

**THE
OLD
VIC**

THE CARETAKER
TEACHING RESOURCES



**TIMOTHY SPALL
DANIEL MAYS & GEORGE MACKAY
THE CARETAKER
BY HAROLD PINTER**

CONTENTS

Company	3	Old Vic New Voices Education The Old Vic The Cut London SE1 8NB
Creative team	4	
Character breakdown	6	E education@oldvictheatre.com 🐦 @oldvicnewvoices
Act breakdown	7	© The Old Vic, 2016. All information is correct at the time of going to press, but may be subject to change
Themes	10	
Timeline – Harold Pinter life and works	11	The Caretaker <i>by Harold Pinter</i>
Context – Britain: then and now	12	Teaching resources <i>Compiled by Anne Langford</i> <i>Design Matt Lane-Dixon</i> <i>Rehearsal and production</i> <i>photography Manuel Harlan</i>
Pinter and the Theatre of the Absurd	14	
Interview with Sound Designer Simon Baker	16	Old Vic New Voices <i>Alexander Ferris Director</i> <i>Hannah Fosker Head of</i> <i>Education & Community</i> <i>Ross Crosby Community Co-ordinator</i> <i>Richard Knowles Stage Business</i> <i>Co-ordinator</i> <i>Tom Wright Old Vic New Voices Intern</i>
Interview with actor George MacKay	20	
Practical exercises – Physical storytelling and comedy	23	Further details of this production oldvictheatre.com
A day in the life of Events Manager Emma Robson	26	
Bibliography and further reading	28	

COMPANY



George MacKay

Mick

Theatre: *Ah, Wilderness* (Young Vic), *The Cement Garden* (Vault Festival).
Film: *Captain Fantastic*, *Pride*, *Bypass*, *Sunshine on Leith*, *For Those in Peril* (Best Actor awards: Scottish BAFTA, Stockholm Film Festival), *How I Live Now*, *Breakfast with Johnny Wilkinson*, *Private Peaceful*, *Hunky Dory*, *The Boys are Back*, *Defiance*, *The Thief Lord*, *Peter Pan*. TV: *Likely Stories: Foreign Parts*, *11/22/63*, *The Outcast*, *Best of Men*, *Birdsong*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Tsunami: The Aftermath*, *Johnny and the Bomb*, *The Brief*, *Footprints in the Snow*, *Rose and Maloney*.



Daniel Mays

Aston

Theatre: *The Red Lion* (National Theatre), *Mojo* (West End), *The Same Deep Water as Me*, *Trelawny of the Wells*, *Moonlight* (Donmar) *M.A.D* (Bush), *Hero*, *Scarborough*, *Motortown*, *The Winterling*, *Ladybird* (Royal Court).
Film: *The Limehouse Golem*, *The Infiltrator*, *Dad's Army*, *All or Nothing*, *Vera Drake*, *Atonement*, *Red Riding*, *Welcome to the Punch*, *The Bank Job*, *Made in Dagenham*, *Byzantium*, *The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn*, *Shifty*.
TV: *Line of Duty*, *Mrs Biggs*, *The Great Fire*, *Public Enemies*, *White Girl*, *Nightshift*, *Common*, *Ashes to Ashes*, *The Street*, *Outcasts*, *In Deep*, *EastEnders*.



Timothy Spall

Davies

Timothy trained at the National Youth Theatre and RADA and began his acting career in the theatre, with seasons at Birmingham Rep and the RSC. Film: *Mr Turner*, *Harry Potter*, *The King's Speech*, *The Damned United*, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Pierpoint*, *All or Nothing*, *Lucky Break*, *Topsy Turvy*, *Secrets and Lies*. TV: *Fungus the Bogeyman*, *The Enfield Haunting*, *Blandings*, *The Syndicate*, *The Fattest Man in Britain*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Street*, *Bodily Harm*, *Auf Wiedersehen Pet*, *Perfect Strangers*, *Shooting the Past*, *Our Mutual Friend* and his own documentary *Timothy Spall: Somewhere at Sea*.

CREATIVE TEAM

Matthew Warchus

Director

Theatre: *The Master Builder*, *Future Conditional*, *Speed-the-Plow* (The Old Vic), *The Norman Conquests* (The Old Vic/Broadway), *Life x 3* (National Theatre/The Old Vic/Broadway), *Matilda the Musical* (RSC/West End/Broadway/international tour), *Ghost the Musical* (West End/international tour), *Boeing Boeing*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Endgame*, *Our House* (West End), *La Bête*, *Deathtrap*, *God of Carnage*, *Art* (West End/Broadway), *The Unexpected Man* (West End RSC/Broadway), *Buried Child*, *Volpone* (National Theatre). Opera: *Falstaff* (ENO/Opera North), *Così fan Tutte* (ENO), *The Rake's Progress* (ROH/WNO), *Troilus and Cressida* (Opera North). Film: *Pride*, *Simpatico*. Matthew was appointed Artistic Director of The Old Vic in May 2014.

Rob Howell

Designer

Theatre: *The Master Builder*, Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, *Future Conditional*, *A Flea in Her Ear*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Speed-the-Plow*, *Complicit* (The Old Vic), *The Norman Conquests* (The Old Vic/Broadway). Rob has also worked at the National Theatre, RSC, Royal Court, Almeida, Donmar Warehouse, Young Vic, Chichester Festival Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Manchester Royal Exchange, Royal Opera House, Metropolitan Opera in New York and on Broadway. He's won three Olivier Awards for Set Design, including for *Matilda the Musical* in 2012 for which he also won Drama Desk, Outer Critic's Circle and Tony awards.

Hugh Vanstone

Lighting

Hugh has designed the lighting for nearly 200 productions and worked for most of the UK's national companies and extensively on Broadway. He's received many awards for his work including three Olivier Awards, a Tony and a Molière. Theatre: *The Master Builder*, *Future Conditional* (The Old Vic), *The Red Lion* (National Theatre), *Welcome Home Captain Fox!*, *Closer* (Donmar), *Matilda the Musical* (RSC/international), *Shrek* (New York/West End/UK tour), *Ghost* (West End/international), *An Act of God* (New York/tour), *Strictly Ballroom* (Australian tour), *Tanz Der Vampire* (Paris/Germany), *Don Quixote* (Royal Ballet).

Gary Yershon

Music

Theatre: *The Master Builder*, *The Norman Conquests* (The Old Vic), *Art*, *The Unexpected Man*, *Life x 3*, *The God of Carnage*, *The Play What I Wrote* (West End/Broadway), *Edward II*, *Grief* (National Theatre) *Arabian Nights* (RSC), *The Low Road* (Royal Court), *Julius Caesar* (Donmar). Film: *Mr Turner*, *Another Year*, *Happy-Go-Lucky*, *Running Jump*. TV: *Trial and Retribution*, *Skin Deep*, *James the Cat*, *Ebb and Flo*. Radio: *Three Men in a Boat*, *The Odyssey*, *Autumn Journal*. Gary is an Associate Artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Simon Baker

Sound

Theatre: *The Master Builder*, *Future Conditional*, *High Society*, *Electra* (The Old Vic), *Shakespeare in Love*, *Mojo*, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (West End), *Matilda the Musical* (RSC/West End/Broadway/international tour – 2012 Olivier Award for Best Sound), *Rebecca* (UK tour), *Anything Goes* (Sheffield/UK tour), *The Roaring Girl* (RSC), *Don John* (RSC/international tour), *The Light Princess*, *The Amen Corner* (National Theatre), *Steptoe and Son* (UK tour), *An Audience with Meow Meow* (Berkeley Rep), *Brief Encounter* (worldwide), *The Red Shoes*, *Wild Bride* (international tours). Simon is an Associate Artist of The Old Vic and a fellow of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

Jessica Ronane CDG

Casting Director

Theatre: *The Master Builder*, Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Future Conditional* (The Old Vic), *Running Wild* (Regent's Park), *Angus Thongs and Even More Snogging* (West Yorkshire Playhouse). Theatre (childrens casting): *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Sound of Music*, (Regent's Park), *The Audience*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Made in Dagenham*, *I Can't Sing, Singin' in the Rain*, *Billy Elliot the Musical* (West End), *Matilda the Musical* (RSC/West End), *Bugsy Malone* (Lyric), *Caroline or Change*, *Baby Girl*, *Mrs Affleck*, *Burnt by the Sun* (National Theatre), *A Member of the Wedding*, *Far Away* (Young Vic).

Sean Linnen

Associate Director

In 2014 Sean was Trainee Artistic Director at Paines Plough and Sheffield Theatres in partnership with Arts Council England. Director: *Mojo* (RWCMD), *322 Days* (Paines Plough), *Growth* (Paines Plough/RWCMD), *A Preoccupation with Romance* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe), *Hollow* (Bike Shed, Exeter). Associate/Staff Director: *Protest Song* (National Theatre), *Lungs*, *Our Teacher's a Troll*, *The Initiate* (Paines Plough). Assistant Director: *Future Conditional* (The Old Vic), *Translations* (ETT/Rose Kingston/Sheffield), *The Machine* (Donmar/Manchester International Festival/New York), *The Daughter-in-Law*, *A Taste of Honey*, *Copenhagen* (Sheffield). Sean also worked on *The Vote* (Donmar/Channel 4) and is a selector for the National Student Drama Festival.

Charlie Hughes-D'Aeth

Voice Coach

Charlie is Consultant Text and Voice Coach for the RSC's *Matilda the Musical*, (Resident 2010-14). Currently Resident Voice Coach for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in the West End. Other theatre: *The Master Builder*,

Future Conditional (The Old Vic), *The Gods Weep* (RSC/Hampstead), *The Tempest*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (RSC/Shakespeare in a Suitcase tour), *Adrian Mole the Musical* (Leicester Curve), *Jerusalem* (Northcote, Exeter). Before working in theatre full-time, Charlie was a director and playwright, and taught MA and undergraduate levels in London drama schools.

Penny Dyer

Dialect Coach

Theatre: *Other Desert Cities*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Speed-the-Plow*, *The Philadelphia Story* (The Old Vic), *Husbands and Sons*, *This House* (National Theatre), *The Maids*, *Gypsy*, *The Ruling Class*, *The Book of Mormon*, *The Michael Grandage season* (West End), *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, *How to Succeed in Business* (Broadway), *Linda* (Royal Court), *Teddy Ferrara* (Donmar), *Reasons to be Pretty* (Almeida), *Reasons to be Happy* (Hampstead). Film: *The Danish Girl*, *Florence Foster Jenkins*, *Testament of Youth*, *Blue Jasmine*, *Pride*, *Philomena*, *The Queen*, *Elizabeth*. TV: *The Rack Pack*, *The Last Kingdom*, *Marvellous*, *Cilla*, *Tommy Cooper*, *The Girl*, *Mrs Biggs*, *Downton Abbey*.



CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Mick is in his late twenties and is Aston's younger brother. He admits to getting frustrated with Aston but seems to care about him and is concerned by Davies' arrival. He is quick witted and trips Davies up when questioning him. He is aggressive towards Davies, taking his clothes, bag and pushing him to the floor. He frequently talks about projects and ambitions for the house. He owns the dilapidated house that the play is set in.

Aston is in his early thirties and is Mick's older brother, he seems to have a good relationship with Mick, although they do not speak to each other much through the play. He seems quiet and slow but is very kind to Davies, offering him a place to stay, a job, money, tobacco, clothes and shoes. He often speaks haltingly and has trouble finishing anything. We learn that when he was younger he had hallucinations and, against his will, was put into a hospital and given electro-shock treatment that affected him greatly. He eventually asks Davies to leave after Davies threatens him.

Davies is an old, homeless man who at the start of play has lost his job and accommodation at a café because of a fight. Aston intervenes in the fight and invites him back to his home. Davis says he has been married but left his wife within a week because he thought she was dirty. He is very racist and speaks in a derogatory manner, believing that other races are out to get him. He has been working under a false name Bernard Jenkins, and claims to have identity papers and references in Sidcup, where he left them with a man just after the war, fifteen years ago. Both Aston and Mick offer him the role of caretaker at the house before he manages to annoy them both with his cruelty and lies.



ACT BREAKDOWN

Act One

Scene One

Night in winter in a run down room filled with household appliances, a shopping trolley and a Buddha. Mick is sitting quietly on a bed looking around. He leaves the room before Aston and Davis come in. Davis wears worn out clothes and sandals, not shoes. Aston has intervened in a fight between Davis and a Scottish man at the café where Davis was working, and then invited him back to the room. Davis complains about 'the blacks, Greeks and Poles' at the café, and how all his possessions are left there. Aston is in charge of the house, most of which cannot be used because of disrepair. Aston offers Davis a pair of shoes, which he tries on but they do not fit. Davis tells a long story about shoes, including about how he travelled to get some shoes from a monk who was rude to him.

Davies looks around the room and asks about different items, most of which are broken. Aston says that he likes to work with his hands. Davies notices the Buddha and Aston talks about how good it is. Aston clears some things and makes a bed for Davies, who asks if he shares the toilet with the blacks and Aston says no, as they live next door. Davies says he hopes the weather will improve so he can go down to Sidcup to get his papers. We discover that he changed his name to Bernard Jenkins from Mac Davies. The National Insurance card he has is useless as it is in his false name. They finish talking and Davis gets into bed.

Scene Two

The next morning Aston puts his trousers on and makes his bed. Davies wakes up confused before remembering where he is. Aston asks if he was dreaming, as he was making noises, and Davies says he has never had a dream in his life, and suggests the blacks next door were making the noises. Aston gets ready to leave, and Davies is surprised when Aston says he can stay in the room while he is gone. Aston asks Davies if he is Welsh and then asks where he was born and they talk about the broken stove. Davies asks if he can have some money and Aston reminds him he gave him some the previous night. Davies says he might try to go to a café in Wembley to find a job. After Aston leaves, Davies explores the room and while he is doing that, Mick silently comes in and watches him. When Davis sees Mick there is a scuffle and Mick forces him to the floor and silences him. Mick releases Davies but takes his trousers before sitting down and asking Davies: 'What's your game?'



Act Two

Scene One

Beginning where Act One ended, Mick begins questioning Davies, who is cowering on the floor, about his name and how he likes the room. Mick constantly compares Davies to other men he has known and questions Davies about how he slept, asking if he is a foreigner. Davies explains that Aston took him in, but Mick says he is lying and he will call the police. He then offers the room to rent and talks about all the details of how Davies could rent it, at what cost and what processes they would go through. Aston comes in and Mick drops the trousers and Davies puts them on. There is silence and then a drip falls in the bucket suspended from the ceiling. Aston gives Davies his bag, but Mick snatches it. Davies is upset, and Mick, Aston and Davies struggle over possession of the bag before Mick leaves.

Aston explains that Mick is his brother and he is doing the house up for him. Davies realises it's not his bag and inspects the contents, putting on a red velvet smoking jacket. Then Aston tells Davies he can be the caretaker and the men discuss what this would involve and Davies expresses his unwillingness to answer the door, as anybody could be calling.

Scene Two

Davies enters. Annoyed that the light is not working, he tries to light some matches. The vacuum cleaner turns on and Davies gets out a knife to attack the person with the vacuum who turns out to be Mick. Mick says he is cleaning up to make things nice for Davies, and asks if he is a violent man, declaring that he is interested because Davies is his brothers' friend. He gives Davies a cheese sandwich and confides that he thinks Aston is a slow worker. When Davies agrees Mick gets agitated, then suddenly asks Davies if he wants to be the caretaker. He asks if Davies was in the services and worked overseas, Davies says he was and agrees to take the role. Mick says he needs references and Davies says he will get them when he can get to Sidcup, and asks Mick if he has any shoes.

Scene Three

In the morning Aston wakes Davies up, as he requested, so he can go to Sidcup. Davies is annoyed and complains about the draft. Aston did not sleep well because of Davies making noises. Aston says he is going to buy a workbench from Goldhawk Road, which will help him to build his shed. Davies says he can't go anywhere because he doesn't have shoes and gets back into bed. Aston begins to speak as the light dims. We learn that he has spent time in a hospital because he talked at a local café and the factory where he worked about his visions. In the hospital he was subjected to electro-shock therapy, despite asking his mother not to agree to the treatment and repeatedly trying to escape. The night of the treatment he tries to fight the doctors off but they treat him standing up and since then he has experienced problems; slow thoughts, walking with difficulty and terrible headaches when he moved his head. He thinks he should have died. He feels better now but doesn't talk to people.

Act Three

Scene One

The afternoon, two weeks later. Davies complains about Aston to Mick who daydreams about the lavish changes that could be made to the house, describing them in vivid detail. Davies asks who would live there and wonders where he would go when Mick says he would live there with his brother, Aston. Mick asks Davies to talk to Aston about all the stuff in the room and Davies says that he is not friends with Aston and complains about him, suggesting that he and Mick should work on the house together. Mick leaves just before Aston returns bringing a pair of shoes for Davies, who demands laces for them, rejecting some that Aston offers because they are the wrong colour. Davies starts to talk about going to Sidcup, complaining about the shoes and the weather. While he is talking Aston leaves and Davies doesn't notice, getting angry when he does notice.

Scene Two

Night-time and Aston and Davies are in their beds, Davies is groaning and Aston wakes him up. Davies shouts at him angrily saying that Aston treats him like an animal and threatening that they will 'put them pincers on your head again'. Aston quietly tells Davies that he should leave, Davies says that Aston should leave and Aston points out that he lives there. Davies says that Mick made him the caretaker. Aston offers Davies money to get to Sidcup and the men argue before Aston says that Davies stinks. Davies becomes very angry and threatens Aston with a knife. Quietly, Aston says he should leave and Davies is upset. Davies leaves and Aston tidies the room.

Scene Three

We hear Davies and Mick talking as they enter the room. Davies is angry that Aston says he stinks and complains about him. Mick challenges Davies, asking him what he means and questioning him about being an interior decorator, Davies argues that he never said he was one and Mick suggests that Davies has been lying. Davies says Aston must have said he was an interior decorator because he's 'nutty'. Mick tells Davies he is an unpredictable, violent man and offers to pay him for his services so he can leave. Davies angers Mick, who throws the Buddha statue against the wall, breaking it. Mick talks about his plans but doesn't answer Davies' questions. Aston enters the room, the brothers smile faintly but don't speak and Mick leaves. Davies tries to beg Aston to let him stay, and asks if he can still be the caretaker but Aston says no. The play ends with Davies incoherently talking about the shoes, his papers and how he has nowhere to go.



THEMES

Language and communication

The Caretaker may appear at first to be very realistic but more detailed exploration reveals a tightly structured, very rhythmic and stylised use of language. Pinter was breaking with previous conventions in placing working class characters, and their way of speaking, on stage. The characters often speak nonsense and platitudes, rarely able to actually communicate their life experience or needs. They frequently misunderstand each other, don't listen or answer questions and are unable to build meaningful relationships. Pinter is famous for his pauses, and these help the audience explore the limits of language in expressing the human condition – what is not said is often more important than what is said. Language is just one of the ways that meaning is expressed in *The Caretaker*, with the characters' gestures, silences, spatial relationships and the stage picture as important, if not more so, than what the characters say. This breaks with the tradition of literary theatre that came before – where words were the dominant way to transmit meaning to an audience.

Identity

The world of *The Caretaker* is one in which identity is not fixed. Davies has been living under a false name, Bernard Jenkins, and has not had his identification papers for over 15 years. The National Insurance card he has in a false name is a burden, he is afraid that he will be arrested if found with it. He doesn't remember or know where he was born and seems to have lost his identity and place in the world. Aston has been changed by his electro-shock therapy, losing the visions he used to have and rendered unable to complete simple tasks. He is closely identified with the Buddha statue, a symbol of compassion, but we see this get broken by his brother, mirroring his hospital treatment. Mick talks intelligently about his grand ambitions but rarely seems to make progress and is frequently aggressive. We are never sure that what any of the characters say is true. Pinter reveals very little about any of the characters in a traditional theatrical sense; we don't know their histories or understand their motivations. This approach to character was quite radical and is arguably more realistic than traditional, clearly-defined naturalistic characters. Human experience usually isn't sequential, ordered or clearly-willed.

Race

Race was an important topic in 1950s London. The end of World War II brought economic growth and people from the Commonwealth countries (including India and the Caribbean) were encouraged to come and work, the first mass immigration to the UK. Unfortunately suspicion and prejudice were widespread, and many new arrivals faced real hostility. Davies' obsession with labeling and denigrating other races reflected common attitudes in the UK, and while Aston and Mick aren't openly prejudiced, we do not see them challenge Davies views on race. We can notice how Mick and Aston both question Davies about where he is from and his nationality, Mick asking if he is Welsh. They seem to believe that this will help them understand who he is, assuming a particular set of attributes can be associated to a national identity or race demonstrates their prejudice.

Conversation starter

What situations have you personally experienced where what was not said carried more meaning than the words people spoke? Why do you think this was?

Conversation starter

Davies asserts a really strong identity but has no understanding of the consequences of his actions. Is it possible to have a true sense of identity without self-awareness?

Conversation starter

Why do you think the characters are obsessed with race? How does this reflect your experience of people's interest in race today?

TIMELINE

HAROLD PINTER - LIFE & WORKS

1930

Born on 10 October in Hackney, East London. An only child whose parents were of Jewish descent

1940

During the Blitz is evacuated to Cornwall

1942

Begins to write poetry, continues to write and publish poetry and prose throughout his life

1944

Goes to Hackney Downs School

1947

Plays Romeo in school production directed by an English teacher who was a big influence

1948

Called up for National Service but refuses as a conscientious objector and is taken to court twice. Remains politically active throughout his life

1950

Poems published in Poetry London under the name Harold Pinta

1951

Attends Central School of Speech and Drama, having previously dropped out of RADA

1952

Begins working as an actor, touring around the UK, starting a 50 year theatre, film and TV acting career

1954

Starts to use the stage name David Baron for his acting work

1956

Marries Vivien Merchant, who he met when they worked together as actors

1957

Writes his first play, *The Room* in three days, which is performed at Bristol University. The first of 29 plays and 15 sketches for stage and radio

1958

The first production of *The Birthday Party*, at The Lyric Hammersmith is a critical and commercial failure

1959

Writes *The Homecoming* and *The Caretaker*

1960

The first performance of *The Caretaker*, which runs for 444 performances and has a Broadway transfer

1962

Begins a five year affair with Joan Bakewell

1973

Becomes an associate director at National Theatre, goes on to direct over 50 plays; both his own and others

1980

Divorces Vivien Merchant and marries Antonia Fraser with whom he'd had a five year affair

1981

Adapts *The French Lieutenant's Woman* for film, which becomes a critical success starring Jeremy Irons and Meryl Streep. One of his 27 screenplays

1984

Writes *One for the Road*, an overtly political one act play about torture

1991

Party Time a political satire premieres at The Almeida, before being made into a TV show

2000

Last stage play, *Celebration* a social satire premieres at The Almeida directed by Pinter

2001

Receives his first cancer diagnosis

2003

Very vocal in his objection to the Iraq War, accused of being anti-American

2005

Is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature

2008

Dies from liver cancer on Christmas Eve

CONTEXT – BRITAIN THEN & NOW

Race

1959

Racial tensions bubbled over into riots in Notting Hill, London in 1958 instigated by a group of white Teddy Boys attacking Caribbean families' homes. The following year saw a 'Caribbean Carnival' (the precursor to the Notting Hill carnival) as a response to the poor state of race relations.

2016

51 years after the first Race Relations Act made racial discrimination illegal, there is still work to be done in the UK to ensure real equality in many areas, including criminal justice, policing and stop and search, educational attainment and representation in the media. In the US, the #blacklivesmatter campaign and the boycott of the Oscars highlight the shocking inequalities that still exist.

Technology

1959

Luna 2 becomes the first man made object to reach the moon, the first commercial photocopier is launched. The typical UK home has a cooker, vacuum cleaner and a plug-in radio. Only 33% of households had a washing machine and only 10% had a phone. There were less than 500 computers in the UK.

2016

British astronaut Tim Peake tweets from space and people in the UK are able to watch his spacewalk live. There are approximately 36m computers in the UK today, and 93% of adults in the UK have a mobile phone. About 96% of UK homes have a television and 97% have a washing machine.

Culture

1959

Among the most popular films released were Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and the musical *South Pacific*. Elvis Presley's *Jailhouse Rock* and Jerry Lee Lewis' *Great Balls of Fire* were both number one records. Popular books included Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Dr Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat*.

2016

The most popular recent films include *Star Wars: Episode VII* and *The Revenant*. The current number one song is *7 years* by Lukas Graham and Adele's album *25* tops the album charts. The best selling paperback and e-book is currently *Me Before You*, by Jojo Moyes.

Homelessness

1959

In 1949, six people were found sleeping rough in London but the numbers soon grew. A hard-hitting TV drama about homelessness, *Cathy Come Home*, raised awareness of the problem, and charities like Shelter and St Mungo's were formed. St Mungo's placed some of the hundreds of people sleeping rough in London in hostels.

2016

Since the 2002 Homelessness Act, local authorities have a responsibility to provide accommodation to priority households. Homelessness is an increasing problem in a city with rising house prices and rents and in London alone, 6,508 people were reported sleeping rough during 2013/14.

Mental health

1959

In the 1950s there were over 150,000 beds for mental health patients, many of these in traditional asylums. Whilst they could be brutal and uncaring, with poor treatment of patients, many provided a refuge for people with no other options. Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) was widely used to treat mental health problems, though it was not well understood.

2016

One in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. There are 27,000 beds for mental health patients and much of the mental health care system is described as in crisis. Attitudes towards people with mental health problems are improving, thanks to campaigns like Time to Change, which tackles stigma. ECT is still occasionally used, but is very controversial and still not understood.

Current affairs

1959

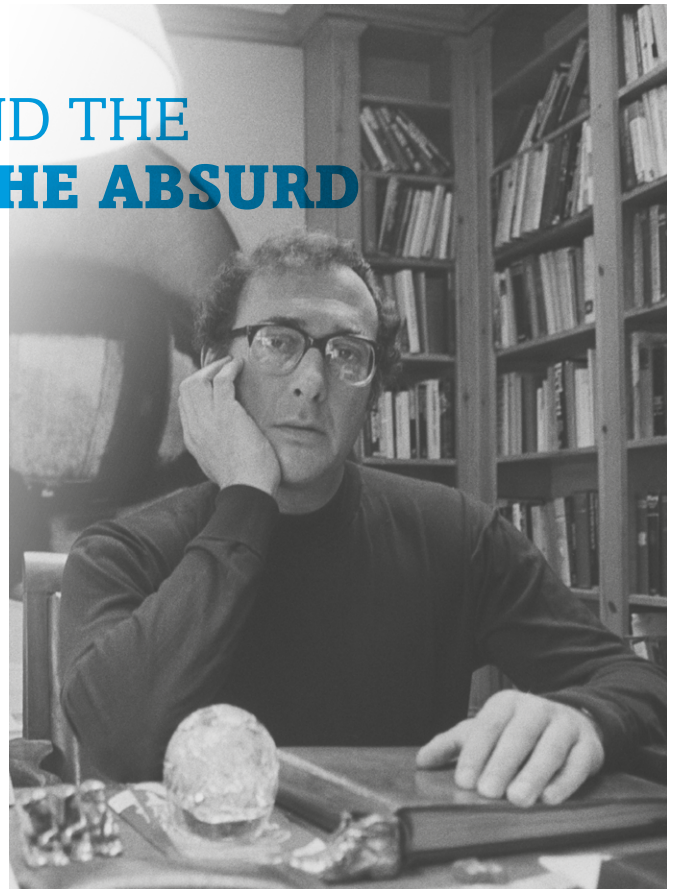
Fidel Castro comes to power in Cuba after the revolution, the first communist state in the West. The Dalai Lama is forced to flee from Tibet and Hawaii becomes the 50th American state.

2016

The continuing tensions in Syria, the rise of Daesh (Isis) and huge numbers of refugees seeking safety in Europe dominate the news in the UK. The American presidential primaries, which select who will become each party's candidate, are hotly contested and Donald Trump is winning more votes than anyone would have thought. 2015 has been the hottest year on record.

PINTER AND THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The theatre student and critic Martin Esslin coined the term ‘Theatre of the Absurd’, and used it to describe the work of certain dramatists writing plays in the decade after the Second World War. He identified the work of Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*), Eugene Ionesco (*Chairs*), Arthur Admaov (*Le Professeur Taranne*), Jean Genet (*The Maids*) and the emerging writer, Harold Pinter, as having strong similarities both in the themes of the plays and the form that they took, suggesting a new shared way of thinking about the world. The Theatre of the Absurd was not a conscious genre, the dramatists weren’t adhering to any rules or singular philosophy when they wrote their plays. Harold Pinter began writing after some of pioneers of the form and their influence can be seen in both his writing, and how audiences received the plays. Early plays were seen as shocking and heavily criticised, but by the time that *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker* were produced they started to receive both critical and commercial success.



Harold Pinter, 1983

The word absurd is more commonly understood to mean ridiculous, but originally it meant out of harmony, in a musical context. It is this definition, the sense of something being out of harmony that is meant when referring to the absurd in the context of Theatre of the Absurd.

There are a number of shared characteristics of plays considered to be Theatre of the Absurd. Most importantly, the world in which all of the plays action happens is a world in which things do not make sense. Following the horror and chaos of the First and Second World Wars, the end of empires and the decline in the belief of God, all the traditional structures which had provided a clear sense of meaning, and a rational order in Western Europe no longer made sense. The traditional, well-made play, clearly-defined in a genre of comedy or tragedy, with three acts, easily identifiable characters and a neat resolution at the end no longer seemed suitable to describe or explore the real world and people’s life experiences.

The dramatists of the Theatre of Absurd bought together both form and content, rather than ‘...arguing about the absurdity of the human condition: it merely presents it in being – that is in concrete stage images’ (Esslin, 1980, p25). The plays were often criticised for having very little plot and no easily identifiable characters – nothing happens. The plot of *The Caretaker* can be reduced to: one man offers another man a place to stay and then withdraws that offer. The characters in the play don’t have clear motives and we discover very little about them; so much is unknown. It can be argued that this is an accurate representation of our experience of life, with people in all their contradictions, weakness and unknown motivations just trying to make sense of what is happening here and now. Pinter says ‘I looked through a door into a third room, and saw two people standing up and I wrote *The Caretaker*’ (Pinter, 1993, pIX). He is concerned with what is happening to these people at this time, and through detailed and honest exploration we uncover experiences and behaviours that feel more universal. Rather than a surface exploration of realism, with naturalistic fully rounded characters, Pinter connects to a deeper psychological truth through situations and characters that are not nice and neat or easily resolved. Pinter says:

'I'm convinced that what happens in my plays could happen anywhere, at any time, in any place, although the events may seem unfamiliar at first glance...I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism' (Pinter, 1993, pg ix).

The characters that populate Pinter's play, especially in his early works, are very ordinary people, and in *The Caretaker* are loosely based on people that Pinter knew or had met. Whereas previously drama had focused on the lives of royalty, nobility and heroes, we find ourselves in the world of working class, alienated, poorly educated and homeless people with poor mental health and frustrated ambitions. This focus on the experience of the less privileged is another defining feature of the Theatre of the Absurd. It places the lives of the majority centre stage, valuing and exploring their struggles and humanity. At the time this was quite a radical act – in *The Caretaker*, the lives of a tramp and a man with poor mental health could be worthy of our consideration and appropriate subjects for art. This concern with the everyday builds on ideas that had been developing in philosophy, in visual art and literature for some years before. Theatre brought this into the public realm in a new way. Theatre is a social art form, bringing people together into the same space to witness a play that goes against the accepted conventions is a powerful experience, and explains why there was outrage at some of the early productions, including Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

In putting ordinary people centre stage we also begin to hear everyday, colloquial language on stage more. In Pinter's plays we can hear the rhythms and accents of working class Londoners, in *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming* there are characters who use very Jewish phrases and slang which was common on the streets of East London at that time.

The language also owes a lot to the comedy acts of music hall, very popular live entertainment featuring comedy, songs and slapstick, often considered working class and not thought of as 'art'. Musical hall comedy acts would often use wordplay, repetition and nonsense language, and the structures of this way of speaking are very evident, especially in the way Davies speaks in *The Caretaker*.

Despite this very specific use of language, Theatre of the Absurd plays are less literary than other forms of theatre and this choice has some of its roots in music hall and also in the comic cinema of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and the Marx brothers. The stage pictures of the plays are important elements of the storytelling. The sequence in *The Caretaker* with the bag, where the three characters each try to take possession, is physical, slapstick comedy at its finest, relying on the actors' skill and comic timing. What is interesting is how this seemingly comic play actually tells us a dark story about power and control, without the need for words, and finally leaves us not laughing, but deeply uncomfortable. Similarly, when Mick takes Davies' trousers from the clothes horse, we find ourselves in an unsettling place between comedy (a trouserless man chasing after his trousers) and the underlying aggression and control that Mick is asserting. Pinter commented in a letter about the play; 'As far as I'm concerned, *The Caretaker* is funny, up to a point. Beyond that point, it ceases to be funny, and it was because of that point that I wrote it.' As an audience we often find ourselves moving swiftly between laughter and revulsion or fear. This breaking down of the traditional genres of comedy or tragedy is another defining characteristic of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Whilst at first glance *The Caretaker* may seem to be very ordinary, it actually works on a poetic level. We are left with a strong sense of these very isolated characters, stripped of social position, desperately trying to survive and make sense of a meaningless world. Their struggles are the very basic, human struggles of the individual trying to make sense of their life. There is a strong thread of satire and social criticism running through the play, as the characters' actions ridicule the habits of a petty, dehumanising society. The Theatre of the Absurd inspires social change not through telling a story with a moral, but through trying to communicate something essential about what it means to be human.

INTERVIEW WITH SOUND DESIGNER SIMON BAKER

What does a sound designer do?

Very simply, the sound designer's job, is to use sound as a tool to tell a story. I'll work with the rest of the creative team using their tools, music, design and light, to tell the story in the best possible way. When you investigate more, you realise that sound as a 'thing' doesn't exist. What we actually hear is matter colliding with other matter, generating movements in air.

Wind has no sound, nor does the sea or rain. Sound is created when it contacts something else, the trees, a beach or a window. And all of this will mean different things have different associations. The sound designer manipulates this intangible and imaginary element to create a new world. The sound designer is always working in two areas at the same time, creatively and technically. What sound does this mean?

How can I make this sound effective in this space, with this equipment?

You and Matthew Warchus (the Director) have worked together several times before. Have you developed a process that you repeat, or is it different for each play?

Each play is different, but because we've worked with each other before there's probably quite a lot of unspoken shorthand that goes on. It's not that Matthew's predictable, but I can understand his aesthetic quite quickly, or where he's heading and what he might mean. Sound is very, very difficult to describe, there's so few words to describe sound events. So I can interpret what he's after. But that's really because we've done lots of shows together.

Not that there is literally a magic shorthand.

I understand his perspective, he's a very accurate and sharp director. He's very, very precise and everything is very finely engineered. So you'll notice a transition, like the lights coming up on stage and it's absolutely precision engineered. Which I love. Those kind of things take a long time and are so hard to do.

They look very simple but the reason they look very simple is because there is so much that has happened underneath.

How did you begin to approach *The Caretaker* together? What's been your process so far?

Matthew's sound work comes quite late in the process. When you're making devised work you need lots of things around you, lots of props and costumes to invent with and it's the same with the sound. With something that is quite prescribed, like *The Caretaker*, the world tends to come quite late. We might have certain obstacles to clear. We know we need to start the show, to go from the position where there's lots of bright house lights and people in the auditorium a bit confused about what they are going to see and we have to get to the first line of the text. So there's a hurdle that creatively me, and the rest of the creative team, have to work out. And that kind of thing is best done in the auditorium. And because we've all worked together before we're able to work really quickly and really efficiently to create that. To find what we are looking for; it could be music, it could be sound, it could be a combination of all kinds of things. But that work tends to come quite late.

The Caretaker is really prescribed, it's really about getting it on its feet, often getting it into the space it's going to be in, seeing it and looking to see what it needs. How does the sound interact with the text? Does it aid it, is it distracting? What's going to happen? And it's really best to stay flexible rather than say what the sound for *The Caretaker* will be and then sticking rigidly to that. I'll watch a run in the rehearsal room, keep talking, knowing the play and then watching it on stage and then seeing what it needs. It's a risky strategy because it doesn't allow you much preparation but because of the amount of shows we've done together, it's doable. It would terrify me working with a director that I'd never worked with before to do that. Couldn't do it. Wouldn't do it! But with someone like Matthew, it's pretty much the best method.

There will always be key things that he needs in the room. There might be a key piece of music that he's using to fill in for scene changes or key sound effect that he needs for something. There a bit like rehearsal props or rehearsal furniture, they won't actually make it into the show, they're building blocks. Pinter famously doesn't need a great deal of framework around it – it is what it is. Sometimes it's about having the confidence

to not put something in. It's very easy to sit there and fulfill one's ego and put a million things into a show but ultimately it doesn't tell the story, it doesn't aid the audiences understanding of the story. So it's also about having the confidence to go, let's not do that. Let's just trust the text.

There's lots of things that will happen in the next two weeks before we go into the theatre and the dress rehearsal. Right now we don't really have anything prepared except some drips for the bucket and some door slams which are generic sounds that are called for in the script. But what else – we won't know until really late. And it will change through preview. That's the thing, Matthew really uses his previews really precisely, they are absolutely working sessions. And it's when people like me and Hugh (lighting designer) do our work. And you have to allow for that. It really is 9am until whenever he wants to stop working in tech week and beyond. So it will change, whatever that first dress rehearsal is, it will grow until press night.

How do you begin? What do you do before rehearsals start?

What's interesting is that the text isn't necessarily the main driver. *The Caretaker* is quite narrow in the ways in which you can take that story. With a Shakespearean play you can go one of a million ways. The text gives you certain things that you know you need to do, you know that you need to tell a certain story. All I want is the best way to tell that story. Then you go looking for time period, if there is one, or if there isn't one, which is interesting. You can look for location, look for the general framework on which the story can be told. That will give you lots and lots of clues to what the sound of the show could be. And it gives you what the form will be, and form is really key because form tells you what sounds are going to work and what sounds aren't going to work. The form comes from the visual clues of the set, the text, the directors' aesthetic, the creative teams aesthetics, all of those are big clues. Understanding form will lock onto what the sound should be.

Is there anything you like to have done before the first day of rehearsals? Do you have any professional habits?

Not really, the thing I get professionally worried about is that I can't really work on more than show at once. The nature of the industry, it isn't a particularly well paid industry. Lots of people work on multiple shows simultaneously and for some reason I can't do it.

My brain can't do it, and I feel I'm not working as hard as I could but I just can't do it. I can only really carry the knowledge of one show in my head at a time. That's reading it, understanding it, and understanding what happens next in the story at every point. It's not about learning the script, it's understanding the story being told in the text. Matthew will have fixed ideas about which way he wants to go, right now there is no definitive idea about what the sound world of *The Caretaker* will be, it will grow over the next three weeks really.

Are there any sources or influences that you've explored when developing the sound design for this show?

I sort of feel with *The Caretaker* that I know where it's set, I know the room. A distant relative of mine used to live in a really similar environment. I remember visiting it as a kid, we weren't rich kids but we lived in better conditions than this person we went to visit. So with *The Caretaker* I feel I do know that environment, that world, that broken down landscape. So actually I sort go back there. It's funny, you sort of build an entire location in your head and what it might sound like. What's great about *The Caretaker* is that it's tangible and it exists. When you're trying to create something like *The Lord of The Rings*, which has no reality, it's an awful lot of work. *The Caretaker's* quite a good thing to work on. I understand the broken down, tired, depressed world much easier.

How do you work with the composer, Gary Yershon?

It always changes show by show. Gary will have made some very early rough 'sketches' of the music for Matthew, some might even be used in rehearsal. Some might not. With something like *The Caretaker* you're also trying to work out whether music's going to work or not work. So discovering what doesn't work is as important as discovering what does. Once that process is through we'll then meet early in the final week of rehearsal. We'll never make completed music but we'll make more polished stuff to go into tech week. We'll sit and do those things together and Gary will have very clear ideas of what he wants so I sort of act between engineer and producer to him at that point. And we'll come up with another draft version of what's going to happen in the show and then once that becomes more refined we'll start making the actual version of the music. Going back over and making it better. That's literally me and him sat down in front of computer screens and a copy of Logic (music and sound production software) and there we go.

The relationship between the music and sound can change while you are teching, sometimes they really don't seem to work with each other and you only actually need one element to deliver a moment. It's really hard working out which element is clearest to the audience and benefits the story more – sometimes it's a combination of both. It's about discovering what works. Quite often they'll be two solutions and it's about working out which one is the right one. The key is that we are never at odds about whose is better, it's about which is going to work. And sometimes you might discover that one language is working better than another. So it maybe that a musical language is working better than a sound language so you might pursue that more, or vice versa. So things can change and change quite late.

What is the biggest challenge of *The Caretaker* for you at the moment?

I don't know actually. It doesn't feel like there are huge challenges, every show has the same set of challenges, within the resources you've got you need to deliver the best possible thing you can that serves the play. When I did *The Master Builder* there were key moments that I was concerned about or not really knowing how to do. *The Caretaker* doesn't really have that. That's a blessing and a curse because we'll get to tech and they'll be something I've forgotten! It'll be oh no – I hadn't thought about that. *The Master Builder* certainly had moments, most shows do, the normal practical problems.

As audiences we are more and more lazy at listening. Because everything is delivered to us so aggressively, and compressed, and we spend more and more time listening to stuff on headphones. But actually the acoustic voice in the auditorium is really tricky these days, and it's not do with actors getting worse or anything. We literally don't listen as hard as we used to. Audiences' expectations of what something should sound like are so high because of TV, film and musical theatre that actually listening to the acoustic voice in theatre now is quite alien to a lot of people. It seems incredibly quiet. Because it is – in comparison.

It's really important to hear an actors' voice in the theatre environment. Even in the 20 years I've been doing this, the shows have gotten progressively louder. I do lots of musical theatre work and go and listen to a musical and then a play and the difference in volume is massive. I think there's two ways of amplifying the voice. One is for effect, to control the dynamic, and one is a practical reason, to make the voice heard.

You really have to decode why you're doing something. I'm doing *A Midsummer Nights Dream* in a couple of months and I'm going to amplify lots of the voices because there's lots of music, there's lots of stuff going on. We'll have a much better show because we can control the energy, the volume of the show. In a show like *The Caretaker* there is an integrity to hearing actors. It may be that we need lifting or reinforcing or subtle work because there's issues with the building or issues with traffic noise or things which shouldn't be there. But I do think that there is an integrity in something like hearing the actor and the audience being asked to really listen. Because storytelling is about the audience engaging with what's in front of them so you have to be careful what you use and when you use it.

You've worked at The Old Vic a lot, are there particular challenges or joys about the space from a sound perspective?

It's a great space to work in. It has certain issues, it's hilariously on three main roads which might work to your advantage. In *The Caretaker* it'll be great when an ambulance goes past and you hear the siren. In *The Master Builder* that's a disaster. It's the outside world, which in contemporary or semi-contemporary drama is great and in a period piece it could ruin you. It breaks the suspension of your belief in the world. It's a nice sounding auditorium actually. I don't have any problems with it. The sides are always tricky because it sweeps round, it means just as the sightlines get tricky so to does what you hear. And you just have to work on that.

How has your practice as a sound designer changed over your career?

The core things haven't changed. The excitement of creating a new auditory world is still there, that's always been core and that's why I do it. That's what I enjoy. The technology has changed massively. Absolutely hugely. That's made the workflow much, much quicker than it ever used to be. And improved the audiences experience of the show. We've lost some stuff. One of the things that I do, that all sound designers do, is search for sound effects. You make recording of samples or get them from libraries. Years ago libraries used be all on vinyl and you used to avoid them. Now libraries are all digital and all in major LA or post production studios and pretty much anything you can think of is available. That's great but it also stops you making alternatives. You used to find if you took a recording of a pet shop and slowed it down by half you've got a recording of a forest and you don't make those kinds of discoveries anymore because you go the sound library and pick forest.

If you could go back in time to meet yourself at the start of your career and give yourself one piece of advice, what would it be?

Be a doctor! (laughs). I think there's nothing really I'd change. This is all I've known and I've had a great time. There have been one or two shows that I had a miserable time on and of course there's sort of key decisions in certain shows that I wouldn't make again. But experience makes you who you are doesn't it. I still do love this job. The difficulty is, the truth is the really interesting work is the least commercial work and what that means is you can only afford to do the most interesting work if you can afford to fund it in another way. And I think that's true across the arts industry, in general. Actually doing a great big glitzy musical, while enjoyable isn't as creative as doing the tiny two person show at a cutting edge venue, it's a different world. That's the downside. You can't afford to do it – who can, I'll go and take six months to develop a new show.

What are your creative ambitions, is there a show or something that you'd really like to do?

I'm doing something I thought I'd never do. I'm doing a show at Shakespeare's Globe and for the first time we

are going to put reinforced sound and a sound system into the Globe. And I'd never thought I'd be doing that. It's going to be a really interesting experiment to see if it works. It might not though. So I'm looking forward to doing that. So it was sort of an ambition, to try something completely new. That's going to be fun.

Is there a sound that you'd like to hear in person?

Hmmm, I don't know. I'm still a kid. I still want to be working on *Dr Who* or *Star Wars*. The reason I got into this was because when I was a tiny kid I was obsessed with how the tardis noise was made. If they rang me up and said do you want to do the new series of *Dr Who* I'd be like, yes!

Simon has written a really helpful essay for anyone interested in sound design, packed with lots of useful advice. You can find it on:

simonnbaker.co.uk/The_Essay.html

You can listen to examples of Simon's work on his website or on: soundcloud.com/simonnbaker



INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR GEORGE MACKAY

What do you do before starting rehearsals?

It's interesting, because I'm learning with each play what's needed. With experience it's like, 'Oh I should have done more of that, or less of that'. So usually I try and get a sense of my lines as best as possible. Because that sort of cancels out one of my biggest fears and that enables me to be a lot less scared and more flexible. That said, it can sometimes be a bit troublesome – I found it a bit troublesome at the beginning of this rehearsal. To learn them I had to make my own decisions about them, but that means I came in with some decisions sort of pre-made, which is good because you have something to offer. But if they're not right you have to kind of let go of them.

I'm learning to be a bit more open and allow myself to be a bit more scared. To be more open, rather than be worried about being 'found out' on the first day. I read the script a lot – always go over the script lots. Then each part is different. With this there was a bit of accent work, because Mick's got more of a sort of a cockney, London accent. So I did a bit of work on that myself, speaking to friends who had the same accent, and then working with a dialect coach for a few sessions before starting rehearsals. I also did a bit of reading on Pinter himself. I started a book about him that I didn't finish until we were mid-way through rehearsals. I said to myself that I would read more plays than I have. I did read another one of his plays, just to get a sense of his style, I guess. Obviously we want to do our own thing, but his name is attached to something, a sort of style of writing and way of doing things. I was quite wary of getting locked into that, and not wanting to just replicate that. But I also wanted to learn about what it is to do his plays – I want learn about his style so that I can approach the material better.

It's week four of rehearsals, how has the process been so far?

It's been cool, it's been fascinating. The play is so deep, so it's very daunting at the beginning, because there's so much possibility. You don't know where to take it – so you sort of dive in with one idea, and because there are so many options, you sort of think – I want to try and pick the right one first. Because within that option, it's like a sort of mind map – there's a sort of arm and



once you get to the end of that arm, it could be a word, or way of doing something or whatever it is, there's another three more options, and then another three. So you're like, I want to make a decision. But at the same time, like learning your lines too much, you've got to be able to let stuff go.

So now, come week four, there's still so many possibilities and still so many things to find out. I think we'll be finding that out all throughout the run to be honest, but now we are starting to fix some things. It's like having milestones, or road signs that we are going to stick with – this idea links to that, this fed in from that and this compliments what came before. I don't know if 'easy' is the right word – but I feel in a better position to orientate myself, being a bit further down the line. Like anything, I just know more now. That said, there's still much more to find.

Do you have any particular exercises or rehearsal techniques that you like to use a lot?

You learn so many with each job. My process, which I'm still trying to work out, is doing work that makes

you feel you're ready. And that changes with the job. With this, there's been some physical work. Having not gone to drama school, I've been doing work on and warming up those muscles that will be required in projecting my voice. And the physical side to the character, he's very difficult to pin down. I think it's important, it would be cool, to have an element of it that's physical too. It's preparation in terms of allowing yourself to feel able to explore the broad idea of what the character is, and the specifics of that change with each job. It might be that if you don't have many words and the context is more important or if you've got tons of words but it's a non-specific place that's not as affected by the context, then that will be a different process. You do that for yourself before you get going. Then the main thing is when you are in the room and working with people – how you are then, how you respond.

You've worked with the Director, Matthew Warchus, on the film, *Pride*, is the process of working together on a play different?

I think the nature of the film we worked on, there were so many people involved. It was rare that you'd have a scene with three people. It was more common that there'd be a scene of six to twelve people. One day we had 40 speaking roles on set! I don't know how different the actual approach is, but on *The Caretaker* we simply have more time to rehearse. We have more conversations that are exploring things that are yet to come. Whereas in film, we did have three weeks of rehearsal on *Pride* – the conversations we had were little check ups on set, for something that you are literally just about to do. Whereas now, we are having deeper conversations to do with something that's a little bit further away, just because we won't have as much contact with the Director during the run of the play. But I think that there's just more contact, because there's just the three of us actors working together.

You've worked in film, TV and theatre. Is there one medium that you enjoy more?

What I like about each medium is what's different about the others. In theatre I love the fact we get to go on one big run, and see it and feel it – the shape of the play. You're part of some massive journey with all these other people and that's really thrilling. But by the same token I love the sort of slightly ridiculous nature of film, of taking half a day for something that's going to last 30 seconds on screen. You spend so much time on making something so short but in a way they both last forever. With theatre and film when you've done it, you can't take it back. In theatre you do it again the

next night but you can't redo the last night. It's always going to be what it was. In film it's in the hands of the people who edit it and it's up to them how it turns out. But with both you've done something, and it's imprinted, be it on film or a memory card or someone's memory.

You will be performing in *The Caretaker* for 8 weeks. How will you keep your performance fresh each night?

I don't know! The jobs that I've done in the past, you stay focused on, 'How can I improve it'. Then again, you can't pre-empt the things that will change. Those things will come out of the work. I mean, even this morning I had an idea of a scene we working on, and it changed at lunchtime and then it changed again when we just re-ran it. I think one thing about *The Caretaker* is there's always so many possibilities of what's actually going on underneath the text. And also of Mick, the way in which he says things, or manipulates people, there's many different possible ways of doing it. So they'll be some of exploring that as we go. That said, I think changes have to be about improving the piece, and not for the sake of it. What you always want to put across is the best version of the play that you can, and that will take some getting to know I think. Maybe we'll never know. That's the thing about theatre it genuinely is, to varying degrees, different every night, every performance.

How do you feel about Mick, the character that you are playing?

He's mercurial. He's wonderfully complex, which I know is a sweeping statement. I'm still working him out to be honest. I want to give a good answer but while I'm still working it out I also want to hold back. He's kind of got – oh no, this is going to be such a vague answer! He's got various different ways of doing different things, and I'm still trying to work out how conscious of each one he is. He's so complex. In rehearsals we have time to go through and analyse what motivates everything whereas sometimes in life we are motivated by something from way back when. So we say something because of how we've been treated way back when – and I'm trying to understand that for Mick. He's incredibly bright. I'm still working it out, just still working it out!

What's been the biggest challenge of this rehearsal process for you?

Honestly, the biggest thing – nerves. Not just in the sense of 'Ooh there's going to be a lot of people there' but also not letting those nerves be the biggest thing.

They can be positive – nerves are important, you want them there, but they shouldn't be something that you seek out. You just have to truck through it, I think.

What's been your favourite thing about rehearsals so far?

It's the hydra-head thing, where you make one discovery about the play, chop off one head and three more possibilities grow. When you get a nugget or a new path that feels good, it's like 'oooh' – and it's a really exciting thing that there's three more heads. It's these little blossoming moments of possibility for the character, or the story that's really exciting. There's also the section with the bag passing, it's tricky. Danny, Tim and I had practised it loads one day and then the next morning we ran the whole act and when it finished it was all quiet and then we all just looked at each other and went 'Yes, we nailed the bag bit!' We were really excited.

Next week you'll be moving from the rehearsal room into the theatre. What are you most looking forward to about that?

I'm really curious to see what an audience thinks of the play. We are getting used to understanding the play, quite sort of privately. It'll be interesting to see what people think. I'm sure that they'll be some people who know the play and will have their own ideas about it and some people who know nothing about the play. And I'm just curious to see what the reaction will be.

You've already mentioned that you didn't go to drama school. How did you become an actor? Is it something that you've always wanted to do?

I was really, really lucky. I got my first job from school when Shaheen Baig, a casting director, was doing a big search. She was going round lots of different schools to pick people for a workshop. And I went along to a workshop to audition as a lost boy for the film *Peter Pan*, and after that workshop I got called back a number of times and eventually got the part of Curly in *Peter Pan*. I was 10, so I wasn't really considering what

I wanted to do. I just enjoyed drama and that whole experience was so much fun, I just thought I'd like to do this again. I got an agent through a friend, and she put me up for jobs when there were opportunities and I managed to work through school. Then I auditioned for two drama schools when I left school and I didn't get in. So I thought I'd try and keep working and, touch wood, I've managed to carry on working, for the minute!

Do you have any advice for young people who are interested in becoming an actor?

I wouldn't want to patronise, because I was so lucky with being able to get work. The more I work, the more I realise I learn most when I'm doing. It's really difficult when that decision is taken out of your hands – in terms of simply being employed. There's so much that I've learned so far in this rehearsal process that has changed the way I'll approach the second part of it, and will influence how I approach other jobs - just through working with other people. It's hard if acting is the thing that you are doing and trying to live off, but really if there is anyway you can just be doing it, just do as much as possible.

Are there any roles that you'd really like to play?

It's mainly roles that have already been done – you see something and go wow! I've been really blessed in terms of roles that I come across that I didn't know about. So there's nothing that I'd call out, I'm just really open to any possibility.

Are there any actors you think are brilliant and that you'd really like to work with?

Danny and Tim! I really admire both of them. It was really thrilling and wonderful and quite scary on the first day of rehearsal. They're really nice blokes though. Hmmmm, I don't know – any actor who consistently does good work and varied work, both in the characters they play, and the mediums in which they do it. As many as possible please!

PRACTICAL EXERCISES – PHYSICAL STORYTELLING AND COMEDY

Harold Pinter writes very precise plays. The language, while seemingly casual and realistic, is carefully crafted and there are often detailed stage directions. Realising the stage pictures that Pinter writes require the actors performing the play to work very closely as an ensemble, with physical sequences that often draw on the traditions of clowning and slapstick comedy from the music hall tradition. The following exercises encourage participants to explore some of these skills.

Yes/No (5 minutes)

This warm-up game encourages participants to be playful with language and explore sub-text, tone and meaning. Split the group into pairs and ask them to label themselves A and B. Instruct each pair to have a conversation, where A can only use the word 'Yes' and B can only use the word 'No'. Neither partner is allowed to touch the other. Allow the group 30 seconds to explore this. Ask for feedback about what the group noticed. What relationships or stories appeared? What was happening? How could we tell? Ask participants to think about how they used pauses and silences – if no-one did ask for some suggestions about how they might use these if they played again.

Re-set and ask participants to swap so that A can only use the word 'No' and B can only use the word 'Yes'. Explain that they are having an argument, A wants B to leave, B does not want to leave. Encourage the participants to think about their objective but allow themselves to be affected by their partner. Again they cannot touch each other. Allow this exercise to run for two to three minutes. You can move around the space and side coach. Notice when the energy dips and boredom sets in, encourage the participants to work through this and make new discoveries. Allow how they are feeling to affect what they are doing. You could ask pairs who are working really well to share back a couple of moments, or move straight to a plenary and ask for feedback. What tactics worked? When did you listen to your partner or change your approach? What happened when you got bored or frustrated? Notice how in *The Caretaker* the story of what is happening is often not communicated to the audience through the words that are used.

Eyes out (10 minutes)

A game to explore focus, ensemble, and the world of the clown. The group sit down to create an 'end on' audience, and three volunteers stand in a straight line facing them. Explain to the volunteers that at any given moment one of them must be looking directly out and making eye contact with the audience and the other two must be looking directly at the person who is looking out. At any time one of the participants in the line can change the configuration, either by looking at someone else in the line (if they were staring directly out) or by staring out (if they were looking at someone else in the line). The other participants in the line must respond so that there is always only one person looking out at the audience. Encourage them to start slowly and work together as a team, they all need to win this together.

Let the game play for 30 seconds to a minute. It's important to allow laughter, which is a natural response but encourage participants to continue working and playing the game. Stop the game and ask for some feedback from the audience – what was happening? Who had status? What did we enjoy? What didn't we enjoy? Then ask the participants – how easy or hard was it? What skills did they have to use?

Repeat the exercise with three more volunteers and encourage them to be more playful with each other, you can side coach to encourage participants to try to catch each other out, then repeat the plenary starting with the audience observations.

Chair status (10 minutes)

You will need: three chairs.

In *The Caretaker*, the characters constantly try to maintain and exert their status, often non-verbally. The following exercise explores status, ensemble and clown in a playful way. Keeping the participants in the same 'end on' audience configuration ask for two volunteers. Give each student a chair. Explain that the participants are on stage at a conference, they both think that they are the most important person and to prove it they will sit down last. The conference cannot begin until they are both seated. They cannot speak at all during this exercise though they may use noises. Let the exercise play out until they are both sitting, or for about three minutes. Then stop and ask the audience to give their opinions about who had the most status, and why. Ask for audience observations of what worked and what didn't work so well, what was interesting to watch. Ask for some feedback from the participants - how easy or difficult was it? Repeat the game with new volunteers adding in an extra person and chair so that there are three participants playing. Repeat the plenary to end.

Working on the text (30 minutes)

You will need: copies of the stage directions, a bag and a copy of the character breakdown for each group of three participants.

Split the participants into groups of three, and ask them to label themselves A, B and C. A will be playing Aston, B will be playing Davies and C will be playing Mick. The group does not need any prior knowledge of the play or the characters for this exercise. Give each group a copy of the stage directions from Act Two of *The Caretaker* (over). Ask the group to spend three minutes working out the sequence and practicing it until they can make the sequence run smoothly. Let them know that they will be performing this 'end on'. After three minutes stop the participants and ask them what they have discovered about the characters – who is in control? What evidence do they have for this? What has been difficult/ what has been easy? Encourage the group to think about rhythm, and tempo and the use of the words in the stage directions eg. take vs grab.

Give each group the character breakdown for Aston, Mick and Davies. Allow them to read it, and then ask the whole group to give some opinions about how this might change their performance of the sequence. Give the groups a further three minutes to polish the piece and then present them back, asking the audience to give feedback – at least one thing they liked and one thing they would ask the group to work on if they had more time.

Extension exercise (additional 5 mins)

See only a couple of the 'straight' performances back and then give each group a new condition to add in, with an additional three minutes, then share the pieces back with a plenary. Additional conditions could include:

- none of the characters can stay still during the scene
- the characters moving as little as possible during the scene
- performing the scene in the round
- performing the scene in traverse
- adding the word 'yes' each time a character takes possession
- adding the word 'no' each time a character loses possession
- playing the whole scene with the actors looking out at the audience the whole time
- playing the scene as quickly as possible
- playing the scene as slowly as possible

The Caretaker by Harold Pinter Act Two – stage directions

Aston offers the bag to Davies

Mick grabs it. Aston takes it

Mick grabs it. Davies reaches for it

Aston takes it. Mick reaches for it

Aston gives it to Davies. Mick grabs it

Pause

Aston takes it. Davies takes it. Mick takes it. Davies reaches for it. Aston takes it

Pause

Aston gives it to Mick. Mick gives it to Davies. Davies grasps it to him

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF EVENTS MANAGER

EMMA ROBSON

What does your job involve?

I sit within the Development team and organise all of the fundraising events that take place onsite at the theatre, while also assisting the Head of Events with our major fundraisers. As a theatre without regular government support, we have to raise approximately one third of our income through fundraising, so the events are to thank our generous donors, celebrate our sponsorships, and introduce potential future supporters to the theatre. I run about 95 of these events a year.

What do you do on an average day?

I usually tackle my emails first, armed with a cup of coffee. I have events three or four times a week so I usually need to answer some pressing questions or complete outstanding things on my to-do list when I first get in. I can then look a bit further ahead to events taking place in the next month or beyond – sometimes I work much further in advance, programming a calendar of events around a whole season of different productions.

A lot of what I do day-to-day is the groundwork for these events – for example, if I have an event that takes place onstage, I have to ensure I've booked the right spaces, made sure I've communicated it properly to the relevant departments, booked staff, ordered the flowers, arranged the catering, reserved the tickets... the list goes on! When we have a large fundraiser approaching, I take care of the ticket bookings and act as the primary point-of-contact for the guests, so a lot of my days are spent answering ad-hoc queries, processing bookings and posting tickets, plus other tasks like proof-reading the programme and laminating access-all-areas passes...

Have you always worked in a theatre?

No, but I have always worked in events. I realised I enjoyed organising things when I organised the Leavers' Ball at school, and then took some work experience in my university holidays organising an annual charity ball. After studying English Literature and History of Art at university, I knew I wanted to find a job within events that also satisfied my love of the arts.

It took a couple of jobs that were not quite right for me to realise that I wanted to work in a theatre, and luckily the stars eventually aligned to enable me to get this job.

Which part of your job do you most enjoy?

The day-to-day satisfaction of organising, delivering and completing a really good, successful event. I love that I get to deal with almost every department, plus the cast and creative team, on a near-daily basis. No two days are the same: I would find it really difficult to get bored.

What is your best memory of working at The Old Vic so far?

I've worked on some fundraisers that have been bonkers but absolutely brilliant to be a part of. We organised an event called *The 24 Hour Plays*, where 6 new short plays were devised, written, rehearsed and staged in 24 hours, which was no mean feat. The Gala we held to mark the end of Kevin Spacey's 11-year tenure as Artistic Director was so spectacular. And every time I watch a play staged here I'm reminded how fantastic this building is, and why I do the job I do.

If you were to offer a young person wanting to get into the industry some advice, what would you tell them?

If you want to be involved in staging work, then get all the experience you can. Take a job that gets you into a creative environment – our usher and bar team are made up of the smartest, most talented young actors, directors and producers around. Volunteer. Get involved with free schemes that will introduce you to theatre. There's also so much more to the theatre than what you see onstage – pull back the curtain and you'll find all sorts of jobs. If you want to work backstage, build up your experience elsewhere if you have to, all the while keeping your eyes peeled for job vacancies that crop up. Go and see theatre – lots of it – so that you can then wow your interviewers with your passion and enthusiasm.

What is the biggest misconception about working in a theatre?

Theatre and events can both be seen as superfluous and elitist, and there can be an assumption that it's all glamour and celebrity spotting. There is some glamour and there are some celebrities, but the day-to-day is both busier and more admin-heavy than you might expect!

Did you have any theatre heroes when you were growing up?

I've always been in awe of actors like Mark Rylance who can command a stage with a single word or ached eyebrow and directors/choreographers like Matthew Bourne, who can create something beautiful and otherworldly. But, that said, I think rather than having 'heroes', it's the collective experience of watching and being a part of theatre that I've always loved – it's something like no other.

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