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FESTIVAL

NOISES OFF

NEWSPAPER

Nofflets

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Editorial

“It’s not punk going somewhere and not looking out for each other.

Punk is about being together.”

The sentiments expressed in the panel discussion on accessible theatre, chaired by Nickie Miles-Wildin and featuring the cast of *Reservation* on Wednesday were incredibly thought-provoking, and crucially, compelled us all into pledging to take action and centre accessibility in the work that we do.

I thought about how much the status quo, as it is, is built to dis-incentivise us from looking out for each other, and puts in place obstacles to prevent the material conditions in which everyone can thrive. Our society encourages us to get in each other’s way.

Whether it’s through the pressure of time and productivity, which runs counter to the requirements of those who need to pace and manage their energy levels. Whether it’s through the lack of thought for wheelchair users in just about every archaic urban planning development and in the contemporary provision of public transport in this country, and so many others. Whether it’s in theatres being unwilling to provide more than one relaxed performance for a full run of a show because just one is ‘enough’, as if that’s a reason.

If we are all on the same page we are all able to pull in the same direction. I loved the idea that care is punk. Fighting a system whose natural resting place is apathetic indifference to fellow human beings. It does feel radical. It makes so much sense.

NSDF has felt like a space imbued with a willingness to pull together in the same direction. On our festival newspaper side of things, the *Noises Off* writers Taiwo, Zoe, Nathan and Beth have done an incredible job of navigating this festival as critics. It’s difficult to write about work that isn’t finished, and to navigate the nuance of the reviewer and critic divide in such a packed and busy festival, where it feels like there are more shows being presented than ever. From the very start they have been on a mission to be generous, curious and fair. Creative and critical. Analytical and led by a desire to be helpful. I’m a very proud editor! It’s been a pleasure reading their work over the last week and I am certain it has been a pleasure for you too.

Noff love,
Naomi
Noises Off Editor

It’s the last day of NSDF 2022, and all I can think about is paper.

Three pages. Layer them on top of one another. Shuffle, settle, pass them along. Repeat. Speculate on the possibility of papercuts (Florence anticipates them, she’s done this before). Repeat. Look at the photograph currently being edited. It’s of a couple, surrounded by pages in the air. It’s notoriously difficult to get paper to fall in a beautiful way; the surface area is too big, the sheets too thin. But this paper had been folded and crafted to catch the air in just the right way – “a lot of care went into it”, one of our critics said.

This was my first year as a member of staff for NSDF. Working as *Noises Off* Deputy Editor, I didn’t have time to see many shows at all.

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With thanks to

Ellie, Lizzie and James

Instead, I experienced it through the pages you’ve been reading from *Noff* this week. As I edited and proofread the work of our *Noff* critics – Zoe, Taiwo, Nathan and Beth – it was impossible to ignore their generosity of spirit, their empathy and their creative approaches to reviewing in this challenging context. Our designer Florence and our photographer Beatrice have such sensitive and thoughtful approaches to their respective crafts; you can see it in their work. And, of course, our incredible editor Naomi created the inspiring, deeply thoughtful and empowering space that facilitates and furthers these voices.

There is so much care in these pages; they too have been crafted to catch the air in just the right way. It’s my sincerest hope that this care, from creatives and critics, can inform the broader cultural context when NSDF ends. The last few years, for me at least, have felt like a constant cycle of writing down, screwing the page up, throwing away, starting again. Covid cancellations. Rejection. No funding. A very bleak and intimidating landscape in which to build a career; where do you start on a blank piece of paper? But this paper isn’t blank. These pages are full of all the methodical care of laying out booklets and all the tender warmth of just-printed-pages. We know it’s difficult, but we know that through collective action, liberatory creativity and radical joy, we can still strive to make beautiful things.

Noff love,
Emma x
Noises Off Deputy Editor

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

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Provocations for Political Theatre

David Longworth offers ten provocations for making political theatre

'Power may be at the end of a gun, but sometimes it's also at the end of the shadow or the image of a gun.' – Jean Genet

I Political theatre has too long been content to criticise, when it's real aim and purpose today should be to imagine. Imagine action, solidarity and alternatives.

II Political theatre, and political art in general, imagines itself as an ideological sharpshooter. In reality, Political theatre does not even have weapons, and should embrace this.

III Political theatre must stop being concerned with themes, ideas & relevance and start being concerned with the real situations of oppression from which these things derive, and provide solutions for them.

IV Political theatre would be better suited with the chorus than any individual character.

V Theatre rarely touches on political violence, and almost not at all on the political violence of the oppressed. It will represent personal violence inflicted on characters representing political forces or institutions, and hope this is imbued with political content, but otherwise pretends that violence used in the course of liberation does not exist.

VI Political theatre without historiography is less than nothing.

VII Political theatre must abandon the theatre as a location, and become insurgent. It has more to learn from the Diggers, the Maroon communities of the Caribbean and the Paris Commune. In short, political theatre is a commons.

VIII Following on from this, political theatre must be completely and totally democratic.

IX Political theatre should avoid a realism/experimental dichotomy, and recognize that the total configuration of human experience requires all other forms.

X Political theatre is only effective insofar as it is the complement and cultural component of direct and revolutionary action. We are done with representation of the world, the point is to change it.

Kindness, grit and ART

Beth Bowden interviews Slung Low's Alan Lane

"If there was an explosion round that curtain right now, there are three types of people, right? There are people who will grab their valuables and run, there are people that will hide under the table, and there are people who will get up and run to the other side of the curtain. I think you're born one of those three people..."

It's outrageously clear to me what kind of person Alan Lane is, and what kind the brilliant team at Slung Low are. *If there was an explosion round that curtain right now*, you would find Slung Low running towards the fire. Which is exactly what they have done countless times: firstly, when they moved into the Working Men's Club in Holbeck, and subsequently in 2020 during the first COVID lockdown, when their theatre company became a social referral unit. It seems that in every crisis, they choose to sacrifice themselves in service of their community. **They run into the fucking fire.**

I've been wondering how to accurately describe Alan Lane, who sits opposite me in this interview. I have concluded that it's an impossible task. How is it possible to condense this warm, *genuinely* humble, courageous leader into words? How can I convey the electric energy that fizzles in the air when he speaks? I've watched Alan talk a few times now – the first time online in 2020 and most recently at his book launch here – and each time I leave feeling like I've been punched in the artistic gut (in a good way). He has a charismatic ability to inspire – but, I can't help but notice that for the past two years, Alan has been asked to give roughly six talks *per week* on how to *change* the theatre industry. I am extremely conscious of this saturation, and I decide to ask him some *different* questions. If you're in the theatre industry, let's be honest, you've probably heard Alan speak already – and if you want to hear more about Slung Low's brilliant work, then I suggest you read his book. He can explain it all better than I ever could.

I start by asking, "What brings you joy?"

He doesn't even hesitate before answering:

"My boy".

I've noted that in his book, the first words printed dedicate the writing to his son (affectionately called Davidbaby), and the last ones thank his wife, Lucy. It is here, in these soft moments of love, that you get a sense of the man behind the work – you can see who it is he is trying to change the world for. There is something intangible here: some unspoken commitment to other people, to be in service to others – and it's not about being glorious, it's about being honest, dedicated, and generous. For Slung Low, this has taken many forms: from the team all being paid average wage of the nation, to pay what you decide tickets, to offering their space and van to anyone that asks, to putting on theatre, to delivering food boxes worth £15,202, or pulling pints. To be honest, that isn't even NEARLY the complete list of things Slung Low have done in recent memory.

And it all sounds incredibly exhausting.

I ask, "How do you sustain the fire within you? Honestly, I don't know when you *sleep*... this book is an incredible testament to what your organisation has managed to do, but how are you not exhausted...how do you keep going?"

"I'm genuinely angry", "We spend £500 million on Culture in this Country, and we're wasting it, we're **wasting it** because we don't have the courage to say, I'm not for this, we should do it differently". He then goes on to describe the kids at Ingam Road Primary school in Holbeck, who are only nine, and live in houses that don't have books, that don't have crayons, kids who "speak 4 different languages already", some who "came on boats in the night and don't know where their mum is" and are "creative, brilliant, and still fucking cheerful!". It is for these children, who this £500 million doesn't reach, that Slung Low works and campaigns for.

Alan says:

"I do this in service to **my community**, to **my nation** and to my **art form**: and that

service sometimes comes in the form of telling people alternative points of view, in a framework that they cannot dismiss, and they cannot bully: for five minutes they can listen to me tell them why I think their theatre company is failing, and then we can battle, and that's enough to keep me motivated."

I can see in his eyes this isn't a fight that Slung Low is going to give up *anytime soon* (and **thank bloody goodness**). For me, the thing that makes Alan and Slung Low an outstanding Creative Leader in this industry is (and this seems obvious) that they make change first, and **then they talk about it**. When someone is in need, there is no faffing, no stasis, there is **only action**. There are no broken promises, there is only yes. This reflexive practice provides a value-based leadership that is trustworthy, ethical, and honest. He credits his team, which include Joanna Resnick, Matt Angove, and Ruth Saxton for this. It seems to me that these exceptional people have dedicated their lives to their beliefs – and they are brave enough to stand in the rain for hours, Hoover up food from the carpet every day, and have honest arguments with people they don't agree with.

There are many stories that Alan tells, some incredibly funny and some profound moments of failure that I could have written about in this article – BUT I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH WORDS! Read the book. Just read the book. The one thing I can say is that if you listen to Alan Lane for just even *five minutes*, you will leave with a reinvigorated sense of imagination, empathy and artistic graft. His organisation is a testament to sheer creative, joyful willpower – and of "standing in a place no one else wants to stand in and holding on for as long as you can". If you ever feel powerless, just remember this small pocket of goodness - a group of people who changed their corner of their earth, with kindness, grit and ART.



promising young woman

Clodagh Chapman explores the legacy of language

It probably isn't news to anyone that theatre has a misogyny problem.

Specifically, that in 'authorial' roles (think: writing, directing), men get to be genius until proven otherwise - a luxury that isn't afforded to anyone else, and which has knock-on impacts for the creative risks different people can afford to take. (And this isn't to even begin to discuss the intersections of race and class and disability and LGBTQ+ identity)

But I think in particular about the word 'promising'.
And I think about all the times I've been dubbed 'promising'.

as in the promise that next year we won't have an all male line-up
as in the promise of a play in a too-small venue
as in the promise of a press comp if you're mates with the director
as in the promise of keeping your details on file because we think you're a really promising new voice but we were a bit concerned about the scale of it

So how can promising voices make work if certain promising voices are not being promised resources or time or energy or critical generosity?

I've not got a conclusion. I am just very tired

We talk a lot about 'response' in theatre.

The audience response, or a venue's response to an invite, or a character's response to an event.

I googled the etymology of 'respond' - 'spondere' (Latin; to pledge) then became 'respondre' (Old French, 'to answer') - but 'spondere' also implies a solemn promise, a vow, a contract, a guarantee - as in 'sponsor', as in 'spouse', as in 'despondent'. (and I am not for a moment suggesting that we have to default to the dialects of the privately educated, but the histories we invoke when we talk are important.)

so a response is a 'promise in return'.

I actually started thinking about the word 'promising' when I googled etymology of 'respond' - 'spondere' (Latin; to pledge) then became 'respondre' (Old French, 'to answer') - but 'spondere' also implies a solemn promise, a vow, a contract, a guarantee - as in 'sponsor', as in 'spouse', as in 'despondent' (and I am not for a moment suggesting that we have to default to the dialects of the privately educated, but the histories we invoke when we talk are important.)

but everything changes when we think about the promise.

I am promising

pro-mise, releasing something beforehand

pro "before" (from PIE root *per- (i) "forward," hence "in front of, before") + mittere "to release, let go; send, throw" (see mission).

in performance, and if you experience misogyny,
but if it's news then please note that, yes,

what happens when our responses - our systems of rewarding promising voices - are broken?

and if it isn't news then I assume

audiences make me feel weird.

liveness is the potential for failure

an audience response as a sort of promise
a venue's response to an email as a promise

as in promise, as in the promise that next year we'll have 50:50

as in the promise of something better

as in the promise of a play in a too-small venue

as in the promise of a press comp
as in the promise of keeping your details on file because we think you're a really exciting new voice but we were a bit concerned about the scale of it

response-ability
the ability to promise
the ability to enter into a vow

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Leaning in

Zoe Callow explores the *Reservation* rehearsal process with David Longworth

I've arranged to meet David Longworth on the Mezzanine level of the Curve, but it feels a little like we're on another planet. Festival sounds from the foyer float up to us, abstracted, as David tells me about how the show has developed his self-awareness as a theatre director.

Reservation is the first show of its kind for NSDF. Born of a collaboration with DaDaFest, a Liverpool based organisation which develops and celebrates Deaf and disabled arts, the project has brought together a company of young Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists to devise a performance with a guaranteed place in the programme.

"What people wanted to do was be able to tell their own stories," he reflects, and this became the catalyst for the current iteration of the performance. Describing stripping away the elements of the 'typical play' to

focus on the ensemble's personal experiences, he tells me that "we, being disabled artists, aren't really concerned with trying to make a sleek, nicely contained package for people to consume".

I'm fascinated by the idea of a show which abandons traditional forms, refusing to make itself easily digestible to create a more meaningful engagement with an audience. David tells me that instead the production plays stereotypes of disability. I wonder if this could be distressing for the actors, but this couldn't be further from the truth for David: "For me personally, it's very much seeing how uncomfortable people are when it's now us who get to really lean into that, and they're not the ones in control of it anymore".

Throughout our discussion, David is always conscious of speaking personally. This awareness of his own positionality was particularly important in his co-directing

responsibilities. As a director, he is expected to make decisions, but he is aware that his own biases as an artist with an invisible disability make this process complex: "I've not necessarily born the brunt of a lot of the viciousness from the welfare system and people's attitudes towards disabled people, so for my voice to be the dominant interpretation would have really limited the piece"

"It's been a balance. I want to listen but at the same time people do want to have someone say, 'We're doing this, we're going to commit to that'". For all his concern, David's quiet self-awareness in this respect leaves me completely reassured that *Reservation* will reflect the voice of every artist involved.



IRL

WORK IN PROGRESS

Nathan Hardie explores the context of NSDF LAB show RABBITHOLE

To critique RABBITHOLE as a performance is not possible. A work in progress show from the NSDF LAB, I witnessed three 5 minute script-aided scenes with writer Alice Flynn standing in for an actor that had tested positive for COVID beforehand.

Dotted around these scenes, director Daisy Major proposed insights, before opening up the floor for suggestions on how to achieve them. With an intriguing premise of two chronically online teenage girls creating a short film on Woodland Folklore, they discussed the underlying themes of abuse that brought them together. In return, the audience proposed multiple ideas and

directions, some of which were improvised by Flynn and Phoebe Cresswell to present a worked example.

I can see the advantages and disadvantages of using the festival as a soundboard. Such a concentrated hub of creative people, brimming with new ideas, has even inspired me to write new content between reviews. It is also incredibly brave to demonstrate work you know needs improvement and ask for help.

However, this has taken the space of a show, when still in its workshop phase, and I wonder how they'll be able to take this feedback onboard. To essentially create

a second act requires more than a test screening of your work so far and, with planned story beats already in place, only the creators truly know where they want to take the piece. NSDF LAB breaks the rule of never showing people your first draft, but at what stage does it become productive to advertise a show that's nowhere near finished?

To meet us here

THEATRE

Taiwo Ava Oyebola interrogates the history and heritage of *Them*

The poet Warsane Shire once said “the past and future merge to meet us here”, which encapsulates the experience of Global Majority performers and creatives. The influence of our history very much impacts us now. Centring the imagined life of Jamaican born Fanny Eaton, who was a model at the Royal Academy in the Victorian era, *Them* explores this relationship.

Eaton is a fascinating topic, historically and conceptually, in terms of exploring power dynamics in a white male dominated art world. Tambala, who plays Eaton, showed a clear discomfort in being openly viewed as 'other' but the piece did not go far enough in exploring what was at the heart of this. Despite the show's insistence to tell Eaton's story, I didn't leave the show knowing any more about her life.

The show's title suggests that its aim is to humanise non-white British people and I enjoyed when members of the cast shared their own stories of belonging to the diaspora. Here is where the true strength of the show lay, within the comradery of the ensemble.

Physical theatre is a compelling mode for exploring the silent ways Global Majority bodies carry trauma. The cast explored this, at times, physically shrinking themselves, and at times, dancing with rage. The use of physical theatre did feel clumsy at points, e.g. when they were switching poses and costumes and the lack of precision in these movements did leave gaps in the production's narrative arc.

Although narratively disjointed, *Them* provided an opportunity for its Global

Majority creatives to tell their stories on their own terms, reminding me that theatre can also serve as a means of archiving voices that have been silenced.

Pissing on pity

THEATRE

Reservation hits all the right notes, says Nathan Hardie

Halfway through NSDF 22, I had yet to witness a standing ovation.

After watching *Reservation*, not only was everybody on their feet clapping or signing jazz hands, but we were welcomed on stage to rave alongside the cast and their song for revolution. It's a moment of pure joy and single-handedly proves the point *Reservation* is making: inclusion is amazing!

With a relatively large cast of eleven people, they succeed at giving each member a moment to shine. Introducing themselves via a last supper-esque Pity Party, the performance fragments into shorter scenes that spotlight each individual star.

Each set piece offers something different too, from an interactive quiz show that highlights the absurdity of defining people by their limitations, to a stim party that educates us about the nuances of being neurodivergent. A more overarching narrative would have likely restricted this, but may improve a couple of the pacing issues in the show, excluding a technical difficulty

that was improvised through brilliantly.

Tonally, it achieves the right balance of comedy whilst making a serious point, welcoming us to laugh with the cast as they joke about their disabilities. They address the audience's potential discomfort by throwing it back in our faces, staring at us with the same judging eyes they encounter everyday – we can put up with it for an hour. Alongside breaking down these barriers and demystifying stereotypes, the show underlines severe inequalities created by the current political climate. *Reservation* is necessary viewing you won't regret.



Just a note to say...

THEATRE

Zoe Callow follows up on yesterday's performance of Reservation

Dear Reservation,

Thank you very much for the gift you gave me at your party yesterday. I loved your Stim Dance, which was not only an absolute tune but also a smart and unexpectedly moving celebration of centring your own joy. Your choice to address this song to me was an act of inclusion I wasn't sure I deserved.

There were times where I didn't know what to do with your gift, or whether it was for me at all as a non-disabled person. When you played out stereotypes of disability, you invited me to laugh at them. While these embarrassing tropes were worthy of that response, I felt uneasy. Laughter, to me, suggests a sense of detachment from someone's else's pain, a declaration of it having no meaning to me.

Your invitation to cheer for each performer's pity points similarly left me uncertain. To throw myself into this performance of ableism felt like an assumption that it is only a performance, a statement that someone other than me must be complicit in the real violence it reflects.

Then, I knew that it was good to be uncomfortable. Now, I can see that there was a kind of air-clearing in the audience participation, a passionate refusal to accept tiptoe-treading in place of real change. I'm still not sure if it's my place to write this, but I hope it continues the honest conversation you've started.

With huge respect,
Zoe



Powerful discomfort

SPOKEN WORD

Nathan Hardie on the confronting NSDF Late show *MANIC*

As I entered the showing for *MANIC*, walking past a cheese string, a ginger balloon and multi-faced cube in the front row, I knew I was in for a wild ride.

Leaving the performance, I was questioning my behaviour as a man in every interaction I had and will have, single or in a relationship. An overreaction maybe, but nothing could truly prepare me for Raina Greifer's performance.

MANIC starts as a stand-up act, accompanied with a hilarious slide-show where Greifer has photoshopped her face into various objects and splashed topless men alongside. However, we feel the atmosphere change as her tone waivers, and we're submerged into the fast-food restaurant bathroom she loses her virginity in. Now a one person therapy session, Greifer details all of the awful sex she's had during her teenage years in search for her own validation, not just a man's.

Covering grounds of grooming, ghosting and consent via handmade constructions of her ex-partners, this show justifies the trigger warnings provided at the start.

With such trauma exposed in full transparency, Greifer's main strength of powerful imagery is also what leads to making the audience so uncomfortable. I was engrossed with her stories and empathised as she re-engaged with such heart-breaking moments in her past. I relate to her feelings of desperation, wanting and yearning but can never fully understand her trauma due to male privilege. A powerful yet harrowing experience, *MANIC* is an important addition to the conversation of sexual inequality.



Going on 13

WORK IN PROGRESS

Beth Bowden unpacks the boxes of NSDF LAB show *A Ton of Feathers*

Sarah Richardson plays Jenny: a 13-year-old girl desperately trying to navigate teenage-hood.

She sits in school uniform on a wooden block, legs splayed out and chatting animatedly to us. As her audience, we are thrust directly into her internal monologue including: her worries about school, relationships, feminism, and periods. Sarah is clearly an accomplished actor and immediately gets us onside with her charming facial expressions and comedic timing.

She has me smiling and laughing from the word go. Considering *A Ton of Feathers* had lost two cast members to COVID at the last minute, I must also commend Director Vivi and festgoer Lucy for stepping in, script in hand. This is no mean feat, and they do well to support Sarah in constructing Jenny's world.

My critique of this work in progress is that I wanted more nuance, more detail, and to dig a little deeper into the complexities of being thirteen, beyond the choices of football, TikTok, makeup, and Harry Styles. I know – I know – there are some young people out there whose interests do align with this, but it sometimes felt like the character was slipping slightly into a stereotype. Sometimes I felt like I was watching an idea of a thirteen-year-old, rather than a fully dug out person.

In future versions, I'd love to see more of the moments like the 'box' monologue that comes at the end of the piece. This feels like the triumph of the piece, and expresses the themes and pressures of feminism, growing up and womanhood.



Meg and Joe and Chloe

THEATRE

Zoe Callow connects with *The Devil Wears Dada's* show

You are turning the corner into Curve 3, and you meet Meg and Joe. This is all completely hypothetical, of course. Let's give you a hypothetical name, if you'd like one? No pressure, obviously. It's completely up to you. You would like one? Great. Let's go with... Chloe? You, Chloe, are turning the corner into Curve 3, and you meet Meg and Joe.

In purely hypothetical terms, you've actually already met them through a computer screen. Now, you are being handed one end of a tin can on a string. It's an offer, not a demand, so you are very happy to discuss the merits of jacket potatoes with Meg. You aren't getting up onstage to eat the Toxic Waste, though. Having been given the hypothetical choice, you'd prefer to stay in

your hypothetical seat right now. And you feel like that is totally okay.

Next, if you choose to be, you are hypothetically embroiled in the re-enactment of a Year 4 assembly. And before you know it you are somehow chanting Karl Marx Karl Marx Karl Marx Karl Marx in worship of a Barbie with a beard, and you're okay with that. No. You are dizzyingly happy about it, if you want to be? You do? Then you are giggling hysterically, because you have chosen to connect at a pace and degree which is comfortable for you.

It's up to you, of course, but you might refuse to take off your pink party hat when you leave. You might want to start a Meg and Joe fan club because you are completely in love

with them and how much care they have put into making you feel safe to connect with them and everyone else and how they are intelligent, honest, unhesitatingly generous humans who have somehow persuaded you to completely disregard your word count and –

No? Just me, Chloe? That's okay. You don't have to do anything you don't want to. You certainly don't have to write Chloe's *Noff* review of *Meg and Joe Are Trying to Connect* for her. But if you did happen to want to join the fan club, the first meeting will be at Curve bar on Thursday night. Bring your party hat. Pass it on.



Interruptions

THEATRE

Beth Bowden grapples with the form of *Attrition* and *Great Mother* – Iya Ayaba

Over the last two days, I've watched both *Attrition* and *Great Mother* – Iya Ayaba. Though vastly different pieces, I wanted to write about them together – an exploratory consideration of the relationship between form, narrative, and content.

Firstly, each show had striking themes. *Attrition* navigated important discussions around relationships, ableism, and disability, through the lens of two close friends. *Great Mother*, set during Biafran War in Nigeria, explored stories of sexual assault and religion (which felt very contemporary, with horrific rapes being reported in Ukraine every day). Both felt like raw, emotional explorations of unique stories and voices.

But in both performances, I couldn't help

but feel that the form disrupted me from engaging with the content. To be specific, both pieces were episodic: which is when the storyline jumps through time to show the specific important scenes (like fragments of the whole). As a disclaimer I am a big fan of episodic structure. I think it can be an effective tool to blow-up traditional narrative-based storytelling...

But in this case, for me, it felt like sometimes this form didn't support the narrative of each piece – specifically sometimes the scene changes in between each 'episode' interrupted my experience. From an audience perspective, it can be hard to maintain momentum and energy when we experience frequent stop/starts. It can also be hard to follow a storyline when you are only delivered fragments of it, and jump through time too quickly.

There is, perhaps, a precarious balance here in how form can assist the narrative, and when it hinders it. It is often different for every theatremaker. As a writer and director, I needed more time to settle in each scene, to land in the storyline, to gain ground with the characters and then move on. I wanted more of the guts of the characters – their thoughts, their interactions... and maybe fewer set changes, and pauses in between. I think it is a testament to the storylines and themes of each show that I wanted to spend more time experiencing the action of the juicy bits, rather than the form surrounding it.



Life and voice

WORK IN PROGRESS

Nathan Hardie *admires the energy of* The Yellow Traffic Light

As we draw closer to the end of NSDF 22, fatigue from late nights and early starts has finally caught up with me. Yet, somehow, performer Isabella Sperotto expended more energy into her one-woman show *The Yellow Traffic Light* than I've mustered this entire week, and still had enough in the tank to answer questions afterwards.

Directed by Catherina Conte via Zoom and constructed during the pandemic, this was the first-ever showing outside of a bedroom, not that you could tell with how Sperotto bounces around the stage. The premise is a Brazilian family dissolution, and we encounter the perspectives of Grandpa, Grandma, Mother, younger sister and her own. What makes this performance unique

is that Sperotto embodies all of them almost simultaneously. There are some pre-recorded videos with herself timed expertly, but when she's changing between three characters, I can't help but think another actor to play off would help – despite possibly defeating the point of this personal piece.

Switching personas in such a quick-fire fashion is surreal, differentiated by mannerisms and aided by props that were, as Sperotto mentioned in the Q+A, only introduced earlier this week. A necessary addition to avoid further confusion, it also doubles as a great way to structure the story and build to a satisfying climax.

The props also allow a layer of physical comedy which, when combined with the

jokes, make for an absurdly funny piece. The only let-down I had is not more people were able to view this great piece of art, and I hope more will catch the next iteration.



Up down up down

THEATRE

Zoe Callow *gets to grips with the staging of* Great Mother - Iya Ayaba

[Scene 1 happens]

Lights dim. Agnes gets up from where she has been crying on the floor. She appears to be completely fine. She clears away and exits stage left. Lights up.

[Scene 2 happens]

Lights dim. The stage is empty for a few minutes. Someone in the audience eats a pringle. Then, Agnes and the Nurse enter stage left with a table covered in a white sheet. Lights up.

[Scene 3 happens]

Lights dim. Taiwo stands alone onstage, illuminated in orange backlighting. He shuffles nervously. He looks about, stage right and left. He waits. Eventually, the Nurse enters stage right, and they carry the table off stage left. Lights up.

[Scene 4 happens]

Lights dim. The stage is empty and dark. A piece of dramatic music plays for about three minutes. Lights up.

*

I'm trying to form a coherent opinion, but everything feels disconnected. The scenes feel disconnected from each other by the long pauses needed to move the tables around, and I feel disconnected from Agnes; I'm working really hard to invest my imagination in her, while she is forced to break character to rearrange the scenery.

I'm trying to understand the intention behind these decisions, which made it so difficult for me to stay engaged. Maybe they

were chosen in an attempt to harness the dwindling respect afforded to naturalism, as a dominant historical tradition of British theatre. Perhaps this was meant to ensure Agnes's experiences were treated with seriousness and gravity. I don't know. It didn't work for me.

Something somewhere somehow

WORK IN PROGRESS

Zoe Callow explores the shifts and surprises of Lucid

It's like there's a sleeping bag, and then it turns into a cave.

It's like you're walking on scrunched up paper.

It's like you're watching your friend brush her teeth, but the sound is coming from somewhere else.

It's like something, somewhere hurts, but I couldn't tell you where, or how, or why.

It's not exactly like my 2010 school trip to PGL, but the feelings are the same: a trapped nerve, an expansive, hopeful intake of breath, a pinched vein somewhere near my heart.

I try to trust my pathway through the fluid, rich, surprising world of Sammy, Isaac, Toby and Sofia F. They make a campfire, they help Tom Daley win gold, Sofia F nearly admits that she's feeling quite left out.

It's fabric, quilted, paper and imagined, shifts constantly around me. Tom Daley's diving preparations are as real as Lucy's absence from the trip. Lots of things happen, but I'm never sure which parts are important, or what any of them mean.

I never truly understand why Lucy didn't come, or why I feel so achingly sad when she arrives just after the disco. I'm not sure, too, why this play is called *Lucid*, when the emotional core of it seems to be still in the process of making itself known elsewhere.

It's difficult, but I resist the urge to force a conclusion. Not everything makes sense. Sometimes there are no answers. I float out onto the mezzanine and take up the solidness of my own body again. I wonder what's for dinner.

Party like it's 1999 (to 2022)

Longtime festgoer **Andy Rogers** shares memories from NSDF over the years

Let me set the scene: it's Easter week 1999.

Wednesday morning 8:30. Scarborough. Over the four nights you've been at NSDF, you've accumulated maybe 12-14 hours sleep in total. You've just walked a mile from your accommodation through the freezing wind off the North Sea to queue outside the Spa Lounge so that you can be near the front for the mad rush at 9:00 to sign up for that day's workshops – one in the morning, one in the afternoon.

Between workshops you have a show at the university – a 2+ mile hike up a long steep hill (feels like 10) and a rush to the Stephen Joseph Theatre for the daily discussion during which festgoers take delight in:

- a) showing off their extensive knowledge of psychology/philosophy/Greek theatre/Shakespeare/some other bollocks,
- b) gushing over a play they saw yesterday,
- c) absolutely slamming a play they saw yesterday,
- d) all of the above or, on one memorable occasion, inviting a student playwright "outside to compare CVs", when that student described members of NSDF staff as "Z-list celebrities" because he didn't like the criticisms being levelled at his show.

Then, after your second workshop, maybe two or three more shows – each at different ends of Scarborough – the bar, evening entertainment, Noffice. Eat? Sleep? Nah. Oh, and it's rained all day.

Alan Lane and I were both debutants in 1999 – me just to observe, he with the first of his two selected shows *Beckett Shorts*. I think Alan would agree it wasn't his finest hour. When I thought about offering this article to *Noises Off*, I thought it would be a gentle rumination tracking the changes since the end of last century, so I reached out through social media to the many and wonderful students I have had the pleasure of teaching and introducing to the delights of the Festival, and the people I met there and asked for a few high and lowlights. I was amazed by the response and variations/consistencies in the replies. Here is a selection of observations from past attendees, plus my own memories,

jumbled through the years...

Highlights: *The Lion, The Witch and a Bag of Chips, The Spurt of Blood, Long Wave* by Small Change, *In the Bog of Cats, Unlucky for Some, Tea Without Mother* ("We live in a world without weather' [if only] – magic opening line), most shows by Dartington College, the quiz, the quiz, the quiz – and winning it one year, *A Smile Fell in the Grass* by Paper Birds, RashDash.

Workshops with DV8, Frantic Assembly, Simon McBurney, Weapons of Sound, Chris Thorpe (whose name appears many times in the responses I received!). Mike Alfreds, John Wright, plus too many more to mention.

Alan Lane's welcome speech in which he riffed for over 20 minutes on the theme 'You Have Power' (still true – even more relevant). *Noises Off* every year – sitting in the Noffice til 4 am proofreading the next day's edition with one eye open.

Lowlights/Turkeys: Well, there are always some 'Marmite' shows. Our own *You Have 10 Minutes* 'split the Festival', according to Alan, but was admired by Richard Wilson (yes him) and Jamie from Graecae. So, validation enough for us. *Atlantica* – about a group of super intelligent whales, if you will!

One standout, though, for which pretty much all the festgoers that year were united in condemnation, was *Making Ugly* – a truly awful piece of work in both concept and execution – about making a snuff movie! I kid you not. It's the only time in 20+ years of attending that the judges withdrew a show from adjudication. Yes, we had judges then!

Some contributions from festgoers past:

"Being with likeminded people to share and challenge each other."

"...some amazing workshops and performances that taught me so so so much about performance. Honestly one of the best experiences of my life that will stay with me forever."

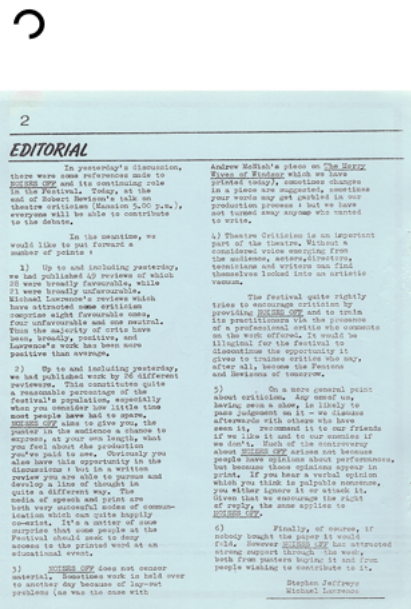
"When Christopher Eccleston kissed me on the back of the hand (consensually)"

"NSDF is a place where students discover that what theatre can do and say is limitless.

For a week, I felt completely challenged and inspired. It was amazing to see so many young people saying so much about the world with their work..."

"I miss it."

There are a million memories I've left out, but one thing remains consistent: NSDF keeps changing, thankfully. The range and diversity of work on show this year is breathtaking. James Phillips and the team should take bucket loads of credit for moving the festival into new and exciting directions. Thanks for the memories and here's to the next four decades!



Some old editions of *Noff*, with articles by *Noff* founder, playwright Stephen Jeffreys

Whatever happened to the freelance task force?

Zoe Callow speculates on the mysterious disappearance of the freelance task force

What happened to the Freelance Task Force?

Perhaps they were sent on ambassadorial duties to Mars, I wonder, to learn from the Martians' funding models. Perhaps they made an emergency diversion to Jupiter. Perhaps they have set up camp and are still out there, forgotten, surviving on the last of their instant coffee. I wonder if other festival goers have their own theories.

"It's well known that Nadine Dorries sold the taskforce off to Russia, and then was like 'hey, what else can we sell off to get rid of original ideas for making work better' and then looked at Channel 4 and was like 'hmm!..'"

"They were sadly swallowed up by the drum revolve in the Olivier. Some say that if you stand at the right spot in the auditorium you can hear their cries. Sound designers are figuring out new ways to cover it up so that National Theatre audiences can enjoy passive art that affirms the capitalist status quo without hearing the pained cries of poor, woeful freelancers. Rufus Norris tried to programme them to do a show in the Dorfman, but they hadn't been on a Netflix show before, so were therefore valueless to him."

"They (somehow) ended up at a Downing Street party, and because of the embarrassment they have all changed their names, retrained in cyber and are now on the board of meta. IT'S ALL A CONSPIRACY. IT ALL FITS. What else could have happened?"

"They got distracted by following Avril Lavigne's career trajectory, and everything going on with her possibly being a clone. So they're not completely gone, they're just busy with Miss Lavigne."

It is the first day of NSDF and I'm sitting in the first panel discussion of NSDF. We are talking about why theatre is shit and what we can do about it. Someone mentions that there was once a Freelance Task Force.

This taskforce was set up during the pandemic to ensure that freelancers are better protected and supported.

In the time it takes me to tell you this, the conversation moves on the untapped potential of youth boards. But I am still thinking about the Task Force and wondering what happened to it.

You probably have your own theory, and I'm guessing it doesn't involve Avril Lavigne.

I'm sure someone at NSDF could tell us the truth. While we should definitely track them down, that's not what I want to talk about right now.

This topic lasted approximately two and a half seconds in the panel discussion, like the one about youth boards that came after, and the one about untrustworthy leadership that came before.

It's clear we have a lot to talk about, but the way these conversations are structured are as important as the conclusions they may or may not enable us to draw. A single week is both a futile tool for solving every issue that affects our industry, and a rare, currently unexploited, opportunity to address something (anything) specific in meaningful depth.

Best accidental captions of the festival

As collected by Nathan Dunn

Toto (Turtle)

I'm, like, fuzzy (I'm, like, buzzing)

Dolphins of Love (Dull Thuds of Love)

The most engaging fish (the most engaging piece)

Don't trust the beef people (Don't trust the big people)

Captain James Phillips of the HMS NSDF

