

ISSUE 16. 2018.

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BA

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One of the questions we often hear from students is: 'what am I going to do when I leave university?' While we want students to invest themselves fully into their university experience, and not constantly worry about what happens next, we are also aware that this concern for future careers is important and inevitable.

During their course our students receive rich and diverse opportunities to expand their thinking, all informing their journey to discovering what they might want to do once they leave university. This includes work placements with the creative partnerships that the university has with regional and national arts organisations, study abroad programmes, internships, and career development support. All this, we tell our students, will not only prepare them for careers after university, but sometimes even provide them with the first step, the first opportunity, that first vital contact.

And it works. In the latest national survey of graduate destinations, 96.9% of students from York St John University are in employment or further study six months after graduating. This outstanding result places the university 23rd out of 153 in the country for graduate outcomes, alongside being placed in the top 50 universities for student satisfaction with 85% for overall student satisfaction.

Such statistics, however, do not reveal exactly what it is that our students do when they graduate. They do not reveal the myriad of stories that we hear from our graduates about what they have done and how they have grown and developed as practitioners, educators, entrepreneurs, artists and performers. Nor do they reveal precisely how their university experiences prepared them for such adventures.

This alumni edition of Theatre Pages hopes to do precisely that, giving twelve of our graduates from the last ten years an opportunity to return and tell us what they did next. More than statistics, it is these graduate voices that speak clearly of the experience of studying drama at York St John University and of votal moments of learning provided transformational opportunities and nformed their journey to employment or further study

ALEXANDER KANIEWSKI

DIRECTOR AND THEATRE DESIGNER

York St John gave me a sense of the vast breadth and diversity of work, life and art that can be labelled 'theatre'. Most memorable for me was discovering and learning about the New York art scene of the 1960s and 70s, a place and time that would come to influence and develop my practice the most. It became evident all the artists that I admired – such as Merce Cunningham, Lucinda Childs, Steve Reich, Laurie Anderson – were a part of this scene, influencing each other to collaboratively push the boundaries of their art. It was all new to me, it filled me with a sense of ambition and excitement, and made me want to be a part of the kind of work and concepts they were exploring. York St John encouraged me and gave me the environment and the freedom to do so.

This freedom to chart your own path allowed me to create durational performance art works, outdoor environmental explorations and even design and direct my own contemporary opera. A Very Pleasant Pineapple, an opera exploring the life and works of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, was my third year independent project, a collaboration with fellow student, composer Lauren Leigh. I was able to work with a group of 30 people across the university departments of theatre, music, dance and media. It was greatly inspired by Einstein on the Beach the 1976 collaboration between composer Phillip Glass and director

Robert Wilson. The style, look and concepts of Wilson would spark an obsession with the performance and would lead to this amazingly rewarding experience that was the accumulation of the development of my practice during my degree.

The success of A Very Pleasant Pineapple would lead to me receiving the graduate prize from the York Theatre Royal and a year-long theatre artist in residence at York St John University. The prize and residency was part of the celebration of 50 years of theatre at York St John. These opportunities have led to me recently directing and designing my first commissioned piece MEDEA MARIA, a contemporary opera of Euripides's Medea retold through the eyes of Maria Callas, performed at York Theatre Royal as part of York's Literature Festival. Later this year I will also be directing York St John's contribution to the York Mystery plays, before hopefully traveling to New York to partake in Robert Wilson's summer residency at the Watermill Centre. YSJ has made me hungry for new and explorative work and has enriched my practice as a theatre maker.





VERITY BROWN

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS PRACTITIONER

I can honestly say that if I hadn't completed my degree in theatre at York St John, I wouldn't be in the job I am in now.

After completing my degree, I took a children and young person's post at a local charity that supports victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. I can remember when I applied for the job knowing that my learning at YSJ had prepared me for every part of the criteria that was needed. I had chosen to pick applied theatre modules ont he degree precisely for that reason and also because I knew this was where my interest and strengths were.

During my second year I completed the 'schools' and theatre in social context modules which provided me with facilitation skills that I have taken forward into my current role. The most impactful aspects of these modules for me was that the drama practice was structured through classroom-based learning. Being able to put safe-guarding and creative skills into practice is something that has given me the confidence to know I can do my job safely and that I can work creatively and provide the best resources for young people. Through these modules, and the direct contact with young peoples' groups they provided, I learnt how to professionally facilitate a group and work with real world subject matters.

In my job I work with young people who are vulnerable and at

risk and may have complex needs but my experiences at York St John had already enabled me to work with similar groups of people, so I felt confident starting my job.

During my third year, the independent focus of the modules was something that prepared me for working confidently in a professional role. Part of my current job is to create and deliver outreach project in schools and young settings. The work that I was taught at YSJ and that I created during my degree is work that I have gone on to use in my career today.

The resources and creative knowhow that I gained throughout my time at York St John are things that I cherish and will be eternally grateful for. An important aspect was that I always felt supported by my tutors and that they believed in my ability, pushed me and challenged me in my work. I will always say that studying at York St John was the best decision I ever made. I feel like my career path is full of potential opportunities because of the professional and life skills I gained and all of this is down to my own hard work and the theatre staff for their passion, trust and care.



LAUREN NADIA HALL

THEATRE ENTREPRENEUR

During my 6th form college years I studied music technology, theatre. dance and English. As I began to think about university I knew that I wanted to focus on my creativity and artistic potential, but definitely knew that I didn't want to be an 'actress'. I was pushed by careers advisors at college to look at drama schools, but through the audition process I quickly realised they were not the place for me. However through clearing I discovered the theatre degree at York St John. The next day I visited the department and was shown around by members of staff who explained the ethos of the course, and instantly I knew it was where I wanted to be. In September 2013 I enrolled and started.

In the three years of my studies I gained invaluable knowledge from my lecturers and guest artists running workshops as well as bringing performances to the studios. I focused my degree on autobiographical performance and feminism, which was supported by all members of staff and I was placed with tutors who were specialists in these areas of practice. In my second year I chose to study Theatre of the Self. Artist as Witness and Theatre in a Social Context, giving me the skills and knowledge needed to not only achieve a first in my degree university.

In 2016 I decided to continue my academic journey at York St John by enrolling on a Masters degree in Theatre and Performance. The one vear full time course allowed me to meet even more professional external artists as well as being commissioned by external organisations such as York Art Gallery. The course also gave me a deeper theoretical knowledge and the opportunity to write more critically about theatre, performance and philosophy.

Since then I have worked with many theatre companies as a freelance practitioner, but most recently I have set up my own business with the York St John Grad2Director scheme. My company Impact Media Productions uses theatre expertise to create unique visual content on PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Education) which I deliver to schools across the country. In July 2018 I won the Duke of York Young Entrepreneur Award after founding my company just seven months before.

Not only is YSJ supportive, with an amazing community spirit across the campus but they are known for their academic excellence. Your tutors spend time getting to know you, enabling your professional development, and therefore supporting students in becoming more confident both in yourself and in your practice.

These multiple reasons have lead but also to become successful after me to decide to return to YSJ this October to start a PhD in collaboration with Mind the Gap Theatre Company, under the supervision of Professor Matthew Reason.

JAMES KNIGHT

ACTOR, PERFORMER, CLOWN

To be asked to write for Theatre Pages, two years after I graduated, is an opportunity for me to reflect on my theatre training at YSJU and think about where and how I encountered the discoveries that catapulted me to where I am now – which is as a theatre practitioner running my own company based in York, called Clown Space, creating performances and teaching clowning and mask.

For me it began near the end of my degree, in my final year in 2016, whilst studying on the Independent Practice module. During this module my tutor, Dr Claire Hind, had persistently tasked me to find form in my work, to rummage for a conceptual framework that would hold together the world I was trying to create. It was here that I discovered clowning, although at first I resisted it, seeing it as about gags and routines and not much more.

With guidance I found that contemporary clowning is more than that. Every week through trial and error I would come with a new routine, and every week I worked hard on finding a framework that tied it all together. Slowly I started to combine clowning with writing and as well as being a physical pleasure, the theatre performance started to have context and purpose and a series of 'NED' talks was born.

In my two years since graduating, I strived to do three things: be the nicest person in the room; be passionate

but not precious; and invest in opportunities to make things happen. All are important but in attempting to have a career as a theatre practitioner this last one is crucial. I said to myself early on that I am not just searching for work but keeping a lookout for potential relationships, looking to connect with people with similar interests and goals on a human level. Changing the way I have engaged with people has meant no longer thinking simply of opportunities to gain another role, but opportunities to connect with another person that may well continue long after any particular project has completed.

As I was leaving university David Richmond, another tutor, said always think six months ahead. What he meant was as a theatre maker you should always have the next project in the pipeline whilst your working on the current one. Be proactive, plan ahead, so that when the current project is done you've already set the wheels in motion to begin the next, creating a seamless transition.

By seeing it this way work has flowed, work that can grow and become something more in time. So...get involved, be available and say YES!



JESSICA ROBSON

PRISON DRAMA PRACTITIONER

'Everything became clear' was the title of the first ever catalogue document I submitted in my first year of my undergraduate Theatre BA. When I first embarked on the degree I felt confused and wondered why everything was stripped back to the bare bones of 'What is performing?', 'When do we start performing?' and 'Do we ever stop performing?'. I was baffled, but my tutors assured us to 'trust the process' and that's exactly what I did. Everything slowly started to become clear and I learnt that even if things don't go perfectly - you often make new discoveries from trusting the process and allowing mistakes to happen. It wasn't until my second year in the Theatre in Social Context module, where the penny dropped and I truly knew what I wanted to do; work with different communities. My first work placement was with Converge, a YSJ project run in collaboration with the NHS that provides artsbased education opportunities to people who access mental health services. Through this I gained some unbelievable experiences and skills in facilitation and thoroughly enjoyed volunteering there.

In third year, I decided I really wanted to do a project in HMP Askham Grange with Senior Lecturer Rachel Conlon and the York St John Prison Partnership Project and was very passionate about doing so. It allowed me and my company to create the

show *Through the Gap* which is still performed today to students and at criminal justice conferences. The play pays homage to the stories shared in HMP Askham Grange by the women, commenting on the criminal justice system.

Today I continue to work as a Graduate Intern and drama facilitator with the York St John Prison Partnership Project working with a group of women on a weekly basis exploring and creating performance around identity and womanhood in HMP New Hall. This process allowed me to build up a repertoire and make connections with other artists who work in the criminal justice system and has opened up amazing opportunities to work with prestigious theatre companies such as the Donmar Warehouse. Recognised by the university myself and my co-facilitator and fellow YSJ alumni Casey Fox will be employed on the York St John Prison Partnership as of September as the project grows. The ability to use theatre and empower groups is something I am still passionate about and I have the theatre department's work placement opportunities and the York St John Prison Partnership to thank for this.



CHANCE MARSHALL

DRAMATHERAPIST

My time at York St John was challenging transformative. stimulating. The Drama and Theatre course braided both embodied and academic practices in order to help me develop my own creative performance practice and strengthen me as a completed my training on the Drama thinker and as a theatre maker.

The outward facing nature of the course and modules such as Artist as Witness, Auto/Biography Into Performance, Practice as Research and Intertext aided me in becoming more culturally attuned; to have an awareness of, and an aliveness to, the world around me: and in understanding the role theatre has to play in affecting positive change, growth and insights - on an individual level and a societal level. Each module provided rich and fertile ground for me to test-out, explore and to take risks. I was offered opportunities to tour my performances outside of the university at Drifting East Festival (East Riding Theatre, Beverley) and received publishing credits as a result of student-tutor collaboration (see Claire Hind and Clare Qualmann's Ways to Wander, 2015).

I still hold the words, guidance and advice I received from the course team and incredible visiting artists such as Adrian Howells and Karen Christopher (Goat Island) very closely.

The course at York St John helped me to find my voice as an Artist, to find my passions and it gave me the confidence to apply for my Masters training.

Since graduating in 2015. I have and Movement Therapy MA at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. I have worked with clients in settings ranging from the NHS; Adult Mental Health; Addiction Recovery; Refugee and Migrant Day Centres; Mainstream Schools and schools specialising in the provision of education for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

I am currently based in London working as a freelance Dramatherapist within Adult Mental Health services, an Addiction Recovery Centre, and at a Refugee and Migrant Centre.

SIMON BEDWELL

LIGHTING DESIGNER

I graduated from York St John with a BA in Theatre in July 2014 followed by an MA in Theatre and Performance in September 2016. Since graduating, I've lit theatre, dance, opera, music and festivals performances with designs sent out to international and national touring companies. Most recently, I've lit shows for York Theatre Royal and The Arcola, in London.

The intrinsic learning pedagogy, unique to York St John allowed my creative practice to integrate and interrogate many different art forms and genres. I'm grateful to the degree for allowing me to experience the core values of theatre, namely: hard work, long nights and to be learning by 'doing'. I learnt how to focus a fresnel by exploring and watching how I could manipulate light, by closing shutters and detracting lamps away from lenses. The freedom to experiment has been crucial to my learning practice when approaching new venues, technology and artists.

YSJ's theatre department is fast-paced and exciting, with many performances, festival and exhibitions occupying the academic year. I soon became involved, working alongside international artists and designers to facilitate technical designs within the university's spaces. Through this, I developed an interest for visual production and I began working for various venues and companies through the city and country.

My external work expanded and

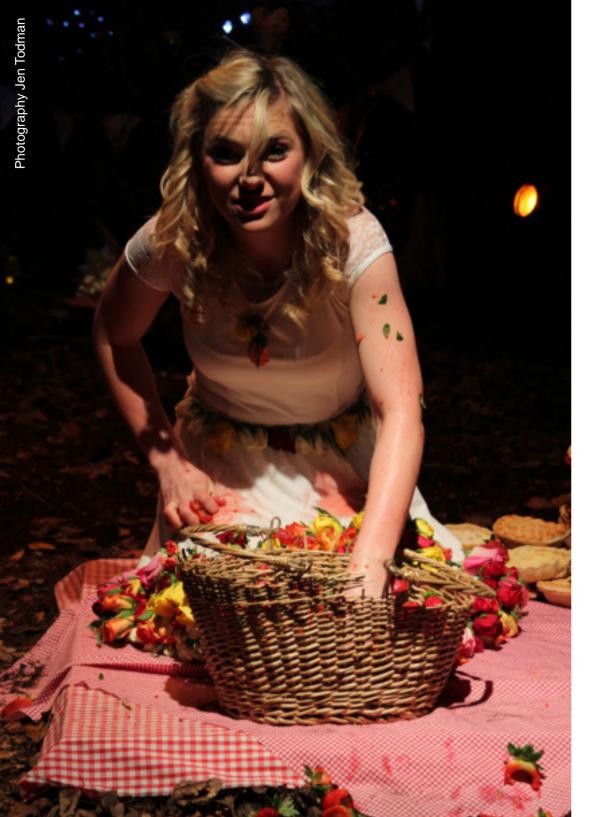
begun to directly inform my practice within taught modules, such as using show control software, digital networkina. projection mapping alongside my continued appreciation and understanding of light. These technologies became a staple of my work with peers and tutors crossexamining the role of technology within performance. There is a healthy habitat for discussing work on the degree, that teases out questions and provokes interesting collaborations and ultimately, outcomes.

Whilst completing my MA, I became Production Manager for the newly formed East Riding Theatre in Beverley, East Yorkshire. When I first walked into the building we had no seats, stage or lighting rig, yet within four weeks, we had opened a professional run of *A Christmas Carol*. 2018 will be our fifth year, and we've produced 15 large scale in-house productions, taken shows to London, hosted festivals and worked with hundreds of artists, touring companies and young people to bring productions and creativity to East Yorkshire.

All of my knowledge, of how to facilitate productions and bring ideas and artistic creations to realisation has stemmed from my time at YSJ. Being surrounded by such a supportive and challenging environment has only just started my learning process.

It is a place I am very fond of and always enjoy returning to, whether touring work or as a visiting lecturer.





LIZZY WHYNES

THEATRE EDUCATION OFFICER

I graduated in Theatre from YSJ in 2014, since then I've had a phenomenal few years working in a variety of different jobs from directing, performing, choreographing, stage management, arts management and education. I am currently the Theatre Education Officer at Harrogate Theatre.

My three years at YSJ were challenging but extremely beneficial. It pushed me to my creative limits and I learnt a great deal about myself as an artist and the world we live in. I focused my degree on performance-based modules. The ones that truly inspired my practice where Performance of the Self, Artist as Witness, Scenography Independent Practice Research. These modules really spoke to me as they allowed my art to be vulnerable and also speak to others. I continue to use the skills I learnt in these modules all the time in my job. At the end of my degree I realized I love to tell stories and I love working with people and that is what I now do everyday.

Along side my degree I worked with York Theatre Royal's Creative Engagement department, starting as a volunteer at 18 and by the time I was 23 I was teaching a group of young people in youth theatre. In the year after my graduation, I was Artistic Director of the Culture Award Winning TakeOver Festival in 2015/16 making work at the National Railway

Museum, York, and for the studio and main stage at York Theatre Royal while being mentored by their Artistic Director Damian Cruden. These were work placements on offer in the city. York is a brilliant city for many different mediums of art and there is something for everyone.

I would like to take this time to thank the theatre lecturers, and specifically David Richmond, as without his teaching, guidance and inspiration I would not have managed to complete my degree, especially not with a first class degree!

My advice: I have learnt that things take time, but success will happen. You may need to do a part time job alongside your creative practice for a few years straight after university and you might find yourself working with people who you are sometimes challenged by but use that time to continuously develop your art and theatre making as every job will teach you something new and life is a good inspiration for art. You have a lifetime to tell stories and your stories are your art; no one else can make your art like you can. Trust in it and most importantly trust and believe in vourself.



During the third year of my theatre degree I remember a lecturer saving 'when you go out in the real world remember to always call yourself an artist, if you do not believe that, no one else will.' Holding onto this piece of advice since graduating in 2013, bravely calling myself an artist outside of the university bubble has enabled me to begin carving out a creative career. I have worked in arts venues including the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and Durham's Gala Theatre, alongside building a portfolio of freelance work as a Theatre Maker and Facilitator.

After graduating I was fortunate to be awarded a Graduate Internship with York St John University's Prison Partnership Project. This opportunity was a fantastic stepping stone into

professional practice. Since then I have worked as a freelance Actor/ Facilitator, Lead Facilitator and Research Assistant on several YSJ partnership projects. In 2015 I was part of the team who collectively devised the Theatre in Education play It's Not OK and accompanying drama workshop. Directed by Lecturers in Theatre Rachel Conlon and Jules Dorey Richmond, fellow YSJ Alumni Sarah Rumfitt, Jamie Heelbeck and James Aconley were also involved. It's Not OK raises awareness and tackles the issues of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. As Lead Facilitator on the project I can proudly say the national tours have reached over 25,000 young people. Currently commissioned by the NSPCC, the project is being delivered to Year 7 /8 classes in secondary schools across the country. Being employed on *It's Not OK* has enabled me to gain valuable experience in TiE and is a huge learning opportunity in my early career.

This work sparked my interest in the topic of healthy/unhealthy relationships. Ready to contextualise my practice, 2016 saw me enrol onto the YSJU MA Applied Theatre programme. Now I am working in cooperation with YSJ's All About Respect campaign, a partnership between YSJU, York College, IDAS and Survive. Taking a stand against sexual violence, sexual harassment and sexual abuse in the higher education sector, the project aims to raise awareness and enhance prevention methods. Integrated into

my MA, I am delivering exploratory drama workshops in York College. I use creativity to encourage dialogue around healthy and unhealthy behaviours in intimate partner relationships.

YSJ has played a significant role in my education and early career. Equipped with skills, support and amazing opportunities YSJ gave me confidence, to believe in myself as an artist and facilitator, who is now carving out a space in the professional world.

20 21

NATALIE QUATERMASS

THEATRE DIRECTOR

In 2012 I arrived in York to take up an exciting dual opportunity: Creative Engagement Intern at York Theatre Royal (YTR), a position that involved creating practical arts-based projects that extended the reach and scope of the theatre; and a student on the MA Applied Theatre programme at York St John, where I would put my theatre practice into a critical research context.

Up until this point I did not consider myself an academic; honestly I thought doing a Masters was for people far cleverer than I. Dispelling this nonsense was the first lesson I learnt at YSJ. As soon as the research was intertwined with my day job I could delight in articulating my creativity in different frameworks, putting it into a cultural context and becoming more critically reflective. Unquestionably this improved my practice and gave me a myriad of essential skills, particularly useful when applying for funding.

For anyone reading this who maybe considering a MA but is worried about also working full time: it is possible! Whilst I was still completing my final module I became the Youth Theatre Director (maternity cover) at YTR. I worked with the 300+ youth theatre members, a large team of practitioners and created a season of ambitious and relevant theatre that put young people's voices centre stage. Top tip: make sure you have a decent sized desk, a lifetime supply of tea and

friends who are willing to proof read anything at the drop of a hat.

After this role I spent time working at The Freedom Theatre in Palestine. There I was responsible for training staff members in youth facilitation, as we worked towards successfully establishing the first ever youth theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp on the West Bank. The Freedom Theatre epitomises theatre as a socio-political tool by providing a creative space for Palestinians to explore their individual and collective identities.

Returning to the UK, in 2016 I became freelance with the intention of developing my directorial voice with professional artists. My time at YSJ was essential at this stage of my career as it had instilled the importance of collaboration and creative networks. I have worked with several YJS Alumni as well as directing Moira Buffinis' *Welcome to Thebes* the at the University of Cumbria, *The Winter's Tale* with York Shakespeare Company and established my own theatre company: Vandal Factory.

YSJ was integral in helping me realise my artistic principles and helping me understand the importance of working within institutions that share those principles. I'm therefore delighted to have recently become the Youth Theatre Director at Freedom Studios, Bradford, an organisation that aims to create innovative arts activities for diverse communities.





JAMIE HEELBECK

DRAMA TEACHER

The phrase I most often use to describe what the BA theatre course at York St John University provided is: 'endless opportunities'.

So much so, that by the time I'd finished my second year studies, I was employed and working alongside theatre lecturers Rachel Conlon and Jules Dorey Richmond in touring the Theatre in Education project It's not OK, a play and workshop created through a commission from the NSPCC.

My role was as an actor/facilitator, performing the play in secondary schools and working with the young people in post-performance workshops to investigate the topics it raised for them. The project explored issues of concern around the subject of sexual exploitation and social media, identified by the NSPCC as crucial and urgent themes that could be effectively explored with young people through the arts.

When I finished sixth form college I had never imagined that even before I finished my degree I would be employed as an actor, touring nationally to Yorkshire, Wales, Sheffield and Nottingham. Following the tour I was employed as an actor to help in the adaptation of the play into an online digital resource for the NSPCC website, a process that afforded me a rich ecology of experience and collaborations with other artists.

During my degree I also worked

with Converge, a YSJ project providing arts education opportunities to mental health service users. And, in another example of the endless opportunities I mentioned, volunteered with two theatres in York where I worked with with artistic directors and children with special educational needs. This made me realise that we need to actively strive to ensure that theatre is truly accessible for everyone.

Working in such environments also helped me make connections and amazing friends along the way. Not only did I tour around schools but I was offered a placement in a York school with the best support from the teaching staff there you could imagine! Four years on and I'm in the job of my dreams, working in a school for young people with special educational needs. I will teach drama up to GCSE, a key stage 3 class and run the school allotment.

The resilience and endless opportunities studying at York St John gave me has enabled me to reach out into the world and make build a vibrant and rewarding career.

MATT HARPER-HARDCASTLE

COMMUNITY THEATRE PRACTITIONER

Looking back to my graduation in 2010, I remember a few of my peers were disappointed that their BA theatre course hadn't turned them into one particular thing. 'I thought I was going to be an actor' a few of them said. In contrast both at the time, and also especially now looking back on my career, I am extremely grateful for the range of modules, contexts, styles and techniques that I was engaged in whilst studying, allowing me and my career to be unrestricted by never sticking to just one thing.

I've never wanted to pigeonhole my practice, as I love so many aspects of theatre and didn't really want to let anything go. To this end in my second year I discovered applied theatre practice, which enabled me to use all the theatre skills I knew in making work for, by and with different community groups.

It was the encouragement not to look at the learning from modules in isolation, but to understand how they can bolster one another, that has created a framework for my current practice. Analysing Pinter in text studies has transferred into workshops I have run with youth theatres; or exploring Shakespeare and Sophocles has been incorporated into devising processes with adults with learning disabilities. An amalgamation of researching for my dissertation, creating solo autobiographical work, investigating the aesthetics of making

theatre productions and participating in Playback Theatre workshops, have also influenced scripts I've written and performances I've produced for theatres, festivals, tours and schools.

This has not only given me great satisfaction personally, but also – especially in the early years of my career – made me confident in being able to take up different opportunities in theatre and explore avenues I might not have. Creating and sustaining a professional practice within this industry is hard work and can be tough, but the more you can harness all of your skills and understand how to apply them, the more resilient and successful you can become.

I am now a youth theatre practitioner for York Theatre Royal, artist for Connecting Youth Culture (North Yorkshire), artistic director for Once Seen Theatre Company (a company of adults with learning disabilities), theatre tutor for Converge (a YSJ arts-education project working with mental health service users) and actor for Playback Theatre York, as well as a freelance director, writer and facilitator. If that sounds like a lot, it is; but I'd rather do all of that than settle for just one thing



