



by David Harrower

Education Resource Pack

By Helen Cadbury

Contents

Introduction	3
Interview with Katie Posner - director	4
Extracts From the Director's Rehearsal Notes	5
Designer's Presentation	6
Model Boxes	7
Costume Designs	8
Interview with Lydia Denno - designer	9
Blackbird Stage Management	10
In rehearsal: how it all begins	11
Interview with George Costigan	12
Interview with Charlie Covell	13
Text Activity	14
Review Writing: Evaluation of a Performance	15
Devising from Stimulus Material	16
Further Resources	17

The Tour Dates

York Theatre Royal: Studio

20 Oct - 12 Nov

Box Office: 01904 623568

Tron Theatre, Glasgow

Tue 15 - Sat 19 Nov

Mercury Theatre, Colchester

Wed 23 - Sat 26 Nov

Northcott Theatre, Exeter

Wed 30 Nov - Sat 3 Dec

Introduction

Blackbird is a hard hitting exploration of a forbidden relationship. When Una, a twenty-seven year old woman, seeks out Ray, now in his fifties, she is looking for answers to what happened between them fifteen years earlier.

David Harrower's award-winning play was first commissioned by the Edinburgh International Festival. It premiered at the 2005 festival under the direction of Peter Stein and starred Roger Allam and Jodhi May. In February 2006 it opened at the West End Albery Theatre, with the same cast, and has since been seen all over the world and translated into several languages.

We recommend this play to school and college groups over 16 years old. If you are intending to bring a GCSE group, please read the text first.

This pack takes you behind the scenes into the process of creating this Pilot and York Theatre Royal co-production.

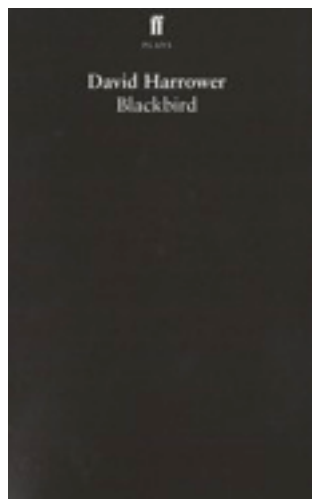
There are interviews with the creative and production teams and accounts of rehearsal room practice to enable students to gain an insight into the process of developing the work from page to stage.

The pack will be of interest to teachers and students of vocational performing arts, including BTEC National Diploma in Acting or Technical Theatre, AS/ A level Drama and Theatre, through to degree level Drama, Acting, Directing, Theatre Design and Music.

The material in this pack may be reproduced for classroom use only and not for resale or reproduction in print or electronically without the prior permission of the author or photographers.

Helen Cadbury www.theatrestudy.co.uk

David Harrower
Born and brought up in Edinburgh, he now lives in Glasgow. His recent plays include *A Slow Air*, which he also directed, for The Tron Theatre, Glasgow and an adaptation of *The Government Inspector* for the Young Vic Theatre, London. His new play for the National Theatre of Scotland, *Callum's Road*, has recently opened at the Tron in Glasgow and he is working on screenplay for *Blackbird*.



Interview with Katie Posner

Director

When embarking on a new piece of work, how does the directing process begin?

I don't have a specific process that I do for every show, but with this play I've been very interested in getting to know the text inside out, because there are so many layers that I've kept discovering. I've had to do a lot of research into the subject matter. In terms of exercises to explore in the rehearsal room, I'm interested in the fact that it's very real; so the idea is to put them in the space and let these conversations happen. It's almost like an improvisation, even though we will obviously create something that flows and has the right rhythms. I think the work of Sanford Meisner (see Further Resources) will be very fitting to this piece because that's all about stripping away any sense of imitation or mimicry, and just being real and 'in the moment'.

How did you cast the play?

George came, in a sense, with the script. He had spoken to Damian Cruden (artistic director of York Theatre Royal) because it was a project he was really passionate about. Damian became equally passionate about it and I was delighted to be asked to direct it. We then auditioned for the actress to play Una. We met a few girls who I thought might be good and then we sifted through, asked agents and thought about people we knew and then we found Charlie. She's never worked with Pilot or York Theatre Royal before so she is completely new to York and Pilot audiences.

How does this work as a co-production?

Originally it was just going to be a York Theatre Royal Production but then Pilot said, why don't we tour it? So it was a different way of looking at that relationship. Pilot is based in the building at York Theatre Royal, so during rehearsal we share facilities. There is a lot of really great creative collaboration across the two organisations.

What is the biggest challenge of this piece?

Firstly to create something that feels very real, but there also some practical challenges in terms of the set and how it will be in The Studio (at York). The actors will be performing in a space in which they are physically very close to the audience. In bigger spaces, that won't be so much of an issue, but in York the audience will walk through the door that the actors come through, they will be in their room with all the discomfort of feeling like perhaps they shouldn't be there in that space, and of course for the actors then have to completely blank out the people who are sitting right up close to them. Another challenge is to make sure that the story

feels new and fresh every night. I'm not going to necessarily go through and block this in the way I might with other pieces. I'd like to make sure there are enough tools there, so that it feels alive all the time. We need to believe that at any moment someone could come into this room and anything could happen, that it is dangerous.

It's a very serious piece, how will you keep the experience positive for the actors?

By making sure we have a very trusting environment to work in. That is crucial to support the actors in dealing with very challenging material.

Katie Posner

Associate Director at Pilot

Earlier this year, Katie directed Parlour Song by Jez Butterworth for York Theatre Royal. Last year she co-directed a new adaptation of The Wind in the Willows by Mike Kenny at York Theatre Royal and directed Just by Ali Smith for York Theatre Royal Youth Theatre.

For Pilot she has directed A State of Innocence and Between this Breath and You from The Fever Chart by Naomi Wallace, Jack and the Mystery of the Clones of Chaos by Richard Hurford. She co-directed last year's national tour of Romeo and Juliet.

She also worked with Pilot on their shows Fungus the Bogeyman and Lord of the Flies as Tour and Staff Director. Most recently she directed What Light as part of the pan European PLATFORM 11+ project, a piece of new writing which transferred to Milan and Dresden.

Before joining Pilot, Katie directed a variety of shows: The Bang Gang by Lee Mattinson for Northumberland Theatre Company; My Funny Valentine for Live Theatre; The Government Inspector; Ernie's Incredible Illusions; Gizmo; and Fantastic Mr Fox all for JAM Theatre as well as The BFG for Aylesbury Theatre's Roald Dahl Festival.

She is an experienced actress, practitioner and educator having course led Drama and Theatre Studies A-Level and National Diploma Acting. She has also collaboratively written two BTEC study guides which are used nationally by schools and colleges.

Katie writes more about the process at www.katieposner.posterous.com look for her September 2011 posts

Extracts from the Director's Rehearsal Notes

Rehearsal plan

Facts about everything that exists and happens before the play begins

Questions about everything that exists and happens before the play begins

Place- images- times- seasons- street- b and b
Where are we now?

Chronology of events that took place- dates, times

HISTORY

Where were we then?

What did it look like?

What was your job?

What was your world?

What was your best friend like?

What did you do for relaxing time?

Shared history- what happened between you?

Visualisations about that time. Where you were, what it looked like etc

Visualisations about what happened after that b and b

FACTS

Known facts about each other

Unknown facts about each other

Different emotional circumstance for scene's-

Improvisation scenarios

Ages, thoughts, feelings

Attraction to each other

What were you then? Looks, physicality, dress, attitude, status

What are you now?

Meisner repetition- say anything you want to each other without censoring it. They can say these things as they are the only two persons who knew exactly how they felt or what they wanted.

Designer's Presentation

On the first day of rehearsal, straight after the 'Meet and Greet' (where cast, crew and theatre staff get to know each other), designer Lydia Denno gives her model box presentation. She shows us the box itself (see page 6) with its miniature pieces of furniture and tiny details of doll-house sized rubbish spread across the floor. Even the fluorescent lights, suspended from the ceiling are perfectly to scale.

"We are in the staff break room of a pharmaceutical company. And yet this room is very untidy, in stark contrast to the world of the company it is part of. This is a room which nobody respects. The space gives us lots of clues about the environment and also about the fact that Una is entering this space for the first time, judging Ray and his situation in terms of what she sees. It raises questions about what the room is, does he live here? What is this space? So there are clues all around it. It is also a room which is out of the way. Once people have finished eating in here, they are not going to come back. It's a room to which Ray feels he can bring Una fairly safely, without having any interruptions, although the back panel is made up of frosted perspex so that we can see the shadows of people moving behind, in a way that suggests that somebody could enter the space at any point, so there is a fear that comes with that.

In terms of entrances and exits, at York Theatre Royal, the audience will be entering through the same door as the performers. That does two different things, obviously for Ray and Una these people (the audience) are just the fourth wall, they are not actually in their space but along with the figures moving behind the perspex, they might represent the other shadows of Ray and Una's past. In terms of the audience it puts them in that uncomfortable situation of having entered the same space. The play asks questions about judgement and how we judge the past actions of the characters, so this positioning increases the intensity of those questions.

As well as the rubbish, we've got broken chairs, a kettle that has just been left on one side, things pouring out of the lockers.

At most other venues, the audience won't be able to come in through the stage space, but the sense of a world beyond the tight, closed world in this room will still be apparent by the use of figures moving behind the perspex. The outside world is in stark contrast to the claustrophobic world within."

After the model box presentation, Lydia shares her ideas for costume design and explains that the final decision for Una's costume will be made later in the week, after important character work has been done. (see Costume Designs page 7)



Lydia (in blue) presenting her ideas on the first day of rehearsals to sound designer, Craig Vear (left), and director Katie Posner (right). Tom Bellerby (Pilot Associate, right) listens in.



photos (c) Helen Cadbury 2011

The Model Box

The White Card Model

This is the first model which Lydia Denno, designer, created to show Katie Posner, the director, a month before rehearsals began. It already has a lot of the detail which will appear in the final version.



The Final Model Box

More colour and detail has been added. The translucent panels upstage can be seen.

A decision has been made to go for a less geometric floor pattern.

The lighting designer and set builders now have a template from which to work.



Costume Design



image (c) Lydia Denno 2011

Lydia Denno created the costume design drawings before rehearsals began but until the actors did their character work in the first week, the costume was not finalised.

When you watch the play what differences do you notice in the details of the costumes?

Interview with Lydia Denno

Designer

What training did you do to become a theatre designer?

I did a three year BA Hons degree at Nottingham Trent University which covered all aspects of theatre design from script analysing to model making and technical drawing to realisation of our designs. It was a great course for teaching us the practical skills which accompany design such as set construction and costume making.

What is the best thing about the job?

I love the variety of the work! Not only can every consecutive show be very different, but for each show itself I get the opportunity to do a million and one things – historical research and background reading, sketching and technical drawing, model making and costume drawing, working with set builders and costume makers, scene painting, working with an amazing team of skilled people in different places... the list goes on!

What is the worst thing?

The worst things is probably the other side of the same coin. With the variety comes an irregular way of working. Mainly the work comes one show at a time so it is necessary always to be searching for the next job.

What do you do first, when you start to design a show?

The very first thing is to read the script! That's quickly followed by a discussion with the director to find out their vision for the play from which I can begin to generate ideas.

How long does it take to build a model box?

The length of time I'm given! Generally from making the first 'white card' model to presenting the final one, I have a period of 3 – 6 weeks but it really can vary depending the size of the project.

What is has been the biggest challenge when designing Blackbird?

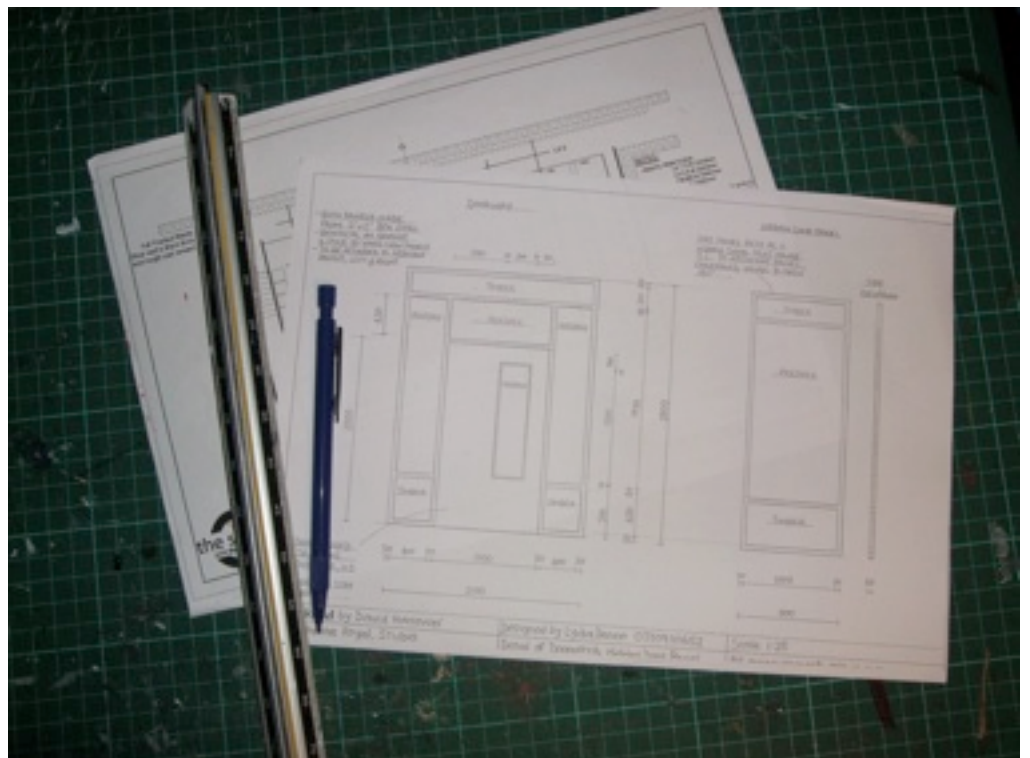
Since Blackbird goes on tour after its opening in York, I have to consider how to make the same set work in other venues with very different staging, which is always a challenge.

What would be your ideal show to design?

I love designing for shows like Blackbird which discuss deep issues and ask important questions of an audience. That said, I love the thought of designing a show like Alice in Wonderland which screams out for a visually scrumptious design, full of imagination!

Technical drawings for the door and panels for Blackbird

photo (c) Lydia Denno 2011



Blackbird Stage Management

- in rehearsal and on tour

Health and Safety

On the first day of rehearsal, Steve Muckersie, from the York Theatre Royal's stage management team, takes the cast on a tour of the rehearsal space to explain any health and safety issues about the building. He shows them the fire exits and explains where to find a first aider. If anyone is going to be in bare feet, that would also be risk assessed as a health and safety issue. On tour the host venue's technician would do a health and safety talk to explain any specific hazards in that venue.

One of the more unexpected risks with this show is the rubbish and food packaging, which could still contain real food and begin to go mouldy.

In Rehearsal

Carl Moir is DSM 'on the book'. This means that he follows the script and marks up any blocking, once it is fixed - although Katie Posner's rehearsal style for this piece is to keep these decisions as fluid as possible for as long as possible, to enable the actors to find the truth in their actions.

Carl sets up the room at the beginning of each day and clears if another group, such as the youth theatre, are going to use the rehearsal space in the evening. The floor is marked with tape to show the exact dimensions of the York Theatre Royal Studio. Rehearsal Room 2 is the perfect size, with the exact floor space of the studio plus just enough room for the desk where Carl sits. He will also be controlling any sound that will be used in the rehearsal period.

Touring the Set

On tour, Carl becomes the touring stage manager. The set will have to be taken apart to fit into the van. The back panel breaks down into sections. The largest section will be 2m 10cm X 2m 80cm. They are steel framed structures and they will be quite heavy. There will only one stage manager on tour, Carl, plus the production manager Mark Beasley. They will be dependent on venue staff to help with the get ins and get outs. One of Carl's worries on tour is that someone might accidentally clean up all the rubbish between shows!

In Rehearsal

The model box is available as a point of reference.

A copy of the play-text lies on the desk.

Carl's script is a larger photocopy to enable him to mark up blocking and technical notes.

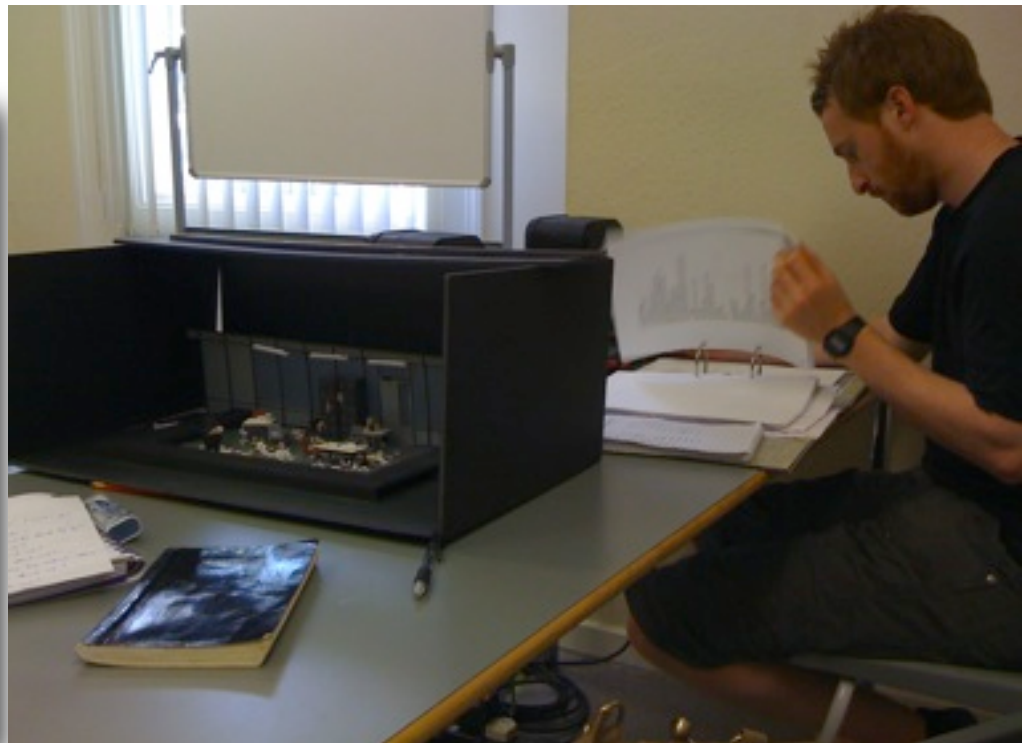


photo (c) Helen Cadbury 2011

In Rehearsal: how it all begins

The cast of *Blackbird* arrive at York Theatre Royal and are immediately welcomed at the 'Meet and Greet'. Over coffee everyone is introduced. There is another show starting rehearsals today, *Laurel and Hardy*. Although each show is only a two-hander, there are at least twenty-five people in the room, including two artistic directors, two designers, two composers and a range of production and administration staff from both York Theatre Royal and resident company Pilot.

After Lydia Denno's presentation of the model box (see page 5), our actors, George Costigan and Charlie Covell, are taken on a tour of the theatre, before we all go next door to the beautiful De Grey Rooms where the rehearsals will take place. The De Grey Rooms were built in the 1840's and originally used as an officer's mess for the Yorkshire Hussar Regiment. The cast go upstairs to the ornate ballroom to have their photos taken for the marketing department.



When everyone is gathered in the rehearsal room, the cast begin the read through. It is immediately obvious that both George and Charlie has spent time studying the play closely before arriving in York. It is like listening to a radio play, except they are here in front of us.



At times it is so moving, that even at this stage, those listening have tears in their eyes.



There is a moment to recover from the emotional impact and then Charlie and George are whisked off for their health and safety briefing and tour of the De Grey Rooms, while in the rehearsal space composer Craig Vear sits down to talk through the sound of the piece with Katie Posner.

Sound

with Craig Vear

Craig Vear is a composer and musician who creates music for theatre and film. He also makes sound installations and sound art.

The technique he's going to be using to create the sound for **Blackbird** will include recording certain lines of Una speaking. He'll then use a process of cross-filtering - sometimes called convolution - to turn her voice into a piece of music. We'll hear the sibilants (the 's' sounds) of her voice and the pitch of her speech patterns as an ambience that fills the room. The effect should be that as we enter into the room, we are entering Una's mind.

The method which Craig uses involves taking the sound shape of one sound and pushing another sound shape through it.

"You don't hear one or the other, you just hear the way they work together."

There will be moments in the play which will be heightened by including elements of the sounds of the world outside the room. The noises made elsewhere in the building will become part of the music, underscoring the dialogue and increasing the psychological effect of the piece.

Further Research: Explore the technique of *Musique concrète*.

Practice creating your own soundscapes using Audacity software.

Interview with George Costigan playing Ray

Blackbird is a project you've been wanting to do for some time. What first drew you to it?

An actress I was working with first showed me this play and I said to Damian (Cruden, artistic director of York Theatre Royal) that I really wanted to do it. When you read it, it's the sort of thing you just feel you have to do. It's what the best of theatre is: great material about something so important. And it takes you through so many loops.

It's been translated into several different different languages, do you think it is a universal story?

I worked in Sweden last year and they asked me if I wanted to come back and I said, yes, I'd love to do Blackbird there, and they said they'd already done it, the same thing happened in Ireland. So yes, this is a about a constant theme in human nature, it has something that talks to everybody.

Does it link back at all to Rita, Sue and Bob Too?

Well, I was thinking about that the other day and of course, there's a connection but the writing is so different and the reason Andrea Dunbar wrote what she wrote and the reason David Harrower has written what he's written could not be further apart. Although they are both great writers, hers is a much lighter take on the subject and it is also written from the young women's point of view. The man is their tool. He thinks he's not, but he is, while this is a different game.

In terms of your acting process, how have you prepared for this role?

I've gone through the script with a fine tooth-comb because of the way it's written, with all these stopped sentences, you have to make a decision about why he stops saying something in one place and... ..even if you wrote down what I'm saying now, you'll see it's how people really speak... I certainly haven't done a lot of research into the main issue of the play although just today I read a long interview with Chris Langham, which was rather good and very apposite, because like Ray, he is trying to explain that he was not a paedophile.

Do you think the seriousness of the issue at the heart of the play will affect how you work?

No. The only thing that affects how you work is the quality of the material. If it's bad, you have to work harder and if it's good, you ride. And this is very very good! It'll end up like a racehorse.

Are you looking forward to touring?

Yes, definitely. We're going to Glasgow and David Harrower is coming to see it and that will be great.

Do you prefer to work in theatre or film or television?

I like to work on good material, wherever it is. But if you gave me a flat choice, I'd always prefer to be in a theatre. That doesn't entirely make sense because what you want to do as an actor is communicate and the best way to communicate is film. You can reach millions of people with a film, but it doesn't quite satisfy you in the same way that a hundred people in a studio theatre will do. You can see and hear the audience's reaction in a theatre and you can feel their response.

Is it a challenge to play a character like Ray?

It is very dark material. I suppose if you play Macbeth, you have the distance of the classics to protect you, in a way. Although for Macbeth, the places he goes to couldn't be darker - "I will kill those children." It would be a mistake to construct the character too much from the outside in. I did that once when I played Ian Brady (the 'Moors Murderer') and I didn't explore what was going on inside enough, so it caught me out and suddenly gave me very scary thoughts. Of course, I've never wanted to be where Ray is, but I can understand that the chemistry between two people means that you can't say where love starts and ends. Ray knows he's made the biggest mistake of his life and yet... When I read this play, I really understood the review that said: 'David Harrower has taken one of the biggest issues of the day and dropped an atomic bomb on it.' I couldn't believe he'd got it so right.

George has many years experience as an actor in theatre, film and television. He is still remembered for the part of Bob, in the 1986 hit British film Rita, Sue and Bob Too. Among his numerous credits, he has appeared in Emmerdale, A Touch of Frost and Dr Who.



In rehearsal with director, Katie Posner
photo (c) Helen Cadbury 2011

Interview with Charlie Covell playing Una

What preparation did you do before you came into rehearsals?

I did a lot of research about the sort of issues that the character is dealing with. Anyone who has been in a similar situation to the character will have gone through a certain process. I tried to find out what that process would be. It's been going on for about fifteen years and I was thinking about how she's dealt with certain things. I didn't want to pre-empt work with Katie. Some directors want you to do all your backstory on your own and some want to do it in the rehearsal room with you. So I thought I'd do some pre-work, but not decide on everything.

We are now at the end of the first week of rehearsals. What sort of things have you done this week?

It's gone quite quickly! We've done some improvisations because the characters have a shared history, some of which is mentioned specifically in the play and other bits we improvised, scenarios that the two of them could remember having happened. It's very interesting to go from one of those into the text and see where they are at now, because obviously the memories they have will be going through both their heads all the time, as they're talking to each other. I find it very useful because sometimes you can get obsessed with playing an action, following your intention, obviously you still have to do that, but if you have that history very recently in your head, I think it can't help but affect your performance in some way.

How quickly do you find you're able to learn lines and be off book?

Generally speaking, good writing is easy to learn and this is very good. There's a natural rhythm to it. It's written like I'm speaking now, slightly hesitantly, with ums and ahs and slight repetition because the characters are finding their thoughts all the time. They are not coming on and doing a prepared polished speech. So it's naturalistic but also quite poetic. The things that are hard to learn are the little words and the words that repeat. Also where there are very short single lines that we alternate, that can be difficult. But I'm getting there. This weekend's task is to get it sorted!



Charlie and Katie on the first day of rehearsals
photos by Michael Lambourne (c) Pilot/York Theatre Royal 2011

What other methods are you using to build the character?

We went costume shopping today and found the shoes. I think it was Beryl Reid who said 'start with the shoes and build the character from there'. I've never had that approach before but today I put the shoes on and it did make a difference. In other shows I've rehearsed in my own clothes and when I've got my costume in the last week, I've suddenly found my character moves completely differently. So getting the costume as soon as possible will really help.

Have you ever worked with Pilot or York Theatre Royal before?

No, but when I came for the audition I remember really wanting to get it. Mainly because it's such an amazing pay but also because, walking up from the station, I realised that York is such a beautiful city. And when I walked up on the first day of rehearsals I remembered that day and I was so glad to be here. Pilot make really interesting work and York is a lovely theatre, really friendly and also doing great plays.

Did you train at Drama school?

I haven't got any formal training but I did the National Youth Theatre for about five years. Then I went to Oxford University to study English so I didn't go to drama school. While I was at university I was doing a lot of plays and I got an agent, so I've been very lucky. I think you do learn a lot by working. My advice for any young person who wants to be an actor would be to do youth theatre and whatever courses or youth workshops you can find. Go to the theatre and see plays, watch films. But mainly get involved in a youth theatre, that was what made me realise I wanted to do it as a profession.

Charlie has appeared on television in several shows including Doctors, Mid-Sommer Murders and in The Inbetweeners where she played Sophie in the episode A Trip to Warwick

Text Activity

Linked to Edexcel AS level Unit 1

1. Read the following passage in pairs:

Ray: What's in there?

What's in your bag?
What's in it?

Una: I need a

Ray: Give me it.

Una: No.
Why?

Ray: What're you doing?
Are you

Una: What?

Ray: Don't

He grabs the bag from her.

Una: You're

Ray: Do you want to kill me?

2. What do you notice about the way the language is laid out on the page? What clues does this give the actors? When you read it out loud, does it flow naturally?
3. Put this extract on its feet by working out what the physical relationship is between the actors. What clues are there in the text about what they are doing? How close are they? Does that change?
4. Improvise on from this scene. If you have not yet seen the play, what do you think happens next?
5. Look at the interviews with the cast and note what they say about learning lines.
6. Why do you think David Harrower has chosen to write in this style?

Follow Up Activity

Record or listen to 30 seconds of everyday conversation and write down exactly what is said. Try to re-perform the dialogue exactly. This is called **verbatim theatre**. It creates a heightened reality when it is re-performed. You could use this as an activity to **devise** a new piece of theatre.

Research **verbatim theatre**. Do you think Harrower has been influenced by this style?

Review Writing: Evaluation of a Performance

Linked to Edexcel AS level Unit 1

First Impressions

What impression do you get entering the space? What size is it? How close are the audience to the action?

Language

What kind of vocabulary is being used? Is it simple or complex? Natural or artificial? Do any words or phrases stay with you?

Non-Verbal Communication

Think about the history, or backstory, of these two characters, how does this affect how they move in the space in relation to one another?

What gestures do they use at different stages in the play and how do they change?

How do they relate to sounds or events from beyond the space?

Voice

Listen for changes in tone and pitch. How does the situation they are in affect the volume of their voices?

How does strong emotion change the tone or pitch of the actors' voices?

What level of vocal projection is needed in the venue?

Visual/Aural/Spatial

Refer to the resources on design and sound (pages 5, 6 and 10).

How do the actors relate to the set and what could be imagined to be beyond it?

How do the props, furniture and set dressing create a sense of the space in which the story unfolds?

What impression do the colours of the set and costumes give you?

What impression do the textures of the set give you?

What do you hear? Are you aware of the sound or does it act on your subconscious?

What lighting effects are being used and what impression do they give?

How do the visual and aural and spatial elements work together to communicate the themes and emotional effect of the piece?

Interpretation

All the elements above are brought together by the director, Katie Posner, in her interpretation of the writer's text. Read the interview with Katie on page 4. After seeing the show, do you feel she has been successful?

Further Study - Practitioners

Katie has used the techniques of Sanford Meisner in her work. What can you find out about him? How does he relate to the theories of Stanislavsky? Note George's comments on creating a difficult role, how might the transition from Stanislavsky's earlier theories to his later theories be relevant here?

Devising from Stimulus Material

The original case which is said to have inspired David Harrower to write *Blackbird* was a real event where a sex offender, Toby Studebaker, developed an online relationship with a 12 year old girl and then took her to Europe.

Details of the case can be found here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toby_Studebaker

What is different in Harrower's play? Why do you think those differences are important?

Activity

Take a daily newspaper and choose a story which interests you. Research the story further, for example by comparing coverage in different newspapers, broadsheets and tabloids (most except *The Times* have free online access).

The live improvisation process and the study/note taking/ thinking process need to happen together, for example, improvising during the lesson should be followed quickly by note taking, otherwise the learning may be lost.

Improvise

- a) a scene between two or three principle characters in the news story. Be specific about where they are, what time of day it is, what has just happened.
- b) Run the improvisation through a second time, but invite those watching to freeze the action and hot-seat the characters to find out what they are thinking and what their intentions are in the scene.
- c) Allow the scene to run a third time but this time the actors can change it, move away from the original story to see what might happen.

Make notes

What makes the story interesting dramatically?

Are there any moral issues which you will need to explore or even change?

Who are the key characters in the story?

Whose point of view are you telling it from?

Improvise

- a) Once you have set the main scene, explore what happens before it and what would happen next. Divide the group into smaller units if necessary to improvise these scenes separately.
- b) Play the scenes back, and explore as above. Often the first idea remains the strongest, so explore how to make these new scenes as vibrant as the first one you came up with.

Script

In devised work, do not script too quickly or you will lose the freshness and creativity of the piece. But at some point you will need to fix the structure and capture the language that has emerged. It is difficult to write by committee but if you are working in a larger group, arrange that different people script different scenes, preferably not scenes they are in, so the language can be captured by a third party.

Rehearse

Although you have made this up, it now needs to be treated like any scripted play and rehearsed. You will need to appoint a director whose 'outside eye' can support the elements of the production. Refer back to the elements in the evaluation linked to Unit 1 (page 14) and use these as a checklist for your production.

Further Resources

Books

Blackbird by David Harrower (playtext) Faber and Faber 2006

Knives in Hens by David Harrower (playtext) Methuen Drama 1997

Sanford Meisner on Acting by Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell Vintage Books 1990

The Sanford Meisner Approach - Workbooks 1 - 4 by Larry Silverburg Smith and Kraus 1995-2000

Weblinks

<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/david-harrower> - more information on David Harrower

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/aug/17/theatre.edinburghfestival2005> Guardian review of the first production of Blackbird in 2005

http://www.tron.co.uk/event/calums_road/ - information about Harrower's latest play Callum's Road

Important Information

If you need any support to deal with any of the issues in this play here are some suggested links:

http://www.mind.org.uk/help/diagnoses_and_conditions/sexual_abuse

Mind, the national charity for better mental health has a section for those affected by abuse.

<http://www.safenetwork.org.uk>

a comprehensive site full of resources for ensuring good safeguarding practice.

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

[ChildLine 0800 1111](http://www.childline.gov.uk)

<http://www.respect.uk.net/pages/what-type-of-help-is-available-for-men-who-are-abusive.html>

Respect is an organisation to help people who want to stop their own abusive behaviour