me wrong, these are amazing, AMAZING changes, and are absolutely welcomed – but, for me, the **proof** will be in the **longevity** of this level of access – can we expect the same standard over the coming years? Only time will tell, but at least they are trying (which is more than can be said for some buildings/organisations..).

Looking to the wider theatre industry, I remain hopeful that the words of lockdown will still turn into actions – but boy I'm angry at how long it's taking. Watch this space, I guess (rant over...for now, **ARGH**).

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## Tending the wound

Making work about traumatic experiences shouldn't come at the expense of care for both audience and performer, says Taiwo Ava Oyebola

There is a trend recently in which young writers and/or performers, and particularly those from intentionally overlooked communities (global majority, women, non-binary, disabled, queer, trans), bare their trauma on the stage for all to witness.

Yes, there is something cathartic in revisiting the past to shake off its hold on you, but you can only do that when you have actively done the work in the present to reckon with its grip.

As a writer, you are encouraged to write what you know, largely about your life experience, but I think equally it should be about writing what you know emotionally, which includes not only the experience of the trauma but also the experience of healing it.

In today's culture, trauma seems like this intangible thing that you can't put a finger on, but by returning to its Greek origins – it translates literally as 'wound' – I find it easier to figure out its meaning. If you have not yet experienced the healing of your trauma, 'the wound', you are just rubbing on something that is still sore and tender, cutting it open each time you perform or encounter the piece again. I feel quite sensitive about this as I've made the same mistake – mistaking the raw sensation of baring myself onstage as me being radically honest, real and authentic – when all it did was make me feel empty. It was anything but empowering.

That is from the perspective of the writer and performer, but there is a duty of care to your audience too. To some extent, theatre is voyeuristic, you are invited by the creative team to witness something, there is an element of permission/consent there, but it is an odd sensation to feel like you shouldn't be watching something. It is almost like being invited to an intimate dinner party

## May contain

The festival has come far, says Florence Bell, but it's still not enough

### This show may contain flashing lights or haze.

This show may contain flashing lights. Or it may not.

This show may contain flashing lights. We've gone to the length of printing out a sign but we can't really be expected to go any further. Find out once you're there?

This show may contain sandwiches or bread. All the same to us.

This show may contain something that will cause you to have a seizure, sustain a severe injury, or send you to A and E. Or it may not.

This show may contain flashing lights, or haze, or strobe, or venomous spiders, or graphic descriptions of sexual assault, or sandwiches, or clouds, or a big gravitydefying floating orb composed of unspecified substances, or some jokes, or smoking on stage, or loud noises designed to give you sensory overload, or a scene so beautiful you will think about it for the rest of your life. Hehe. We don't know!

We are providing you with a notice/warning/ sign and you can do with that what you will. This show may contain sandwiches, or bread. It's all the same to us. This show may contain orange juice, or traces of nuts. You are responsible for looking after yourself.

This show may not contain compassion for its audience.

This festival will contain BSL-interpreted, audio-described and captioned events. This is wonderful, and exciting.

This festival may contain a quiet space on the Curve Mez that is surrounded by loud noises from get ins and techs, music and conversations.

This festival will not contain sensory-adapted performances, relaxed performances, or proper provisions for people with invisible disabilities. (It's frustrating to see so much brilliant work being done in some areas and that not extended to other areas. This organisation is so clearly capable of such high levels of care and attention to detail in terms of making itself more accessible. I start to wonder whether I'm asking too much or not asking enough.)

This year's festival has more access provisions than it ever has before, and more than what by someone you barely talked to at uni, and when drunk, they conspiratorially confess their deepest darkest secrets to you. Yes, you were invited, but should you be there? It is bold and courageous to be vulnerable and to also do that publicly, however, one should be cautious about storming the castle to slay the dragon, lest others get burned too.



theatres and buildings around the country that get more money from the Arts Council than NSDF offer. But it still has more progress to make, especially in terms of accessibility of design for individual shows.

We respect our participants enough to tell them what the shows at this festival may contain, but not what they will.

This festival may contain the willingness to do better – and it will never get there without us giving it a chance. But this festival does contain the ability to make advocating for yourself feel like tiring work.

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# **Rinsing off**

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Clodagh Chapman feels her way through the textures of Definitely Fine's work in progress Dull Thuds of Love

it's about men, sort of, but mostly about love and sickness and flesh and beforeness and desperation.

it's got a queerness in its guts (and a sort of campness to it too?) [it's about feeling strange and soapy and fleshy and ashamed.]

"God is dead" / "that seems unlikely"

it's the sort of slick and foamy work that you need to stand in while it pools around your feet, and it makes me think about resonance too

like the

yeah

the sense that I get it, in the sense that I couldn't explain it to my mum but I think I feel the feeling you felt when you put it down even if I couldn't pinpoint exactly why or how.

(experimental work can be funny! more experimental work should be funny why did we decide that it can't be!)

there's something in the politics of laughter too

[men laughing and when they laugh, and when not-men laugh. who's laughing and when and why. not to be tiredly structuralist about the whole thing.] [but I don't want to make a play made mostly by women about men and their feelings.]

it all felt a bit like gently pressing on a bruise. or that expanding foam that I want to press my fingers into. like there's a twinge of something familiar and gently uncomfortable but in a sort of satisfying way.

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### **Resounding joy**

THEATRE Beth Bowden on the joyful, funny and moving Reservation

David Longworth leads us in a minute's silence at the end of *Reservation*. It is a powerful moment, and a testimonial to the unequal treatment of vulnerable people throughout the pandemic: to remember those who have passed away or can't be with us.

In the silence, I think of Rory Kinnear's article in the Guardian: 'My sister died of coronavirus. She needed care, but her life was not disposable'. As a sibling of a brother with cerebral palsy, I have seen the effects of isolation, lack of resources and care, and discrimination has had on my family first-hand. The treatment of disability and chronic illness in this country over the last 20 years, fills me with rage. Put starkly, people have died, and will continue to die due to the UK government. Within the last two years, it has felt like the protection of vulnerable people has been, for the want of a better word, SHIT – pushed lower in the agenda to prioritise the economy, or those

who don't want to wear a mask. But this treatment goes much further than that, with systemic cuts over the last ten years criminally reducing access to local services and benefits. It is this personal context that makes *Reservation* an important watch for me.

Despite the emotional introduction to this review – one thing *Reservation* is, is full of JOY. The piece plays on the intricacies, brilliance, stereotypes, and frustrations of having a disability or being neurodivergent – and it is full of revolutionary rage and boundless joy in equal measure.

Colourfully clad in EPIC dungarees and party hats, the cast (all young disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent creatives), take us on a deeply personal exploration of their experiences. Highlights included for me, Emily Bold and Rhiannon May singing/BSL signing two original songs called 'Piss on Pity' and 'The Stim Dance'. While they were both rocking out, the rest of the cast danced and threw confetti and glitter everywhere, filling the stage with light. It felt like watching a punk, power revolution – they were having so much fun, sticking it to the government and to the PIP process... their joy was infectious. I really enjoyed the individual testimonics which filtered throughout the piece.

Written by the performers, these were a raw and honest move away from tropes about disabled lives – incredibly funny and moving in equal measure.

If I talk too much more, I will spoil it for you. It is a brilliant celebration of these young creatives – who as Nickie Miles-Wildin (DaDaFest's joint Artistic Director and CEO) reminds us, celebrate Disability as a **creative opportunity**. What's more, audio description, BSL and captioning is embedded into the performance, which is ACE to see. Creative, joyful representation onstage. ACE.

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# Your Disco Needs You

THEATRE Nathan Hardie gets involved in DJ Baz's Year 6 Disco

### I'm 18 and I'm wrapped under covers in a hotel room in Malia.

My friends have gone to the main strip, celebrating A-Level completion by getting drunk and searching for more attractive company. Sniffling and feeling sorry for myself, these emotions of loneliness and anxiety were indicative of who I was about to become. When Bazzer was 22, he was on a rooftop rave in Magaluf before succumbing to his own panic attack, leading to a traumatic event he's not ready to face quite yet. Especially as tonight, 13 years later, is the Year 6 leavers' disco, his biggest gig of the year! However, the school board is trying to cast fresher talent, a severe conflict that reopens DJ Baz's deep-rooted wounds. The show took me on a wild rollercoaster of certified bangers and heavy drops. One minute I was enthusiastically popping shapes to YMCA, the next caught off-guard by such honest introspection – a brutal juxtaposition smoothly executed.

Jack Sutherland's charismatic performance as Bazzer carries a one man show that bounces off the audience, sometimes literally with a beach ball. Sitting in the front row secured me involvement, no spoilers though because 'I'm safe like that'. Though both Bazzer and I may be stuck in the past, trauma as well as music-wise, the fact we're both recognising it means we're slowly catching up to the present. Unfortunately, the baggage doesn't leave but it does lessen, and I hope we can all find some respite doing the Macarena.





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# Learning to play

NSDF LAB

Zoe Callow and Nathan Hardie find the fun in the playful NSDF LAB show Hide and Seek

#### Nathan Hardie: How did you find it?

Zoe Callow: It came at a really good time for me! I'd been feeling a little rushed, running from event to event all afternoon, and stressed about everything I had to do. And then I went in and it was half an hour of play. I feel so good now, it reminded me how important it is to play and have unstructured fun.

N: Which is probably why I struggled to get it initially, my life has been built into such a structured routine just to cope with everything that I was already planning my review in advance.

Z: In the post-show Q&A the artists said they wanted to explore being an adult trying to regain the playfulness of childhood, and one of the things the show seemed to be saying was that it is not an easy task.

N: Accessing that inner child as a cynical critic I found incredibly tough. By the end, I finally connected with what was happening just as Emily left the LAB in a strop. I must've felt like my parents did when I left home.

Z: And it was so interesting for me as a critic because it was asking me not to be a critic, at least not in the traditional sense. It also put us in a strange position as an audience more generally. I was being encouraged to see the world through a child's eyes, but I don't think they accounted for how sitting in a relatively traditional theatre setting would impact my ability to do that.

N: Exactly, and I was trying to impose a narrative onto their games, compartmentalise it like an adult does whilst missing that idea. I'd consider ways how they can inform people on what they're about to do, such as signs for a splash zone in the front row, but it would completely defeat the point.

Z: It was interesting to watch this after the day's funding-themed discussion, where we talked about how competition for funds puts pressure on art to have a 'purpose' and tangible outcomes. *Hide and Seek* felt really radical to me because it was resisting this capitalist logic of productivity, by celebrating the value of experiential play without an end goal.

N: My adult brain thinks about ways of marketing it, which stems from internalised capitalism in theatre, a business background and financial childhood anxieties. However, listening to my inner child, why can't theatre just be fun? There clearly is an audience for this work and can even provide therapeutic nature in its playfulness, so why shouldn't it be funded more?

Z: Definitely! Coming back to whether we should be thinking as an adult or a child during the performance, is it fair to summarise that for me it felt like a relief from adulthood, and for you it was stressful because you felt like you were meant to access an experience of childhood, which you found difficult? We had completely opposite experiences?

N: I don't think I could put it better myself.

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# In the beginning

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Zoe Callow writes on her experience of work in progress showing Dull Thuds of Love

#### 1:1 In the beginning, there was Poetry.

1:2 And the first phrase of Poetry was good, and densely packed, and precisely formed.

r:3 And I clung to the first phrase of Poetry and dug my nails into each word like ten sharp little anchors.

1:4 And the Poetry unfurled itself into a microcosm of desire and isolation, momentarily letting me into Adam, Eve and Lilith's world.

r:7 But while I was anchored, the Poetry had moved on.

1:10 And the Poetry was telling me that something had happened between Adam and Lilith, but I had missed it, because I was trying to understand the other Poetry.

1:12 And I clung to the next available phrase of Poetry from Eve, which was unexpectedly funny.

1:16 But by the time I had understood it, Adam was speaking, and I had no idea what was happening.

1:38 And the Poetry moved on. And moved on. And moved on.

1:35 And the Poetry became Quite A Lot.

I:41 And I could not keep up with the Poetry, so I stopped trying to keep up with the

### Thudding in sync

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Nathan Hardie finds much to relate to in the work in progress sharing of Dull Thuds of Love

As soon as the cast of Definitely Fine turned around, when the bright lights shone and ominous music drew in, a feeling of paralysis came over me.

The intensity was surprising, thankfully broken up with brief pockets of levity to prevent emotion draining. The conceptual nature meant I was never laughing in sync with the audience, and the story was what you derived from it.

For me, I was witnessing the first ever love triangle between Adam, Eve and Lilith, and was able to relate with each character's plight and pains. I share Lilith's want to be wanted, always in a position where I'm on the outside of an inside joke. I embody Eve's rage, designated with a purpose impossible to attain, a promise never met despite reasonable expectations. Finally, I empathise with Adam's struggle of being unable to satisfy, to fully open up and give all of myself to somebody. Nonetheless, I'm potentially only pulling one string from a biblical-sized thread.

With this method of storytelling, *Dull Thuds of Love* will not be for everyone. It's

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Poetry.

1:57 And the Poetry ceased for a moment, for Lilith to interview Eve about Adam.

1:58 And in the cessation of Poetry I was elated to understand a power dynamic between these characters and captivated by performers completely present in playing this out.

1:70 But then Eve began to speak more Poetry, and so I abandoned myself to this sea of words I could not process at the speed of speech.

a credit to the writing they can use such difficult language but keep relatability, and to the actors for achieving such depth and range. Their ability to convey complex emotions through facial expressions, tone and limited movement carries a multifacered production. Aided by imposing sound and impactful lighting, this work in progress feels like the finished article, and is a testament to the oldest romantic entanglement in Christianity.

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# Them in the making

Members of the cast (Jason Fernandes, Cadija Jalo, Asim Mirza, Moses Oridoye, Eden Tambala) and director Annie John speak about creating their show Them

In the dark months of winter, creating this show has been a welcome reminder of the power of people coming together in a room to move, play, share experiences, tell stories and connect. We hope that in watching *Them*, the audience shares this too.

Annie: After two years of standing apart, talking through a screen and working independently, the sheer act of sharing space has felt radical in itself.

**Moses:** Creating a show after not being able to perform for so long feels new and fresh in the sort of way that it almost feels like I'm doing it for the first time again.

**Cadija:** In the process we had a lot of open, interesting and educational discussions which allowed us to gather ideas and really develop our own connection to the work.

Moses: I know for sure making this show has rekindled a need in me to create.

**Jason:** I feel making theatre now feels more urgent. Before this I really lost my passion for performing. I feel lucky that Annie and the group have really helped to bring out the creative side of me again.

**Cadija:** I feel that I am back in my element doing what I enjoy the most. Having the opportunity to make this work has provided me with a platform to express myself and what I feel is important to share. **Eden:** The process and what NSDF offered us, has encouraged us to grow as performers. It helped me to refine my performance skills and allowed me the space to create new, innovative and thought provoking work. It's been such a pleasure working alongside a group of amazing individuals who have taught me what it means to work in a community of equally powerful creatives.

**Jason:** I've been supported in so many different ways. I've learnt to become a better actor, how to produce, how to direct. It's helped me become a choreographer.

**Asim:** It has made me explore new ways to make and perform work.

**Moses:** Over the past couple of years the arts have been silenced, new generations of people have been burdened with responsibilities that they didn't ask for and the world has seen so much strife. It felt like the piece we've created needed to be put out there, we needed to speak.

**Eden:** It's been powerful and important in rehearsal to share experiences with each other in a safe way and see how these experiences have shaped our views about where we come from and what home and identity means to us.

**Cadija:** This show has been about understanding how our past still impacts our society today.

Eden: And how our history informs who we choose to be.

**Moses:** We wanted to look at how Fanny Eaton's identity was essentially stolen from her. She was painted often as unnamed characters or in other exoticised ways but never as herself.

**Cadija:** Just like so many people who have been erased by history. It's about reminding the audience of those important figures who may have been forgotten or overlooked as they weren't written about in the history books.

**Moses:** We want to say to the audience that we are a new generation and we're not going to allow our voices or our identity be taken away.

**Jason:** We want the work to say that although our generation is still suffering, we have to find our own way to move, build and succeed.

"Over the past couple of years the arts have been silenced, new generations of people have been burdened with responsibilities that they didn't ask for"

**Asim:** Theatre feels like a welcoming place for me. Theatre is one of the best ways to communicate and send messages out into the world.

**Cadija:** I feel that theatre is accessible to me and young people like myself, through these opportunities given to me by my college, NSDF and the theatres in my community.

**Moses:** It's not about being lucky and being from the right family anymore it's now about determination and having the sheer willpower to strive for your dream. And after the last few years we've got that determination more than ever.

### I said boom boom boom, let me hear you say poetry.

Bróccán Tyzack-Carlin recounts the early stirrings of his stand-up show Turtle

Tim Westwood = Sea Turtle

Last modified: 15 Jul 2019, 18:38 Created: 15 Jul 2019

#### The Noises Off team asked if I would maybe write a little something about making Turtle so here! Happy now! Let my wife and son go free!

In 2019 I wrote down a note in my phone: "Tim Westwood = Sea Turtle".

I had no idea what this meant but I liked it and had a chuckle to myself then I forgot about it and moved on with my life.

2019: I decided I wanted to try and develop a show to take round the Fringe circuit in 2020 (Imfao). I went to open mics on the spoken word and stand up comedy circuits with routines about the rift in the Royal Family, and a poem about bus drivers and I was having a lovely time shouting these things at various people.

2020: Oh no, our global arts community, it's broken! The world became shit didn't it! Boooo. All of a sudden I wasn't able to shout about the Spice Girls or vibrators at strangers anymore. And that's my favourite thing to do. It's my whole thing. Instead I spent a year listening to *Skimbleshanks the Railway Cat*, playing Planet Coaster and coming to terms with the fact that live performance was dead (RIP). 2021: Things seem to vaguely be reopening. I ask my mates for open spots as favours. The first set I do I am shitting myself. I don't remember how to do the things I do. I want to leave. But it goes well. The audience are up for it. Gasping for air and punching each other in the face from the sheer excitement of being out the house. One of them shouts "He's back! The comedy poetry messiah of Teesside has returned! This is the true vaccine!" and they carried me into the streets on their shoulders.

After a month of recycling the same 15 minutes of material (Thatcher/Vibrator/ Bus/Spice Girls) I started looking through my notes on my phone and saw the Tim Westwood=Sea Turtle note. I remembered the reason I wrote it down was the fact that he's a very odd liar and I started doing some research. The more I looked into him, the more I realised that I wanted to make a show about class and place and identity. I had already subconsciously been writing material about these things.

I decided to talk about my life and where I'm from for the first time onstage. Obviously made very silly because I'm a coward, but it's not something I'd ever felt comfortable doing in the past. I didn't think anyone would give a shit. I almost cut the whole statue routine the night before the first show because it felt like it was "too Hartlepudlian" for audiences. It's now my favourite thing I've written and performed. And I got to do it here. What a bloody treat.

But yeah, that's how I made the show. And I'm very glad I did. Remember, when external or internal voices make you doubt whether what you're making is worth anyone's time *"kick them to the curb man. We're gonna keep it real man."* (Westwood, 63 years old). A true sage.

