GIRL FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY
AT THE OLD VIC

TEACHING RESOURCES

JUL–OCT 2017
CONTENTS

Cast and Creative team .......................................................... 3
Characters .............................................................................. 9
Synopsis .................................................................................. 11
Themes ................................................................................... 15
Timeline: Bob Dylan and *Girl from the North Country* .......... 18
Bob Dylan songs featured in *Girl from the North Country* .... 20
*Girl from the North Country* Rehearsal Diary by Jessica Daniels, Baylis Assistant Director .................................................. 21
An interview with Simon Hale, *Girl from the North Country* Orchestrator, Arranger & Musical Supervisor .................. 23
An interview with Alan Berry, *Girl from the North Country* Musical Director ................................................................. 25
An interview with actor Sheila Atim ......................................... 26
The US in 1934 and 2017 ......................................................... 29
In conversation with Lucy Hind, *Girl from the North Country* Movement Director ............................................................. 31
Practical exercises — Devising from Song ............................ 35
A Day in the Life of Izzy Madgwick, Marketing Manager ....... 39
Bibliography and further reading ............................................. 40

Old Vic Education
The Old Vic
The Cut
London SE1 8NB

E education@oldvictheatre.com

© The Old Vic, 2017
All information is correct at the time of going to press, but may be subject to change

Teaching resources
Compiled by Anne Langford
Design Matt Lane-Dixon
Rehearsal and production photography Manuel Harlan

Old Vic New Voices
Hannah Fosker
Education & Community Manager
Liz Bate
Education Manager
Poppy Walker
Education and Community Intern

Further details of this production oldvictheatre.com
SHEILA ATIM
Marianne Laine
Theatre: Babette’s Feast (Print Room); Shakespeare Trilogy (Donmar at King’s Cross); Les Blancs (National Theatre); Black Lives Black Words: The Interrogation of Sandra Bland (Bush Theatre); Volpone, Love’s Sacrifice, The Jew of Malta (RSC); Hopelessly Devoted (Paines Plough); Rachel (Finborough Theatre); Klook’s Last Stand (Park Theatre London); Ghost Town (Pilot Theatre York); The Tempest (St Ann’s Warehouse Brooklyn). TV: I Live With Models.

RON COOK
Dr Walker
Theatre: The Seafarer, Howard Katz, Black Snow (National Theatre); The Children, Our Country’s Good, The Recruiting Officer, Cloud Nine (Royal Court); Faith Healer, Trelawny of the Wells, Richard III, King Lear, Juno and the Paycock, Glengarry Glen Ross (Donmar); The Homecoming, Henry V, Hamlet, Twelfth Night, ‘Art’ (West End). Film: Hot Fuzz, The Merchant of Venice, Thunderbirds, 24 Hour Party People, Charlotte Gray, Chocolat, Topsy Turvy, Secrets & Lies. TV: City and the City, Mr Selfridge, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Silent Witness, Little Dorrit, The Diary of Anne Frank, Dr Who, Funland, The Lost Prince, The Singing Detective.

BRONAGH GALLAGHER
Mrs Burke
Theatre: Every Good Boy Deserves Favour, War Horse (National Theatre); The Caucasian Chalk Circle (National Theatre/UK tour); The Faith Machine, Dublin Carol (Royal Court); The Street of Crocodiles (Complicite/world tour); The Rocky Horror Show (SF Centre Dublin); The Iceman Cometh (Abbey Theatre Dublin). Film: Return to Montauk, Sherlock Holmes, Tamara Drewe, Tristan & Isolde, Last Chance Harvey, The Commitments, Pulp Fiction, Star Wars: The Phantom Menace. TV: You, Me and the Apocalypse, The Street, The Accused.

SHIRLEY HENDERSON
Elizabeth Laine
Theatre: Shining Souls (The Old Vic); Entertaining Strangers, The Winter’s Tale, The Tempest (National Theatre); Anna Weiss (Tralfagar Studios); My Mother Said I Never Should (Royal Court); The Maiden Stone (Hampstead); The Mill on the Floss (Shared Experience); Romeo and Juliet (Citizens Glasgow). Film: Okja, Bridget Jones, Urban Hymn, The Tale of Tales, Set Fire to the Stars, Filth, Everyday, Meek’s Cutoff, Life During Wartime, A Cock and Bull Story, Harry Potter, Intermission, 24 Hour Party People, Wonderland, Topsy Turvy, Trainspotting. TV: Dirty Filthy Love, Charles II, The Way We Live Now, The Taming of the Shrew, Wedding Belles, Happy Valley, Southcliffe.

CIARÁN HINDS
Nick Laine
Theatre: Hamlet (Barbican); Our Few and Evil Days (Abbey Theatre Dublin); The Night Alive (Donmar); Juno and the Paycock, Burnt by the Sun (National Theatre); Closer (National Theatre/Broadway); The Birds (Gate Theatre Dublin); Simpatico (Royal Court); Richard III (RSC); The Crucible, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Seafarer (Broadway). Film: Bleed for This, Silence, Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy, The Woman in Black, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, The Debt, The Eclipse, There Will Be Blood, Miami Vice, Munich, The Phantom of the Opera, Road to Perdition. TV: Game of Thrones, Political Animals, Above Suspicion, Rome, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Jane Eyre, Persuasion.

CLAUDIA JOLLY
Katherine Draper, u/s Marianne Laine

ARINZÉ KENE
Joe Scott
Theatre: One Night in Miami (Donmar); Decade (Headlong at St Katharine Docks); Been So Long (Young Vic); The Lion King (West End); Torn (Arcola). Film: Been So Long, The Pass — Evening Standard Award for Best Supporting Actor, Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, Freestyle. TV: Crazy Head, Our Girl, Youngers (series 1 & 2). Theatre as a playwright: God’s Property (Soho Theatre); Good Dog (UK tour); Little Baby Jesus (Oval House).

DEBBIE KURUP
Mrs Neilson
Theatre: The Threepenny Opera (National Theatre); The Bodyguard, Chicago, Sister Act, Tonight’s the Night, Rent, Boogie Nights, West Side Story (West End); Anything Goes (Sheffield Crucible/UK tour); Jack and the Beanstalk (Hackney Empire); I Love You Because (Landor Theatre); East (Leicester Curve); Fame (UK tour); Guys and Dolls (Sheffield Crucible); Pal Joey (Chichester Festival Theatre); Poison (Tricycle Theatre); Oliver (Cyprus). Film: 28 Weeks Later, Hollow, Beauty, Lethality.
KIRSTY MALPASS
Ensemble, u/s Mrs Burke/Katherine Draper/
Elizabeth Laine/Mrs Neilson
Theatre: Groundhog Day (The Old Vic); Charlie and the
Chocolate Factory, The Lord of the Rings, Charriots of
Fire, Jerry Springer: The Opera (West End); Honk.
(National Theatre/UK tour); The Sound of Music, Crush,
It’s a Wonderful Life (UK tour); Stroke of Luck (Park
Theatre London); Carmen, Die Fledermaus (New Victoria
Newcastle-under-Lyme); The Wizard of Oz (Birmingham
Rep/West Yorkshire Playhouse); The Eight Reindeer
Monologues (Theatre Above the Stage); Spend Spend
Spend (English Theatre Frankfurt). TV: Jerry Springer: The
Opera.

JIM NORTON
Mr Perry
Theatre: The Seafarer — Olivier and Tony Awards (National
Theatre/Broadway); The Contractor, The Changing Room
(Royal Court); Dublin Carol — Obie Award, Port Authority
(Atlantic Theatre New York); The Night Alive (Donmar/
Atlantic Theatre New York); The Crucible, Of Mice and
Men, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Finian’s Rainbow,
The Weir (Broadway). Film: Mary Poppins Returns, Harry
Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, Water for Elephants,
Straw Dogs, Hidden Agenda, Memoirs of an Invisible Man,
Driving Lessons, The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, Oyster
Farmer, The Eclipse, Jimmy’s Hall. TV: Elementary, Frasier,
Poirot, Star Trek: The Next Generation, Stan, River,
Father Ted.

TOM PETERS
Ensemble, u/s Mr Burke/Nick Laine/Mr Perry/
Dr Walker
Theatre: The Crucible, Dancing at Lughnasa (The Old
Vic); Ugly Lies the Bone, The Motherfucker with the
Hat, Strange Interlude, Scenes from an Execution,
Travelling Light, The London Cuckolds, Ivanov (National
Theatre); Shepney (Orange Tree); A View from the Bridge
(Liverpool Playhouse); The Alchemist (Belgrade
Coventry); Forever House (The Drum Theatre Royal
Plymouth); Antony and Cleopatra, Tales from King James
(Creation Theatre); The Taming of the Shrew (Guildford
Shakespeare Company); Dark Tales, Gallows Song
(Bridwell); Hard Times (Croydon Warehouse); Aladdin,
Dick Whittington (Salisbury Playhouse); Four Cities
(The Fortune Dunedin, New Zealand); Macbeth
(The Court Christchurch, New Zealand).

KARL QUEENSBOROUGH
Ensemble, u/s Elias Burke/Gene Laine/Reverend
Marlowe/ Joe Scott
Theatre: Aladdin, Cinderella (Lyric Hammersmith);
Morning (Lyric Hammersmith/Traverse Edinburgh);
A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Filter Theatre); The
Machine Stops (York Theatre Royal); Only the Brave
(Soho Theatre); A Wolf in Snakeskin Shoes (Tricycle
Theatre); Concealed (Accidental Festival); Daygro,
Mind the Gap (Y Touring Theatre); Ignition: Out of
Reach (Franetic Assembly); Depth Charge (Gecko
Theatre); 365 (National Theatre of Scotland); The First
Thing That Ever Ever Happened (Peepolykus Theatre).
Film: 13, Leroy, Broken Glasses, Sex, Lies and DVDs.
TV: Casualty.

SAM REID
Gene Laine
Theatre: ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore (West Yorkshire
Playhouse); One Night in November (Belgrade Coventry).
Film: The Limehouse Golem, 2:22, Despite the Falling
Snow, Serena, Tigers, The Riot Club, ’71, Belle, The
Railway Man, Inhuman Resources, Anonymous. TV:
Tennis, Codes of Conduct, The Astronaut Wives Club,
Miss Marple: Greenshaw’s Folly, Hatfields & McCoys,
Whitechapel, Endeavour, Spooks, MI-5, All Saints.

MICHAEL SHAEFER
Reverend Marlowe
Theatre: All About My Mother (The Old Vic); The Vote
(Donmar); How to Hold Your Breath (Royal Court);
Mr Burns, Little Revolution (Almeida); Godchild
(Hampstead); Table, London Road, Threepenny Opera
(National Theatre); Restoration (Headlong); Hamlet
(Royal & Derngate Northampton); Original Sin (Sheffield
Crucible); Macbeth (Southwark Playhouse); The Beautiful
Game (West End); Jesus Christ Superstar (UK tour).
Film: Star Wars: Rogue One, London Road, London
Fields, Broken, Anna Karenina, Trance, Gulliver’s Travels.
Breaking and Entering, Kingdom of Heaven. TV: Rellik,
Oasis, Vera, Brussels, Taboo, SS-GB, Grantchester,
The Last Panthers, Luther, Black Mirror, Mrs Biggs,
Parade’s End, Game of Thrones.

JACK SHALLOO
Elias Burke
Theatre: Groundhog Day (The Old Vic); Charlie and the
Chocolate Factory (West End); The Little Match Girl
(Shakespeare’s Globe); Dead Dog in a Suitcase (UK/
world tour); The Snow Queen (Nuffield Southampton);
A Clockwork Orange (Stratford East); Goodbye
Barcelona (Arcola); Hamlet the Musical (Royal &
Derngate Northampton/Richmond Theatre); Departure
Lounge (Waterloo East); Our House (Birmingham Rep/
UK tour); The Kissing Dance (Jermy Street). Film:
Fit, Kick-Off, Bashment. TV: People Just Do Nothing,
Dickensian, The Interpreter, Doctors, Miranda Hart’s New
Year’s Eve Sketch Show, The Man Who Loved the Lakes,
EastEnders, Out of Control, Holby City, The Suspicions
of Mr Whitcher.

STANLEY TOWNSEND
Mr Burke
Theatre: King Lear, Phèdre, Gethsemane, Happy Now,
Remember This, Guys and Dolls (National Theatre); ‘Art’
(West End); The Alice Trilogy, The Weir (Royal Court);
Shining City (Royal Court/Gate Theatre); The Nether

The Old Vic  Girl from the North Country teaching resources
(Royal Court/West End); *Broken Glass* (Tricycle/West End); *The Dead* (Abbey Theatre Dublin); *A View from the Bridge* (Royal Lyceum Edinburgh). Film: *The Current War, Florence Foster Jenkins, The Voices, One Chance, Standby*. TV: *Redwater, The Collection, Galavant (series 1 & 2), The Tunnel II, The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses, 24: Live Another Day, New Worlds, Toast, Ripper Street (series 2), Quirke, Call the Midwife, An Appropriate Adult.*

**CHARLIE BROWN**
Violin & mandolin

**PETE CALCARD**
Lap steel resonator, acoustic & nylon string guitars

**DON RICHARDSON**
Upright bass
CONOR McPHERSON  
Writer & Director  
Conor’s plays include *Rum and Vodka, The Good Thief, This Lime Tree Bower, St Nicholas, The Weir, Dublin Carol, Port Authority, Shining City, The Seafarer, The Veil and The Night Alive*. His work has been recognised with an Olivier Award, Evening Standard Award, Critics’ Circle Award, New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award, George Devine Award and three Tony Award nominations.

BOB DYLAN  
Music & Lyrics  
Since bursting into the public’s consciousness in the early 1960s, Bob Dylan has sold more than 125 million records, won 11 Grammy Awards and has six entries in the Grammy Hall of Fame. His contribution to worldwide culture has been recognised with many awards, including: the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature (the first songwriters to receive such a distinction); America's highest civilian honour, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, from President Obama in 2012; a Special Citation Pulitzer Prize in 2008; an Academy Award in 2001 for ‘Things Have Changed’ from the film *Wonder Boys*. He released his 39th studio album, ‘Triplicate’, in April 2017, and continues to tour worldwide.

RAE SMITH  
Designer  
Theatre: *Sweet Bird of Youth* (The Old Vic); *Dublin Carol* (The Old Vic/Royal Court); *Shining City* (Royal Court/Gate Theatre Dublin); *The Weir* (Royal Court/West End/Broadway); *The Birds* (Gate Theatre Dublin); *The Goat* (West End); *The Light Princess* — Olivier Award, *The Barber Shop Chronicles, The Veil, Seafarer* (National Theatre); *wonder.land* (National Theatre/Manchester International Festival); *This House* (National Theatre/Chichester Festival Theatre/West End); *War Horse* — Tony and Olivier awards for Best Design (National Theatre/West End/Broadway). Opera/ballet: *Pelleas et Melisande* (Scottish Opera); *The Tempest* (Birmingham Royal Ballet); *Cavalleri Rusticano and Pagliacci* (Metropolitan New York); *Benvenuto Cellini* (ENO). raesmith.co.uk

SIMON HALE  
Orchestrator, Arranger & Musical Supervisor  
Theatre: *Spring Awakening, Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (West End/Broadway); *Whisper House* (The Other Palace/San Diego); *Side Show* (Southwark Playhouse); *Company* (Sheffield Crucible); *Strictly Ballroom* (West Yorkshire Playhouse/Toronto); *One Love* (Birmingham Rep); *Finding Neverland, ‘Art’* (Broadway); *Sousatzka* (Toronto). Film as Orchestrator: *Spectre ‘Writing’s on the Wall’* — Oscar and Golden Globe awards for Best Original Song. TV as Orchestral Conductor: Sam Smith at the Academy Awards ceremony 2016. As Composer: *LA Noire* video game soundtrack — BAFTA for Best Original Music (with Andrew Hale).

MARK HENDERSON  
Lighting  
Theatre: *Hedda Gabler, A Flea in Her Ear, Cloaca, Aladdin* (The Old Vic); *The Iceman Cometh* (The Old Vic/Broadway); *The Bodyguard, The Sound of Music, Grease, The History Boys, One Man, Two Guvnors* (West End); *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Copenhagen, Democracy, Hamlet, The Real Thing* (West End/Broadway); *Sunset Boulevard, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Enron* (Broadway); *Before the Dawn* (Kate Bush concert series). Mark has worked on more than 80 productions with the National Theatre; and numerous opera and dance companies. He's won six Oliviers and a Tony Award. Film: *The Tall Guy*.

SIMON BAKER  
Sound  
Theatre: *Groundhog Day, The Caretaker, The Master Builder, Future Conditional, High Society, Electra, The Norman Conquests, Hedda Gabler, The Real Thing* (The Old Vic); *Twelfth Night, A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Shakespeare’s Globe); *Shakespeare in Love, Mojo* (West End); *Matilda The Musical* — Olivier Award for Best Sound (worldwide); *The Light Princess, Amen Corner* (National Theatre); *The Roaring Girl* — Olivier Award for Best Original Song. TV as Orchestral Conductor: *The Commitments, Ghost The Musical* (The Old Vic); *The History Boys, One Man, Two Guvnors* (West End); *The Bodyguard, The Sound of Music, Grease, The History Boys, One Man, Two Guvnors* (West End); *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Copenhagen, Democracy, Hamlet, The Real Thing* (West End/Broadway); *Sunset Boulevard, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Enron* (Broadway); *Before the Dawn* (Kate Bush concert series). Mark has worked on more than 80 productions with the National Theatre; and numerous opera and dance companies. He's won six Oliviers and a Tony Award. Film: *The Tall Guy*.

ALAN BERRY  
Musical Director, piano & harmonium  
Theatre as Musical Director: *Groundhog Day* (The Old Vic); *Ghost The Musical* (China); *The Commitments, Matilda The Musical, Avenue Q* (West End); *Little Shop of Horrors* (Menier Chocolate Factory/West End). Theatre as Associate Musical Director: *Aladdin* (The Old Vic); *Shrek the Musical, Hairspray, Spamalot* (West End); *Matilda The Musical* (RSC); *Kiss Me, Kate* (UK tour). TV: *The Royal Variety Performance, Olivier Awards Nomination Ceremony, 4 Poofs and a Piano*. Radio: *Friday Night is Music Night*. Cast recording: *Matilda The Musical*.
LUCY HIND
Movement Director
Theatre: No’s Knife (The Old Vic); Ugly Lies the Bone (National Theatre); Snowmaiden (Opera North); The House of Bernada Alba (Royal Exchange/Graeae); The Merchant of Venice (Globe Theatre/Liverpool Playhouse/Chicago Shakespeare Theatre); Barnbow Canaries (West Yorkshire Playhouse); Somme 100 (national commemoration of the Battle of the Somme, Manchester); The Effect, This is My Family (Sheffield Crucible); Multitudes (Tricycle); The Jacobin (Buxton Arts Festival); Moon Tiger (Bath Theatre Royal); Stuart: A Life Backwards (Hightide); London 2012 Paralympic Games Opening Ceremony. As performer/creator: The Impending Storm (International Dance Festival Birmingham/Southbank Centre). TV: Banana, Peter Pan, The Nutcracker.

JESSICA RONANE CDG
 Casting Director
Theatre: Woyzeck, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, King Lear, The Caretaker, 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 (children casting): To Kill a Mockingbird, The Sound of Music (Regent’s Park); School of Rock, The Audience, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Made in Dagenham, Singin’ in the Rain, Billy Elliot the Musical (West End); Matilda The Musical (RSC/West End); Bugsy Malone (Lyric Hammersmith); Caroline or Change, Baby Girl, Mrs Affleck (National Theatre); A Member of the Wedding (Young Vic).

PENNY DYER
Company Dialect Work
Theatre: Groundhog Day, The Caretaker, Other Desert Cities, Sweet Bird of Youth, Kiss Me, Kate (The Old Vic); Follies, The Red Barn, Husbands and Sons, This House (National Theatre); Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Gypsy, The Ruling Class, Good People, This House (Southwark); The Treatment, They Drink It in the Congo (Almeida); The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, One Night in Miami (Donmar); The Cardinal (Barbican); An American in Paris, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, The Miser, Romeo & Juliet, The Painkiller, Red Velvet (West End); A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Streetcar Named Desire (Young Vic); The Children, Cyprus Avenue (Royal Court); Lazarus (King’s Cross Theatre); King Lear (RSC/Barbican). Film: Troy. TV: Quick Cuts, Against All Odds.

CHARLIE HUGHES-D’AETH
Company Voice Work

BRET YOUNT
Fight Director
Theatre: The Caretaker, The Master Builder, The Hairy Ape (The Old Vic); The Treatment, They Drink It in the Congo (Almeida); The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, One Night in Miami (Donmar); The Cardinal (Southwark Playhouse); Obsession, Hamlet (Barbican); An American in Paris, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, The Miser, Romeo & Juliet, The Painkiller, Red Velvet (West End); A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Streetcar Named Desire (Young Vic); The Children, Cyprus Avenue (Royal Court); Lazarus (King’s Cross Theatre); King Lear (RSC/Barbican). Film: Troy. TV: Quick Cuts, Against All Odds.

WILLIAM FRICKER
Associate Designer
Theatre as Designer: Billy the Kid (Rosemary Branch Theatre); Mirror Mirror (King’s Head Islington); Kindertransport (Chickenshed); Dark Tourism (Park Theatre London); Ace of Clubs (Union Theatre Southwark); The Glass Menagerie (Theatre Chipping Norton); Lay Down Your Cross (Hampstead); The Rake’s Progress (Peacock Theatre); The Song of Rhiannon (Riverside Studios); Faces in the Crowd (Royal Court); Pleasure and Pain (Citizens Glasgow). Theatre as Associate Designer: School of Rock (West End); This House (Chichester Minerva/West End). Will was Design Associate for the original production of War Horse and continues to mount the show on UK and international tours.

JOE MURPHY
Associate Director
Theatre as Director: Woyzeck, No’s Knife (The Old Vic); What I Learned from Johnny Bevan (Soho Theatre/UK tour); Blink, Bunny (Soho Theatre/UK tour/off-Broadway); Incognito (Bush Theatre); The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (Chichester Festival Theatre/UK tour); The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Shakespeare’s Globe/world tour). Theatre as Associate Director: Wolf Hall (RSC/West End/Broadway); This House (National Theatre); Henry V (Shakespeare’s Globe/UK tour); Ghost Stories (West End/Moscow). Joe was Artistic Director of nabokov theatre company,
2010–15, during which time the company presented the work of 88 playwrights and 496 artists across three continents.

**JESSICA DANIELS**  
Baylis Assistant Director  
Theatre as Director: *Rise: Macro vs Micro* (Old Vic New Voices); *The Many Crimes of Hector Cartwright* (Vault Festival); *Gangbang* (Southwark Playhouse); *Stroke* (Theatre 503). Theatre as Assistant Director: *Rise* (Old Vic New Voices); *Jess and Joe Forever* (Orange Tree Theatre); *Leaper: A Fish Tale* (Lyric Hammersmith).

**DAVID GALLAGHER**  
Musicians Contractor  
Theatre as Musicians Contractor: *Dr. Seuss’s The Lorax, Future Conditional, Richard III, The Tempest, As You Like It, The Cherry Orchard, The Winter’s Tale* (The Old Vic); *Play Without Words* (Sadler’s Wells/tour). Theatre as Orchestral Manager: *Groundhog Day, Cinderella* (The Old Vic); *Matilda The Musical, 42nd Street, Queen Anne, From Here to Eternity* (West End); *Jackie the Musical, Bernadette Peters* (UK tour); *Wolf Hall* recordings (Broadway); National Symphony Orchestra projects 2017. Film as Musicians’ Contractor: *amfAR Cinema Against Aids Gala* (Cannes Film Festival), *Robin Hood*. David was Music Manager at the RSC 2010–11, and at the National Theatre 2000–10.
NICK LAINE
Husband to Elizabeth and father to Gene and Marianne, Nick is in his fifties and running the guest house that was their family home. He is not a skilled businessman and over the years lost the horse farm and all the stocks he inherited from his grandfather. He re-mortgaged the house and now owes a lot of money to the bank, which he is unable to pay back. He is concerned about his son and daughter and what the future holds for them, so is trying to make arrangements for their financial security. Nick is caring for his wife, who has dementia. He is also having an affair with one of the guests, Mrs Neilson. They are talking about buying a hotel together when she gets money from an inheritance. When he was 10, he took his six-year old sister Leonora with him into the woods to fight some boys. She fell 40 feet down a mineshaft and died before help arrived. It was after this that Nick was sent to live with his grandfather in Duluth.

ELIZABETH LAINE
Her dementia causes Elizabeth to behave strangely. With no regard for social conventions, she says and does exactly as she feels. Before getting visibly sick she had told her husband that she no longer loved him, which has upset him greatly. She is now cared for by her family who dress and feed her. She saves money in a small metal box she keeps hidden under her chair.

MARianne LAINE
Left by her birth parents who stayed one night in the Laine’s guesthouse, she has been raised since she was a baby by Nick and Elizabeth. Elizabeth had always wanted a daughter, having lost a girl as a baby. A black child being raised by a white family was very unusual in this period/Nick was concerned about her welfare. It is suggested that he maybe didn’t want to be seen with her, so she was home schooled by Elizabeth. At 19 she is pregnant in mysterious circumstances: she won’t talk about who the father is and no one seems to quite know how it happened. Her father has arranged for her to marry Mr Perry, a much older man, in return for some money for the guest house and to secure her, and her child’s, future.

GENE LAINE
Struggling with an addiction to alcohol, Gene wants to be a writer but doesn’t seem to be doing very well. He receives rejection letters for his short stories and spends more time drinking than writing. He is 20 and unable to get work. He has been in a relationship with Katherine Draper but they fell out when he was drunk, though he seems to still be in love with her. He is upset when she tells him she is leaving Duluth and is going to marry another man. He is very close to Marianne, and kind to his mother but has an antagonistic relationship with his father.

MRS NEILSEN
A widow of three years, probably in her early forties. She has been staying at the guest house for some time, while solicitors in Duluth probate her husbands will. She has been having an affair with Nick and she tells him that she loves him. She is under the impression that she will inherit a significant amount of money and suggests to Nick they buy a hotel and restaurant together.

MR BURKE
A former factory owner in his fifties who has lost everything. Mr Burke is staying in the guest house with his wife and son, Elias. He is in Duluth chasing a debtor who owes him money. He is quite kind to his son but occasionally shouts at him, and admits he has found it difficult to raise a child with a learning disability.

MRS BURKE
Also in her fifties, she is a caring mother to Elias, and a gregarious woman who is struggling with the financial misfortune that her family is experiencing. She can be critical of her husband at times and feels ashamed of her reduced circumstances. She has a friendly relationship with Nick, who shares his secret bourbon stash with her, and with Dr Walker who gives her some morphine drops.
ELIAS BURKE
A man in his thirties, Elias has learning disabilities that mean he responds and behaves like a young child. He is easily distressed by loud noises or shouting. He enjoys fishing with his father.

JOE SCOTT
A black boxer in his late twenties arrives at the guest house late at night with Reverend Marlowe and very little money. He is planning to go to Chicago, to make connections with a man who was in Duluth, and who may help him re-start his boxing career. He says that he has just been released from prison after being wrongly convicted and serving three years of a sentence. He has a wife and two children, though his wife now has a new partner so he doesn’t see his family. He invites Marianne to join him and head for Chicago on a boat. Marianne suggests he is an escaped prisoner, and that he robbed a store to get the money to go to Chicago.

REVEREND MARLOWE
Arriving late at night with Joe, he says they were on a train that got delayed and became travelling companions in that way. He sells bibles, and Nick asks him not to sell any while he is in the guest house. He appears quite charming but soon threatens Mr Burke. He also tries to steal from Elizabeth and assaults Mrs Neilsen.

MR PERRY
The respectable owner of a shoe repair shop in his sixties. He is a widow who lost his wife 12 years ago. Many years ago, he took Elizabeth to the county fair and they had some kind of sexual encounter. He seems to be very lonely and shocked by the experience of ageing. Nick has suggested that Mr Perry marry Marianne. He proposes, saying that he will not lay a finger on Marianne, but help her raise her child and leave everything to her when he dies, which he is sure will be fairly soon.

DR WALKER
The Laine family doctor narrates the action at key points. His marriage has failed and he feels responsible. He has become addicted to morphine, although he has largely weaned himself off by the time the play starts. He is kind and very fond of the Laine family, concerned for their welfare and drawn to the guest house and its constantly changing residents.

KATHERINE (KATE) DRAPER
Gene’s ex-girlfriend who comes to tell him that she is leaving as she has a job as a governess in Boston. She is also going to marry someone else, who has a job and good prospects. She is very fond of Gene and we don’t find out why they split up, though his drinking played a part.
The play moves between the world of the story and a performance space. There are live musicians on stage and at different points characters sing. The songs express an emotional truth and happen both inside and outside the world of the story. The songs give the audience a deeper understanding of the emotional state, experiences and desires of the characters.

**ACT ONE**

It is winter in 1934 in Duluth, the biggest city in the northern state of Minnesota. Duluth is a port city on Lake Superior. America is in the midst of the Great Depression; lots of people have lost their homes and jobs. Dr Walker narrates the scene and introduces himself, Nick and Elizabeth Laine. Nick has cooked a chicken stew and is trying to persuade Elizabeth to eat, when Gene enters. Nick criticises him for drinking and Gene says he can’t write in his room so has to go to the bar. Nick is excited by a letter from New York, hopeful that one of Gene's stories has been accepted. Gene dismisses Nick's offer of help with his writing. Nick is pushing Gene to get a job, and asks Gene to carefully feed his mother.

Mrs Neilsen sings 'Went to See the Gypsy'. As she enters Gene slips away and she asks Nick to come to her room that evening. He tells her not to ask in front of Elizabeth. She shows Nick a newspaper with a hotel and restaurant for sale in a nearby town. Nick is sceptical and on edge, checking his watch and worrying where Marianne is. He has invited Mr Perry to discuss marriage to Marianne, something Mrs Neilsen ridicules. She gets angry at Nick, who says that Elizabeth told him she no longer loved him before she got ill with dementia. Mrs Neilsen asks him if he's considered that she might love him, and suggests he's still very attached to Elizabeth before singing a short reprise of ‘Went to See the Gypsy’.

Mr Perry arrives with some flowers. Nick introduces him to Mrs Neilsen. There is some awkward small talk. Nick asks Gene to check on Marianne, then tells the story of how she was left at the guest house and he and Elizabeth raised her as their own daughter. We find out that Mrs Neilsen is in Duluth waiting for her husband's will to be probated (processed so she can claim her inheritance). Elizabeth asks if Mr Perry's flowers are for her and tells a story about how they went to a County Fair together when they were younger, and Mr Perry had asked her to touch him in a sexual way. She embarrasses Mr Perry and everyone present with her frank and uninhibited story.
Marianne enters and Nick asks Mrs Neilsen to help him put Elizabeth to bed. Mr Perry proposes marriage to Marianne, not letting her speak and suggesting she consider his offer. After Mr Perry has left Marianne sings ‘Tight Connection to my Heart’.

At 3.30am Nick opens the door to Joe Scott and Reverend Marlowe who are looking for somewhere to stay after a delayed train. He has a spare room that he offers Reverend Marlowe and offers a simple bed in the kitchen for Joe. He offers the men a glass of whiskey, which he then charges them for. We find out a bit about the two men and Nick asks them if they have ever owed $20,000? He advises them against investing in the fairground business, hinting at the burden of his debt. Nick shows Reverend Marlowe to his room. Joe hears a crash in the kitchen. Gene has arrived home drunk. He degrades and antagonises Joe, asking him to hit him. Joe initially refuses, then hits Gene who crumples with a cut face, begging not be hurt anymore.

Reverend Marlowe re-enters, suggesting that Gene would benefit from a bible and that a man like him shouldn’t be without money. The men sing ‘Slow Train Coming’, seguing into ‘License to Kill’ as they go to bed.

The next morning Marianne, accompanied by Elizabeth, comes in to make breakfast and is startled by Joe. She offers him breakfast and he introduces himself to the women. Dr Walker arrives with Elizabeth's prescription. Then the Burke family and Mrs Neilsen come down for breakfast. Mr Burke recognises Joe as a very good boxer. Joe says he hasn't fought for a while because he was falsely imprisoned. To his wife's horror Mr Burke recalls losing a bet he placed on a boxer Joe fought, then offers to manage Joe. Elias tunelessly sings ‘Dusquesne Whistle’ and plays his harmonica which angers his father.

Dr Walker narrates, telling us that Marianne had a lonely childhood, citing the dangerous racial prejudices of the period. We learn that Nick’s younger sister died when he was 10, and a little about how it affected Nick.

Marianne and Gene are on the front porch, smoking and talks about going to see a movie about a guy helping a girl run away from getting married. Gene wants to know who the father of Marianne's baby is and she tells him not to ask. Nick comes out and asks what has happened to Gene’s face. He has a letter; an interview for Gene at Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad. Nick has called in favours from an old friend and girlfriend to get Gene the interview. He asks Gene to do his best.

Nick sees Kate approaching and he and Marian go inside. Gene and Kate talk; she is leaving and marrying someone else. Gene apologises for being drunk and when Kate tries to return Elizabeth's St Christopher Medal to Gene, he becomes angry and tells her to keep it. Just as she's leaving Gene lies and tells her he has just got a well-paid job and wishes her well. He watches her leave and then we see Gene and Kate sing ‘I Want you’, holding and kissing each other — an expression of what they really want.

Reverend Marlowe finds Elizabeth in the kitchen and tries to ask her about what she keeps in the box under her chair. She replies with nonsensical answers and then seems to be mocking him, saying he smells.

Mr Burke and Elias enter mending a rod; they are going fishing together. Reverend Marlowe suggests that Elias was responsible for an attack on a girl in the Burke's home town. He blackmails Mr Burke, threatening to tell the authorities his suspicions unless Mr Burke gives him $500. Mr Burke aggressively threatens to cut Reverend Marlowe’s throat if he says anything but is clearly distressed and angry. This upsets Elias, and Mr Burke comforts him. Elizabeth sings ‘Like a Rolling Stone’.

Joe asks Marianne how far into her pregnancy she is, and if she is going to get married. He tells her about how amazing Chicago is and they talk frankly. Nick disturbs them and asks Marianne to get her mother some supper. Scott leaves, and Nick asks Marianne how things went with Mr Perry. She says all the discussing must have been done, that Mr Perry had described the plan he had formed with Nick. Nick is furious and asks how she thinks she’ll cope when she has a child and reminds her of the extreme poverty that surrounds them. He calls Marianne a whore, just as Mrs Neilsen enters the room. Marianne leaves, and Nick asks Mrs Neilsen why she is wasting her life away in the guesthouse. She replies that she has to waste it somewhere and they embrace. Elizabeth watches them and sings a reprise of ‘Rolling Stone’.
ACT TWO

Everybody sings ‘You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere’, which segues into ‘Jokerman’. It is evening and the guests are playing cards and chatting. Mrs Burke asks Dr Walker if he has any more drops (morphine) which he gives her with a warning not to take too many. She flirts with him, and the doctor narrates to the audience that suicide had increased 100% in the years following the crash. He reveals that his marriage has ended and he became addicted to morphine before mostly weaning himself off it. Everyone begins to talk about the president and whether they need a good, moral man or a strong, energetic leader. Mr Burke appears to be drunk and compliments Mrs Neilsen on her strong language. Mrs Burke privately asks Nick if the family can extend their credit while they wait for some money owed to them. She’s ashamed but Nick is kind and offers her a drink.

Nick tells Dr Walker that Elizabeth hears things, ‘Girl in the hole’, and the doctor reassures him that Leonora’s accident wasn’t Nick’s fault, because he was just a child. Dr Walker asks if Nick has heard of a condition called pseudocyesis. Nick hasn’t heard of it and the Dr. explains that it is when a woman shows clinical symptoms of pregnancy without an actual pregnancy. Just then Mr Perry enters and so Dr. Walker leaves without finishing the conversation.

Mr Perry arrives with a bunch of flowers; he is angry as he feels Nick is making him beg. Nick is frustrated and they argue. After Mr Perry has gone to the bathroom, Elizabeth, who has witnessed this exchange, criticises Nick. She suggests Marianne would be better in a whorehouse where she can set her own price. They argue and fight. Then he helps get her ready for bed while Mrs Burke sings ‘Sweetheart Like You’, then Mrs Neilsen sings ‘True Love Tends to Forget’.

Mrs Neilsen tells Nick she is leaving because she cannot pay. All of the inheritance she was expecting has been used on legal fees and she owes the solicitor money. Nick is horrified. Mrs Neilson says she will go to her sisters in Oklahoma before asking Nick if he loves her. Nick says he has no soul and he can’t love anyone. Mrs Neilsen sings ‘True Love Tends to Forget’ and it segues back into Mrs Burke singing ‘Sweetheart Like You’.

The next morning, Thursday 29 November, is Thanksgiving. Mr Perry has returned with his now slightly wilted flowers and wishes everyone a ‘Happy Thanksgiving’. Marianne suggests he might be a predator. She says that the night she got pregnant a wind blew into her room bringing something older than a man, smelling of ancient water. She calls Mr Perry weak and he is insulted. He tells her that she has nothing and he is offering her a good alternative; as a black girl with a baby she has limited options. The previous night, in a dream, his wife told him she approved of him marrying Marianne. He describes the experience and pain of ageing. Nick enters and asks how they are doing and Mr Perry says that if Nick sets a wedding date he’ll give him a cheque. They settle on Christmas Eve without Marianne’s involvement.

Nick spots Gene and asks about the interview. Gene says it went well and he can work his way up in the company; Nick is really pleased. The guests are dancing and they all sing ‘Hurricane’, segueing into ‘Idiot Wind’ sung by Marianne and Joe. There is dancing and they enjoy turkey and cranberry sandwiches prepared by Marianne, who cooked the turkey. Mr Burke is drunk and stumbling, and flatters Mrs Neilsen. Mrs Burke is dancing with Joe and complimenting his arms. Dr Walker suggests Marianne should call by and see him the following week. Mrs Burke wonders where Elias is; Mr Burke says he’s sleeping. There is dancing and chatting while Mrs Burke becomes increasingly concerned looking for Elias. Mr Burke talks about the pain and struggle of bringing Elias up and not knowing how to cope before admitting that Elias is down by the lakeside. Mr Burke says it was an accident; that he couldn’t stop it and we realise that Elias has drowned. Dr. Walker leaves hurriedly with some of the other men. Mrs Burke is distraught and attacks Mr Burke. Nick and Mrs Neilsen pull her off him.

The ghost of Elias sings ‘Duquesne Whistle’, moving into ‘Señor’. Mr and Mrs Burke sing ‘Is Your Love in Vain’.

Later that night Joe and Marianne are talking; he says that if she wants to come with him he’s leaving on the 10pm boat. Marianne asks if he has robbed a store to get the money to go and that she suspects he is an escaped prisoner. He is upset and says that he isn’t a saint but he’s never killed anyone. He tells her that if she wants to go with him to Chicago, she should meet him at the coffeehouse on the corner at 8.30 if she’s going with him. He leaves.

Elizabeth comes in and asks Marianne to tidy her clothes and hair. Marianne says she is going away and sings an accappella reprise of ‘Tight Connection’ to my Heart. Reverend Marlowe comes in and talks to Elizabeth and Marianne leaves. The Reverend steals money from Elizabeth’s box and she shouts at him. Mrs Neilsen comes
in and the Reverend pretends he's being attacked but Mrs Neilsen sees through him and says he must give the money back. He turns on Mrs Neilsen, assaulting her, until Elizabeth fires a gun at the ceiling. He throws the money back at the women.

Nick and Gene race in, alerted by the gunshot, and the Reverend says he's been degraded and leaves. Gene tries to tend to his mother who knocks him away. Gene asks his father what he thinks about Marianne leaving; Nick says Joe seems like a nice guy and Gene is angry his father didn't try to make Marianne stay. Nick says there's nothing to stay for, and he's glad Gene has a job. Gene confesses that he doesn't have the job, but was too embarrassed to say anything. Nick is distraught and says that he and Elizabeth are going away, and Gene realises his father intends to kill his mother and himself. Gene is upset and says he'll do something. Elizabeth tells him to go and Nick apologises and gives him $22, all the money they have. As Gene leaves, the ensemble sings a reprise of ‘Jokerman’.

Dr Walker narrates; he tells us the last time he saw Nick he seemed in better spirits, probably because he had decided to end his own life — having made that decision he found some peace.

Time has passed and it is daylight and Mr and Mrs Burke are saying goodbye to Mrs Neilson. They are leaving to take Elias' body back to their hometown for a small funeral. It seems the slipway he fell off is known to be dangerous. Mrs Neilson walks the Burkes outside to their taxi, and Nick asks Dr. Walker if he wants a coffee. He says no, and begins to leave before saying that he has always admired Nick.

Mrs Neilson re-enters to fetch her suitcase. She says she is pregnant, which stuns Nick who says she can't go. She asks why not, but gets no answer. She says goodbye to Elizabeth and leaves.

Nick is sat at the dining table looking at the revolver. Elizabeth congratulates Nick for getting everyone out of the guesthouse. She talks about how she and Nick first met, and the trials and joys of their lives together until she said she didn't love him. She asks whether they can live a little longer, and when Nick takes her hand she sings ‘Forever Young’.

Dr Walker narrates what happens to everyone while the Laine family sit down to dinner in happier times. Nick and Elizabeth hit the road and Elizabeth dies of Bronchitis in Missouri. He heard Nick headed south, maybe to Oklahoma but he doesn't know. Gene ended up moving in to Mr Perry's and working for him before working for a local newspaper as a reporter. He headed to New York and met a girl but it didn't work out. When the war came he enlisted and was killed stepping on a mine in Japan. A month after the action of the play Dr Walker killed himself with an overdose of morphine. The following winter Marianne, carrying a baby, returns with Joe and looks up at the windows of the empty guest house before leaving.
In *Girl from the North Country*, nearly all forms of love are entwined with loss and suffering. None of the characters are able to remain connected to those they romantically love. Nick was deeply in love with his wife, Elizabeth, who shortly before she became ill with dementia told him she no longer loved him: ‘you know what the shock is? There ain’t nothing you can do. That’s it. You can’t make ‘em love ya.’ The pain and helplessness of this experience has embittered Nick who still cares very deeply for Elizabeth and nurses her through her illness. Nick has begun an affair with Mrs Neilsen, who has fallen in love with him. However, he seems unable to return her feelings. At the end of the play he lies to her about what the bank have said, so as not to distress her before she leaves. We get the sense that maybe Nick cares more deeply than he has let on.

Gene’s ex-girlfriend Kate visits to tell him she is leaving town and is going to marry another man. Their true feelings for one another are expressed through the lyrics of the song they sing ‘I want you’. However, their dire economic circumstances, combined with their inability to be honest with each other, do not enable their relationship to continue. Dr Walker talks about the impact of his failed marriage and seeing his wife happy with the man she left him for. Joe Scott’s wife has also found a new man; something that causes him pain.

Parental love and care is very present, though sometimes expressed in odd ways. Nick’s love and care for his children is expressed in his desire to see them financially secure and provided for. This leads him to some strange choices, but love and concern for their welfare is the primary motivation for his actions. Mr and Mrs Burke are very tender and loving towards Elias, though we can see that the strain of caring for someone with such specific needs has taken its toll on Mr Burke who, when drunk, talks about the challenges of raising his son.

There are bonds of affection between the longer-term residents of the guesthouse, the Laine family and Dr Walker. In these friendships, we find concern, support and even fun. For example, Mrs Neilsen takes unlikely care of Elizabeth, Mrs Burke shows honesty with Nick and his kindness at her dire financial situation and Dr Walker expresses concern and support for the Laine family. These relationships feel the most hopeful and nurturing in the play.

**CONVERSATION STARTER**

How are the play’s emotions and relationships affected by the financial circumstances of its characters? Would they express their feelings in a different way if they were living more comfortably?

*LOST*  
*I wasn’t born to lose you/I want you/I want you/I want you so bad*  

*Girl from the North Country* describes a world heavy with loss — not just lost love, but also lost hope, lost chances, loss of self and dignity. The death of Nick’s little sister while she was in his care is a loss which echoes down through time, causing him pain and suffering many years later. After her death, Nick was sent to Duluth to live with his grandfather, losing not just his sister but the love and support of his immediate family. The loss of a child is a repeating motif: Marianne’s birth parents lost her, Elizabeth and Nick lost a baby girl, and Mr and Mrs Burke lose Elias. These losses cause the characters’ deep pain.

Nick’s life seems to be marked by loss. His poor business decisions and the crashing economy have meant that he has lost his grandfather’s farm and all his financial resources. When the play begins, the guesthouse is mortgaged
and Nick is in significant debt to the bank that he cannot repay. This loss of financial stability is echoed in the Burkes’ experience of losing the factory they owned, which is part of the reason they have left their home. Mrs Neilson has lost any inheritance from her husband. The lack of any financial security is one of the biggest drivers of action, and is connected to a loss of dignity as the characters find themselves forced by circumstance to make drastic choices.

Elizabeth has lost part of herself to dementia. This disease also means that her family has lost a wife and mother. The loss of youth and vitality is something that Mr Perry talks about in vivid and shocking detail, and something that Nick experiences too. There is a mystery surrounding the father of Marianne’s baby and her song, with its recurring line ‘Has anybody seen my love?’, speaks deeply to a sense of loss.

DESPERATION

‘How does it feel/To be without a home/Like a complete unknown’

The United States of 1934 was a desperate time. It is now four winters since the crash of 1929 and huge numbers of people are out of work, homeless, destitute and hungry. The breakdown of families as people move for work has led to the breakdown of communities. Nick describes being shocked at seeing people camped by the side of the road, and fears for his own children. The talk is always about how, and when, things will improve, though it seems hopeless. Desperation is the root cause of many extreme actions in the play. Marianne’s birth parents abandoned her as a baby, a shocking action driven by their extreme poverty and hope that maybe the Laines would care for her.

As the action of the play unfolds, we realise Nick is desperately trying to ensure his children’s security. He attempts to marry Marianne off to a man more than 40 years her senior, who is financially stable and has agreed to raise her child. He will also invest something in the guesthouse, perhaps enabling Nick and Elizabeth to carry on living there. This unsavoury action is motivated in part by Nick’s fear of what will become of Marianne, an unwed, single black woman with a child. When Marianne eventually leaves with Joe, seemingly her only way out, Nick seems to be uninterested. We learn that he thinks Joe is strong and decent, and he has realised that Marianne will not marry Mr Perry. Nick can be harsh in his treatment of his son, Gene, but he is desperate to see him settled, arranging an interview at the railroad company for him through his connections with an old friend and ex-girlfriend.

The death of Elias, which is hinted as not being entirely an accident, is an example of how hard life is — the world cannot support his needs and his death is arguably a liberation for him and, to some extent, for his parents.

Gene’s alcohol addiction, Dr Walker’s morphine addiction and Mrs Burke’s emerging reliance on alcohol and morphine are all expressions of the characters’ desire to numb their pain and escape their desperate circumstances. Desperation drives all the characters; Reverend Marlowe’s attempt to blackmail Mr Burke is unsavoury but tinged with desperation as we realise Marlowe is an escaped convict on the run. It seems that Joe may have robbed a shop in Duluth to get the money to leave for Chicago.

CONVERSATION STARTER

The characters are consistently unlucky — fate deals them a hand that means they are fundamentally unable to be happy, irrespective of choices they make. Do you agree?
RACISM

‘If you’re black you might as well not show up on the street/Less you wanna draw the heat’ From ‘Hurricane’, 1966. Bob Dylan.

The overt racism of the period and the prejudices, suffering and tensions that it creates provide a backdrop to the action — and are a key driver in shaping the experiences and opportunities of the black characters. Nick talks about not allowing ‘coloureds’ to stay in the guesthouse. But he takes pity on Marianne’s parents, as they have a baby, and he puts them in the workroom. We learn that when Marianne was five, three black men in her neighbourhood were lynched and hanged for a crime they didn’t commit. No-one was ever prosecuted. Nick didn’t want to be seen holding Marianne’s hand going to school, so she was educated at home by Elizabeth. There are multiple references to the fact that Marianne being black is a problem and an additional risk, especially in light of her pregnancy.

When Joe arrives at the guesthouse he is automatically offered a bed on the floor, but there is no question that his white companion should not have the private room and bed. When Gene returns drunk, he is derogatory and aggressive towards Joe, calling him ‘boy’, and questioning his right to be there and his schooling. We see Joe skilfully navigating this experience, suggesting white aggression is a constant part of his experience. Joe’s body is objectified. Though not intentionally unkindly, it speaks of the deep prejudices of the household who are reducing him to the physical. Mr Burke is fascinated by him as a boxer and Mrs Burke sexualises him, commenting on his arms.

Joe has been in prison, serving a sentence for a crime he did not commit, and he references the racial prejudice of his trial. This experience is underscored by the choice of the song ‘Hurricane’. Dylan was active in the civil rights movement, and this song references boxer Rubin ‘Hurricane’ Carter, imprisoned for a triple murder he did not commit. Marianne accuses Joe of being an escaped convict and Joe asks her to see him for who he really is — he is honest and kind, and feels compelled to enable Marianne to escape.

CONVERSATION STARTER

Do you think attitudes to race have evolved since 1934? If so, in what ways? How do you think attitudes are different in the UK to the US — now and then?

Arinzé Kene
NOVEMBER 1934
The action of *Girl from the North Country* takes place in Duluth, Minnesota.

NOVEMBER 1935
Marianne Laine and Joe Scott return to Duluth with a baby and find the guest house empty.

MAY 1941
Robert Allen Zimmerman is born in Duluth, Minnesota.

JUNE 1945
Gene Laine is killed in action in Okinawa, Japan.

1956
Zimmerman is in a band while at high school (one of many) and plays keyboard on a performance of Danny & The Juniors’ ‘Rock and Roll Is Here to Stay’ at the school talent show. He’s so loud that the principal turns the microphone off.

1958
Zimmerman loves rock and roll and plays covers of songs by Little Richard and Elvis Presley as a member of the band Golden Chords. They play at an event they put on themselves in Duluth: *Rock Hop*.

JANUARY 1959
A seventeen-year-old Zimmerman watches Buddy Holly perform, three days before his death, at the Duluth Armory: ‘He looked me right straight dead in the eye, and he transmitted something. Something I didn’t know what. And it gave me the chills.’

SEPTEMBER 1959
Zimmerman moves to Minneapolis and enrolls at the University of Minnesota. His focus on rock and roll shifts and he becomes more interested in American folk music.

MAY 1960
Zimmerman starts using the name Bob Dylan. He drops out of college at the end of his first year.

JANUARY 1961
Dylan travels to New York City to perform there and visit his musical idol Woody Guthrie. He starts hanging out in Greenwich Village in New York and playing in folk clubs.

MARCH 1962
Releases his first studio album, *Bob Dylan*, featuring folk standards and two original songs.

AUGUST 1962
Legally changes his name to Robert Dylan.

DECEMBER 1962
Dylan visits the UK for the first time, playing folk clubs in London.

MAY 1963
Releases the album *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* which opens with ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’, which went on to become a ‘60s anthem. The album also features ‘Girl from the North Country’; folk classics and other songs considered to be among his greatest compositions like ‘A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall’.

JANUARY 1964
Releases *The Times They Are a’Changin’*, an album of entirely original compositions with themes of poverty, social change and racism. Dylan is described as ‘the voice of a generation’.

JULY 1965
Releases the six minute ‘Like a Rollin’ Stone’. It angers the fans who see him as a folk singer because he uses electric instruments on the record. He is booed at a performance at Newport Folk Convention.

JULY 1966
Dylan has a motorbike crash after which he doesn’t tour and rarely appears in public for eight years, though he still records.

MAY 1969
Appears on the first episode of Johnny Cash’s television show. Together they sing a duet of ‘Girl from the North Country’.

AUGUST 1971
Conor McPherson is born in Dublin, Ireland.

JANUARY 1975
*Blood on the Tracks* album released. At first it is criticised but has subsequently been considered one of Dylan’s greatest albums.
AUGUST 1979
Releases Slow Train Coming, the first of three gospel albums, after becoming a born again Christian. His live performances don’t feature his earlier secular work which angers some fans.

JANUARY 1988
Dylan is inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of fame with Bruce Springsteen’s introduction: ‘Bob freed your mind the way Elvis freed your body. He showed us that just because music was innately physical did not mean that it was anti-intellectual’.

JUNE 1988
The Never Ending Tour begins. Dylan plays 100 dates a year until the present day.

OCTOBER 1988
The supergroup the Traveling Wilburys, a band Dylan co-founded with George Harrison, Jeff Lynne, Roy Orbison and Tom Petty release their multi-platinum Traveling Wilburys Vol. 1.

JULY 1997
The Wier is produced at The Royal Court and has a brilliant reception. Conor McPherson wins a Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play.

SEPTEMBER 1997
Time out of Mind, an album of original songs, receives a brilliant critical reception.

OCTOBER 2004
The first part of Dylan’s autobiography, Chronicles One, is released.

MAY 2006
Dylan starts hosting a weekly radio program, Theme Time Radio Hour, with song selections ranging from classic and obscure records from the 1930s to the present day. All were chosen to illuminate a theme woven together with his trademark dry humour.

AUGUST 2007
Award-winning film biography of Dylan, I’m Not There, ‘inspired by the music and many lives of Bob Dylan’ uses six different actors to represent different aspects of Dylan’s life: Christian Bale, Cate Blanchett, Marcus Carl Franklin, Richard Gere, Heath Ledger and Ben Whishaw.

SEPTEMBER 2012
Dylan’s 35th studio album, Tempest, is released.

2013
Conor McPherson is approached by Bob Dylan’s record company to use his songs and has the idea of setting the piece in a guesthouse in Duluth before Dylan’s birth as a way of ‘freeing’ the songs.

FEBRUARY 2015
The first of three albums exploring the great American songbook, Shadows in the Night, is released.

OCTOBER 2016
Dylan is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature; the first songwriter to ever be honoured in this way.

JULY 2017
Girl from the North Country written and directed by Conor McPherson opens at The Old Vic.
Bob Dylan is an American songwriter, singer, musician, painter and writer. Over a career spanning more than 50 years he has sold over 100 million records and released 38 studio albums, 85 singles, 26 notable extended plays, 40 music videos, 11 live albums, 12 volumes comprising The Bootleg Series box sets (10 releases, 14 editions), 11 other box sets, 14 compilation albums and seven soundtracks as main contributor. He's starred in four documentaries, three films and appeared in an additional eight films and is the subject of the biographical tribute film *I’m Not There*. He has performed more than 2,500 live gigs. He has written and published lyrics, artwork and memoirs in 11 books and two of his songs have been made into children's books.

### BOB DYLAN SONGS
**FEATURED IN GIRL FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SONG</th>
<th>ALBUM</th>
<th>RELEASED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign on the Window</td>
<td><em>New Morning</em></td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went to See the Gypsy</td>
<td><em>New Morning</em></td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tight Connection to My Heart (Has Anyone Seen My Love?)</td>
<td><em>Empire Burlesque</em></td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow Train</td>
<td><em>Slow Train Coming</em></td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>License to Kill</td>
<td><em>Infidels</em></td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Want You</td>
<td><em>Blonde On Blonde</em></td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like a Rolling Stone</td>
<td><em>Highway 61 Revisited</em></td>
<td>1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make You Feel My Love</td>
<td><em>Time Out of Mind</em></td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere</td>
<td><em>The Basement Tapes</em></td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jokerman</td>
<td><em>Infidels</em></td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweetheart Like You</td>
<td><em>Infidels</em></td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True Love Tends to Forget</td>
<td><em>Street-Legal</em></td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl from the North Country</td>
<td><em>The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan</em></td>
<td>1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane</td>
<td><em>Desire</em></td>
<td>1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiot Wind</td>
<td><em>Blood on the Tracks</em></td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duquesne Whistle</td>
<td><em>Tempest</em></td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Señor (Tales of Yankee Power)</td>
<td><em>Street-Legal</em></td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Your Love in Vain?</td>
<td><em>Street-Legal</em></td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jokerman</td>
<td><em>Infidels</em></td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forever Young</td>
<td><em>Planet Waves</em></td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**'Girl from the North Country' featured on the 1963 album, The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan.**

**'Slow Train' featured on the 1979 album, Slow Train Coming.**

**'I Want You' featured on the 1966 album, Blonde On Blonde.**

**'True Love Tends to Forget', 'Señor' and 'Is Your Love in Vain?' featured on the 1978 album, Street-Legal.'**
The Old Vic

REHEARSAL DIARY

BY JESSICA DANIELS, BAYLIS ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

WEEK ONE
The first day of rehearsals sees the cast, creative team and members of staff from The Old Vic gather together for a ‘meet and greet’, starting with some words of welcome from Matthew Warchus (Artistic Director). We then read through the play and Rae Smith (Designer) shares the model box with us all. This is a small version of the set design, which Rae uses to show us the possibilities of how the set can be used.

For the rest of the week we settle into a routine where we spend the mornings working on songs from the show, and the afternoons working through scenes. Whilst working on songs, Simon Hale (Orchestrator, Arranger and Musical Supervisor) will add harmonies and backing vocals as he builds the sound for the show. This is done in discussion with Conor (Writer and Director) as to what tone and sound they are trying to achieve for each moment. In the afternoons, we work our way through the script, discussing characters and situations as we go. From the second day of rehearsals we begin to stage the show, so all discussions are done as we work our way through.

WEEK TWO
We start the week with a stagger through of Act One. A stagger through is the first time that you run through a section of the play without stopping. The word ‘stagger’ acknowledges that there may well be some mistakes or moments from rehearsals that are forgotten, but the important thing is to get through it, then we discuss it afterwards. We continue working through the play and later on in the week we do a stagger through of Act Two and begin to get a sense of how the play works as a whole.

During rehearsals, there are also costume calls and dialect calls so every now and then members of the cast will pop out for 15 minutes to discuss their character and possible costumes with Rae or to work with Penny Dyer (Dialect Coach) on their dialect.

This week we add a new song, ‘License to Kill’, into the show. This appears as part of a medley with ‘Slow Train Coming’ and so we spend time working out how the two songs can fit together musically. Then we begin to roughly stage them so that there is a shape for Lucy Hind (Movement Director) to work with when she next comes into rehearsals.

WEEK THREE
We start week three of rehearsals with a voice session on stage at The Old Vic. This is run by Charlie Hughes-D’aeth, (Voice Coach), and is a good opportunity for the cast to get a sense of the size and space of the auditorium whilst on stage. Charlie runs a vocal warm up and then does a number of exercises designed to explore the space vocally and develop skills that the actor can use whilst performing the show. One exercise that we do involves the actors taking a line of a poem each and reading through that poem together one line at a time. We focus on the energy at the end of each line and how you can pass the line onto the next actor whilst keeping that energy up.

Conor makes some edits to the script this week, including restructuring the end of the play, so we work our way through this with the cast. Later in the week we have a movement session with Lucy where she introduces the cast to some styles of dance that were popular in the 1930’s. She starts by teaching everyone a couple of simple dances, like a foxtrot, which the whole cast can learn. Then she begins to build these movements into some existing scenes and shape them so that the character’s movements are not too modern.

WEEK FOUR
This week we have our first fight call with Bret Yount (Fight Director). He comes in for an afternoon and watches each section in the play where there is any form of struggle or fight. Then he works through them one by one, choreographing ways of fighting that are safe for the actors but will look very real onstage. Again, this is done in discussion with Conor as to how each fight should happen and what mood or effect they are trying to achieve. Some fights involve learning stage combat. This is where it looks like an actor is punching another actor, however in reality their punch will miss and it is the sound and the reaction that make it seem real. Other fights involved
learning a safe way of jumping or landing on the raked stage (the floor of the stage slopes down towards the audience) so that over the course of the 13-week run, the actors won’t injure themselves. Bret will keep popping in throughout rehearsals and technical rehearsals to make sure that the actors are still happy with the fights and how they fit into the show.

Later in the week we record one of the songs that the cast have been working on which will be used by The Old Vic to help promote the show on social media. Costume and voice calls are also happening alongside the main rehearsals, which means that actors will be popping in and out. When this happens the understudies will jump in to take the place of whoever has gone, so that we are able to keep rehearsing the show.

**WEEK FIVE**

Week five of rehearsals sees the cast learning two new songs that we may fit into the show somewhere. The first one is an upbeat version of ‘Spirit on the Water’, which is an option for the end of the show. When we try putting it into the scene, the decision is made that it doesn’t quite work and so it is cut. Then we learn a version of ‘Jokerman’. This starts with the whole cast learning it, and then Simon layers in harmonies. Conor decides that it would work best with just the women singing and so they focus on a five-part harmony that leads us into the start of Act Two. It works well, and later on in the week this song is put into the end of the show as well.

This week we begin understudy rehearsals, which I am in charge of. One of my main roles is to make sure that the understudies are ready to perform at a moment’s notice, if any of the cast are off for any reason. Over the next few weeks we will do some extra rehearsals to make sure they are all confident with what happens in each scene, and for each of the characters that they are understudying, most of the actors will understudy more than one role and must be ready to go on at a moment’s notice.

**WEEK SIX**

Our final week of rehearsals begins with another voice session with Charlie on stage at The Old Vic. It is really useful to get the cast used to exploring the large space, especially now they are much more comfortable with the play and what it might demand of them vocally. Charlie leads the cast in a vocal warm up and then we run some scenes from the play, but with the actors spread across the stage and through all three levels of the auditorium. This helps give everyone a sense of how much they will need to project their voice for it to fill the space.

This week largely involves solidifying bits and pieces from the earlier weeks before we start adding lights, sound, effects and set during technical rehearsals. We have another fight call with Bret, who changes a couple of the fights to better fit with how the scenes have progressed since he was last in. We run the show a couple of times during the week, and then work through notes that have come up from each run. The show will continue to change and develop through the preview period up until Press Night, but for now it’s time for us to move over to The Old Vic and begin technical rehearsals.
INTERVIEW
WITH SIMON HALE, GIRL FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY ORCHestrATOR, ARRANGER & MUSICAL SUPERVISOR

You’ve got quite a long job title. What do you do in the different elements of your role as Orchestrator, Arranger and Musical Supervisor and how do they relate to each other?
Arranging is the process of how to represent the song for the purposes of this show. Things like tempo, feel, key, routine, style and harmonic choice are all part of arranging. The songs already exist of course, but they are being re-arranged for Girl from the North Country, sometimes in a very different way to Dylan’s original version.

Orchestration is the technique of deciding who plays what at any particular time — for example if the guitar is playing chords, melody, strummed or picked, nylon or steel string. The orchestration therefore gives each musical moment its own colour and identity like a picture — sometimes big and bold, sometimes minimal and delicate depending on the moment.

Musical supervision is the overview of the music and music department within the production — making sure the cast vocals (and instruments on this show) are all in the right place and that the musical gestures are appropriate for the moment, moving the story along or conveying the emotion or mood the director wants. It also involves the choice of specific players and liaising with the musicians.

Does your role on Girl from the North Country differ from other projects, and if so how?
The above roles are relevant to any show but with this one it’s different in that we have existing songs from a living composer but one who’s not written them for this production. We are also making a specific point that we are not trying to sound like Dylan’s records — the re-inventing of the songs is very important for this show.

How do you work in rehearsals? What sort of things do you do each day?
Rehearsals mostly consist of putting the songs together within the structure of the play — making decisions about key or feel, all to do with the role as ‘arranger’. This includes creating vocal arrangements and then teaching them to the company. Rehearsals for the most part only used piano with Alan Berry (Musical Director), rather than the whole band. The band came into rehearsal for the last week or so to work with the company. For that, I had to create the orchestrations, deciding specifically what each instrument would play.
We might learn a new song together from scratch and put it together in the room, from a basic routine to adding vocal harmonies.

**What is your relationship with the Director?**
It’s a question of taking care of the music department for Conor and giving him different musical colours to highlight the play as necessary. In rehearsal, things can change very quickly so you need to be able to be adaptable and to create things on the fly. Conor is extremely musical as well as having written an extraordinary piece and directing it. He responds very instinctively to musical ideas and is very collaborative so I have always felt able to try things and be as imaginative as I like.

**How did you come to work on the project?**
I have known Georgia Gatti (Producer at The Old Vic), for a number of years, from a production of *Spring Awakening* I worked on to a more recent workshop to develop a new production for The Old Vic. She got in touch with me to talk about the project. As well as theatre, my background is very much from making records.

**How do you work with the other sound professionals on the project?**
Simon Baker is the sound designer on this production so we have talked about my specific choice of instruments, how they will be set on stage, rather than in an orchestra pit, and how they will be represented in the Front of House sound.

**What preparation or research did you undertake before rehearsals began?**
I thought a lot about what instruments would be used for the period so that we can make it feel convincing. Some of the music in the show is specifically 1930s in style but lots of it, including many of the songs, aren’t set in a particular musical periodic style as such. The period dictated that the band would be entirely acoustic in an orchestra pit, and how they will be represented as theatre, my background is very much from making records.

**What is your relationship with the Director?**
It’s a question of taking care of the music department for Conor and giving him different musical colours to highlight the play as necessary. In rehearsal, things can change very quickly so you need to be able to be adaptable and to create things on the fly. Conor is extremely musical as well as having written an extraordinary piece and directing it. He responds very instinctively to musical ideas and is very collaborative so I have always felt able to try things and be as imaginative as I like.

**How did you come to work on the project?**
I have known Georgia Gatti (Producer at The Old Vic), for a number of years, from a production of *Spring Awakening* I worked on to a more recent workshop to develop a new production for The Old Vic. She got in touch with me to talk about the project. As well as theatre, my background is very much from making records.

**How do you work with the other sound professionals on the project?**
Simon Baker is the sound designer on this production so we have talked about my specific choice of instruments, how they will be set on stage, rather than in an orchestra pit, and how they will be represented in the Front of House sound.

**What preparation or research did you undertake before rehearsals began?**
I thought a lot about what instruments would be used for the period so that we can make it feel convincing. Some of the music in the show is specifically 1930s in style but lots of it, including many of the songs, aren’t set in a particular musical periodic style as such. The period dictated that the band would be entirely acoustic in an orchestra pit, and how they will be represented as theatre, my background is very much from making records.

**How does your process change project to project or do you work in a similar way?**
In essence it’s the same process — using my imagination to come up with a musical picture for a particular moment. Although the styles of music will change considerably and the technical process (making a record, working on a musical/play) differs, I still always imagine sounds in my head first.

**What has been most challenging about this process? How did you overcome the challenge?**
Having to deal with doing three jobs. Whilst being in the rehearsal room every day it means that the only time to work on things (new arrangements, orchestration etc) is in the evenings and days off. I overcame the challenge by working all the time.

**What have you most enjoyed about this process? Why?**
Being in the room with everyone and getting to know the company, creative team and crew. It’s a very collaborative process and very satisfying as a result.

**What do you hope that audience experience of your work will be?**
Enjoying the new interpretations of Bob Dylan’s songs and hearing them in a new light, both as part of the play and also as pieces of music in their own right. There are lots of moments of underscore in the play too — sometimes the original song is quite radically re-invented.

**How did you become an Orchestrator and Arranger?**
I’ve always been a musician — going into arranging (for records) followed after that. Orchestration on shows began with *Spring Awakening* in 2006, as I’d arranged strings, woodwind and brass on all of Duncan Sheik’s records since 1996. Quite often arranging and orchestration can overlap considerably.

**What advice would you give you to a young person considering a career path like yours?**
Say yes to everything. At first, anyway. You never know where things lead and getting experience in different areas is extremely important. Most importantly, don’t EVER stop using your imagination and trying new things out.

**Do you have a favourite Bob Dylan song? Which one and why?**
Sorry, there’s no way I can possibly narrow this down to one song. However, there are definitely some favourite moments on this show and what the company has done with the songs: ‘Tight Connection to my Heart’, ‘Duquesne Whistle’ and ‘Slow Train Coming’ being particular favourites. I like the way we’ve combined elements of songs together too — at the end of Act One we have the melody of ‘Rolling Stone’ over the chord sequence and vocal answers from ‘I Want You’ and at another moment a three-part vocal arrangement of ‘To Make you Feel My Love’ in the style of the Boswell sisters.
What does a Musical Director do?
A Musical Director in theatre is responsible for all things musical regarding the production. In its most basic form the role includes sitting in auditions with the other members of the creative team to cast the show, being present during rehearsals to teach the cast the music and then conducting the band during every show.

What has your role on Girl from the North Country been?
Girl from the North Country is a brand-new production, so there is a lot of creative work to be done. There is an Orchestrator, Arranger and Musical Supervisor, Simon Hale, who I work closely with to realise his and the director’s vision. I have three other wonderful musicians with me each night who help recreate the exquisite sound track for the show.

How do you work in rehearsals? What sort of things do you do each day?
We spent six weeks in a rehearsal studio learning the play and the songs, nothing however is set in stone and we used this time to try out new songs and develop harmonies. Each day is very different — it’s a very exciting and organic environment.

What is your relationship with the Director?
It is important to have a strong working relationship with a director. Conor makes this experience truly joyful. It is his vision we are creating after all, so communication between all departments is paramount as each individual brings their own expertise to the piece.

How did you come to work on the project?
All newly written plays tend to go through a series of workshops before they start rehearsals. These enable an environment to play around with the piece and get it to strong position to begin the rehearsal process. I was the musical director for one of the first workshops around 18 months ago and am so pleased that I’ve been able to see the project through to fruition.

How do you work with the other sound professionals on the project?
I work very closely with the sound team especially during the tech and preview periods. The sound design is of paramount importance, enabling the actors to hear each other to be able to play well. And of course, creating the world for the audience’s ears out front.

What preparation or research did you undertake before rehearsals began?
Before the original workshop I listened to a lot of Bob’s albums. Just tried to immerse myself into his world. It’s always of the utmost importance to know the style of the work you are creating. There was also a lot of transcribing to do; that is, writing the scores onto paper by listening to the songs as there were quite a lot which didn’t exist in print.

What has been most challenging about this process? How did you overcome the challenge?
We wanted to create a world where the music was very organic and had the feeling of not being tied down too much. It wasn’t challenging so much, just a different discipline to what would usually be employed.

What have you most enjoyed about this process? Why?
To create a new piece of theatre is always so exciting and a privilege, however to work with such an incredibly talented cast has been a huge highlight.

How did you become a Musical Director?
I used to be heavily involved with my local amateur dramatic circuit in the Midlands. It was this which really ignited my desire to work in theatre. I went to Music College, and then started playing in pit bands, eventually gaining the job of Assistant Music Director. I assisted many different people before being offered the big job.

What advice would you give to a young person considering becoming a Musical Director?
I’d say don’t be in a rush. Take your time, never say no to a gig and learn your craft. There’s so much to be learnt from sitting in a pit and listening to the other musicians around you. Enjoy the ride up.

Do you have a favourite Bob Dylan song? Which one and why?
I didn’t have a favourite to be honest before this project; however, I have to say now that the song which Marianne sings in the play, ‘Tight Connection’, is so haunting and beautifully delivered. It mesmerises me every night.
Tell us a little bit about the role you’re playing in Girl from the North Country?
My character is called Marianne Laine. She is the adopted daughter of Nick and Elizabeth Laine, and Gene is her adopted brother. The Laine’s run a guesthouse and Marianne was left there by her blood parents and brought up by the family. She is black, the family is white, and the play is set in 1930s Minnesota. You see that racial tensions were an aspect of her experiences growing up. A white family bringing up a black girl was a very unusual thing, so I think there’s a lot of protection, secrecy, and caginess around her upbringing, which means she is kind of stifled a bit.

At the point in the play when you meet her, she’s 19 and she’s pregnant. Her pregnancy is quite mysterious. No one knows who the father is and as far as she is concerned, she’s not even really sure how it happened in the first place. On top of that, because she is pregnant, her father is trying to secure a future for her by marrying her off to someone who is not very well suited to her. So yeah, it’s quite difficult for her.

What sort of preparation and research did you undertake before rehearsals began?
I wasn’t really sure what to expect because I auditioned for the show quite a way before we started and there was a development workshop that I wasn’t able to attend because I was working on another production. We actually continued to develop ideas throughout the rehearsals; we made more of the fact that Marianne is a black child in a white family, which maybe wasn’t such a strong theme in the original writing.

A lot of work happened alongside, as opposed to before, rehearsals for me. I think for everyone this whole show has been about discovering who these characters are. There were a lot of question marks, a lot of things that were open to interpretation, not just in the general sense that you usually have when you work on a show, but literally in terms of what has actually happened in this world. Are they lying? Are they telling the truth? There is a lot of smoke around people’s narratives. That was something that every individual actor had to work on throughout the whole six, seven weeks, and is still doing now with the previews. Sometimes you have that and it’s scary because you feel unsure whether or not the play can support that. In this play, there is a lot of ambiguity and so it doesn’t feel scary. This play gives you the space.

Is that one of the challenges of working on a piece of new writing, as opposed to working on an existing text?
Absolutely. Also, working with a director who is also the writer is an interesting experience. It’s felt very much like in this process Conor has been formulating the final draft. We have come in with the rehearsal draft and rehearsals will be about, yes, making a show, but nothing is set in stone. Everything is up for grabs: scenes have been moved around, whole songs have been cut, songs have been added in. It’s been really dynamic and creative. I trust the director. I trust the other actors there with me. I trust the music and other elements that are in there. It’s great because you feel very safe and that gives you the safety net to go on and take risks and have questions. Because I think a lot of people, myself included, want the question to be answered by the end of that rehearsal session. And if it’s not answered by the end of that session you start to panic. But actually, it was nice to have questions and things to ruminate on. It depends on the environment in which it is happening; in one like this, it’s actually a gift.

In such a fluid process, how have you made character choices as an actor?
The mystery around the pregnancy has been an ever-evolving thing, because I think — I don’t want to speak for Conor — but I think a big part of the way he has written this play is that there are multiple options for each character. He really didn’t have an answer for why she’s pregnant, or how it happened. No one ever goes, ‘It’s definitely this. It’s definitely that.’ I’ve basically boiled it down to two options, but it flips between the two. And that’s fine. Because the character herself doesn’t know. It’s not like a secret that she’s kept and she’s lying. There is a mystery for her as well, so it’s okay. It’s not something that has to be set down. The pregnancy was very much a thing that we were mapping as we went through.

How has it been working with the songs and music?
Great. Conor has done some interesting things with merging songs together, or having three songs back to back. It’s very unusual. Each song isn’t full length, so you don’t end up with a 15-minute thing, but they do become quite epic and it’s quite hard to do. You don’t want the audience to get ahead of you, and to get tired, and think ‘Oh, another song.’ You don’t want it to feel like it’s stunting the narrative. Putting songs in, taking songs out, taking verses out, changing who is singing.
which verse, changing the positioning of songs — we've been doing all of that.

I feel like the songs in a good musical, irrespective of the style of the musical, should enhance that moment and take that moment to another place. Even if, at that point, the way you stage it is very naturalistic. Our songs are more stylized, but then, visually, it's got all of the elements of naturalism but it's not. The set kind of moves around in these subtle ways and it looks quite filmic, quite stark. We're really playing around with the style a lot.

Dylan's lyrics are so dense and so... I feel like he is the kind of writer who is a step ahead of everyone else, in terms of what he sees. For a lot of people, I know for myself, lyrics are dawnning on me way after the fact. Actually, just yesterday we added in a tiny little section of music from one of the songs. It's in earlier in the play and we've added it towards the end. And suddenly, it makes unique sense of one line.

It's very interesting, working with music that already exists in a way that is not a jukebox musical or a musical about Bob Dylan. There is something about Conor's writing that really means the songs and the play can weave in and out of each other without too much hard work. I think he has written something that really does leave the space for these songs to suddenly come out of nowhere and for you to not have to rigidly define the style or your intention. It just is and you accept it.

As an actor, do you have a process that you use each time you start a new role?
I think it shifts slightly with each project. There's an accent in the show. It's set in Duluth, in Minnesota. I like to try and get that down pretty early, because that really changes everything about you. It changes your mannerisms, the sound of your voice. Not just in the sense of how you sound like you're from somewhere else, it also changes the sound quality, the tone, the texture of your voice and even how you breathe. We worked with Penny Dyer; she's great. She nailed down the accent for us pretty early, which was helpful because Minnesota is a really difficult accent; it's unlike anything else I've ever heard. I'm quite well versed with American accents, but I didn't know it. Now I'm used to it, I really love the accent because I can hear where the Germanic, Scandinavian twang is coming in. I use ‘Oh, yeah, sure,’ as a phrase that tackles three of the main vowels, so that really helped me get into the accent. Penny also gave us this list of sentences, which help you practice saying vowel sounds.

I did a bit of background reading about the time and I did a bit of reading about Dylan as well, but at the same time, because I knew it wasn't about him, I didn't want to really saturate myself. I like to have a general, light awareness of things. I'm not a person who likes to do heavy prep personally. Other people are different, but I like to go in there with enough that I know what I'm talking about, but also leave myself some space. I don't want to push myself too far down one avenue.

What, if anything, have you found most challenging about this process? And what have you done to overcome it?
Having questions at the end of a session and being okay with that. I remember actively saying to myself: ‘You know what? You don't know what that is yet. And that's fine; Trust is a big thing. When you work in a profession where your company changes from job to job, you're always aclimatising to a new place, a new room, a new group of people, a new project. Sometimes this leads you to approach all jobs with a kind of default setting, just as a safety net: 'If all else fails, I've at least got this.' In some ways that's good to do, but in other areas, you have to retain some flexibility so that you can adapt. And it's great, because you will find that there is not just one way of working that you enjoy. You can enjoy different ways of working, but certain ways will be more appropriate to certain projects than others.

In terms of any other challenges, I was rehearsing in the day and performing something else in the evenings from the beginning of rehearsals so I was pretty tired. Conor never worked past five or six on Saturdays, which is unusual on a project of this scale. It was just great to work with someone who said, 'Actually, I want to give you time to percolate on these things, and to rest, to think', and everything still got done. It was really great and I would like to commend him for doing that.

What's been most enjoyable about this project?
Working with music is always fun for me, because I did a lot of music in school — singing and playing instruments. I also did Drama A level. It's nice whenever I get the chance to combine the two. I like musicals, but I wouldn't say they are my favourite theatrical style. I do think that this show is very interesting and I'm a big fan of shows that have music in them, that are trying to explore how music can be used as a medium within them. It's also great working in a room of people who are all very experienced. I'm one of the younger members of the cast. It was really nice to have a window into the processes of people who have been doing this longer than you have, and feeling very safe in their company.

How did you become an actor?
I've always loved music but I went to university to study science for three years. While I was there I went to WAC (WAC Arts Centre in North London) on Sundays. It's an amazing place. At first I just went to sing, and then the singing class did a collaboration with the drama class and I thought, ‘Well, this is fun actually. Next year I
might do the drama class as well.' The teacher, Che Walker, was working on a play at the time and he asked me to do a couple of workshops. Then he asked me if I wanted to be in it so I said ‘Yeah’ and that’s how it started.

What advice do you have for a young person thinking about becoming an actor?
I would say, ‘Do lots of things. Do anything that is around you, your local club, your far-away club.’ You know, there’s a lot of theatres that are now starting to do initiatives for young people at school — workshops, summer programmes — get involved, anything. Get with your mates and write a play, write a song, put on a thing. I think the only way, really, is to just stay engaged and to keep acting.

What’s your favourite Bob Dylan song?
Ooh. Okay. The great thing about this show is there are a lot more of the less popular Dylan songs in it, which I think is very clever, because it takes some of the pressure off. Also, it’s just nice to have an insight into lesser known songs. Out of the show, one of the songs I didn’t know before that I really like is ‘Señor’. Lyrically I think it’s beautiful. That thing I said earlier about Dylan having this kind of foresight, I think that this song seems to be touching on that. It’s talking about, ‘Where are we going? Where are we heading? What is over the fence type thing for us?’ And it’s just musically and melodically beautiful.
THE US IN 1934 AND 2017

WELFARE
People living in tents. In tents. In the United States of America. Kids with no clothes on. All along the street into the town. There ain’t no net to catch us.

1934
There are no federal (national) welfare schemes. Local states are responsible for supporting poor people in their area, but since the stock market crash of 1929 they, along with charities who might help, are overwhelmed with demand. The suicide rate leaps up during the Great Depression, and although it peaked in 1929, it is still higher than usual in 1934. Everyone must pay for their own healthcare. However, the newly elected President Roosevelt sets up a commission to look at nationwide welfare and healthcare options as part of his New Deal programme, which creates jobs by spending on public infrastructure like building roads and dams.

2017
In 2017, the Federal poverty line is set at $12,060 (£9,112) per year for a single person, or $24,600 (£18,588) for a family of four. In order to qualify for welfare support, you must prove that your income falls a certain percentage below these levels. The federal government provides funding, raised through taxation, and states administer the funds. There are six main programs of support: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid (the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, increased Medicaid coverage by 28%), Child's Health Insurance Program, Food Stamps, The Supplemental Security Program and Housing Assistance. President Trump is trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act, which could see an estimated 14 million people lose healthcare.

RACE
Three black men... were lynched by a mob who broke into the jail, right here in Duluth. Hanged ‘em down on the corner of First Street for a crime they hadn’t committed. No-one was even ever prosecuted for it.

1934
Huge areas of the US are still racially segregated (the so-called ‘Jim Crow’ laws) and institutionalised racism is everywhere. These laws segregate black and white people in education, employment and public amenities — everything from swimming pools to buses. It is often made structurally very difficult for black people to vote, and a majority of private businesses are also segregated like cinemas, diners and bars. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for someone who is black to be treated fairly by the justice system and extra-judicial lynchings, beatings and murders are common. The 1875 Civil Rights Act determines everyone should be treated equally, but has little effect, and it is argued that private businesses shouldn’t be covered. Duluth at this time was unusual — in the north of the US, it had a very small black population who have moved out of the increasingly racist and dangerous southern states. Minnesota is also one of the few US states that does not have laws requiring racial segregation.

2017
Racial Equality is enshrined in law in the US after the post-second world war civil rights movement, which gained momentum in the 1960s. However, racism and structural inequality still exists. Many schools are still effectively segregated and black Americans’ health, education and economic life chances are far from equal to their white counterparts. This inequality is arguably most pronounced in the US Justice System — where African-Americans constitute 34% of the prison population, despite only forming 13% of the general population. There are deep inequalities throughout the criminal justice system, starting with police stop-and-search, but the most noticeable disparity is in sentencing around drug use. Black and white Americans use drugs at roughly the same rates, but black Americans are six times more likely to be jailed for drugs offences. The Black Lives Matter campaign was formed in 2013. The movement began with the use of the #blacklivesmatter hashtag shared on social media after George Zimmerman was acquitted of shooting the unarmed African-American teenager Trayvon Martin. The global movement has highlighted police brutality and inequalities in the US and around the world.
1934
The Great Depression is triggered by the US stock market crash in 1929. The 1920s had been very prosperous for some Americans, with electricity revolutionising people’s lives, and home ownership and savings increasing significantly. Between 1929 and 1933, unemployment in the US jumped from 3.2% to 24.9%, with almost a quarter of people out of work. Unemployment in some cities was as high as 80%, and 80% of car manufacturing stopped. By 1932, lots of people thought that a massive revolution might occur as unemployed workers began looting food. By 1934 there is a glimmer of hope, and in Minnesota, interesting developments are shaping the future. Stimulated by the New Deal programme, jobs have started to return and workers were unionising — demanding a better share of the prosperity. This sets working people against business owners, who accused the workers of being communists. There are strikes and brutal police clashes until the State Governor declare martial law and asks the President for help to set minimum wages and maximum hours. At the same time the Governor prevents, for a while, any police or state official from helping banks re-possess homes where people can no longer pay their mortgages. He has realised the destabilising impact of extreme poverty on the state and its people.

2017
In 2008 there was a global financial crash, largely caused by unregulated financial services and lending money to people to buy houses who would never be able to pay it back (‘sub-prime loans’). There was a 32% increase in the number of US homes repossessed between 2008 and 2009. The Federal government tried to put in place measures to stop so many people losing their homes with limited success. Unemployment increased to nearly 10% by 2010, though it has steadily fallen back down to around 4.2% — though there are questions around the quality of newly-created jobs. In 2015, 13.5% or 43.1m Americans were living below the poverty line. By comparison, 7.3% or around 4.6 million people in the UK population were experiencing persistent poverty in 2015. In Duluth today 22% of people are living in poverty, and 40% of them are working. In Duluth, 80% of single mothers, 69% of American Indian and 55% of black families are living in poverty; an example of the economic inequalities that persist in the US.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Racism will be gone within the next ten years — Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

What are the similarities — and differences — in the way that the state of the economy impacts the normal people of Duluth in 1934, and now? How — and why — do you think this is different?

Countries should spend more on creating financial ‘safety nets’ for people who are struggling — and these should be funded by increased taxation on people who are doing well. Do you agree? Is this fair? Why?
IN CONVERSATION
WITH LUCY HIND, GIRL FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY
MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

What does a movement director do?
That’s a really good question because I think it totally depends on who the movement director is, what show you’re doing and what director you’re working for. The role is so varied. Sometimes I work specifically with actors on their characterisation, a kind of a body coach role. For example, I worked with an actress earlier this year who was playing a burns victim. It was all about tension in the body and finding out where her character had pain. So sometimes it’s really close, one-on-one work and sometimes it’s choreography. That can vary — anything from big dance numbers to historical dancing. Sometimes it’s just the general staging of a show, which can be anything from scene changes to chorus work. It varies according to the director’s style and what the show needs.

What’s been your role on Girl from the North Country?
My role has been to look at staging the songs alongside Conor — he’s a very playful director. He has this wonderful thing where he says, ‘We’ll know it when we see it.’ And I love that. What I haven’t done is gone and choreographed in a studio on my own. The cast don’t deliver the songs to each other in a narrative way and they don’t deliver the songs out to the audience in a musical style. We’ve developed a certain style inspired by Bob Dylan and we’re trying to stay true to that, so a lot of it is sung around microphones and there’s a lot of backing vocals type of movement. The play is set in the 1930s, so I’ve had to do some historical research. There’s a Thanksgiving scene and they’re dancing in the house. And there’s a particular number where I’ve done sort of a ‘50s Kentucky-gospel style, which was so much fun.

How do you go about researching something like that? Where do you start?
I don’t know how you could do this before YouTube. I’ve watched lots of videos and there are old books about social dancing. It’s also really important to understand that just because something was big or fashionable at the time doesn’t necessarily mean that those characters would’ve been doing it. If they’re slightly older they would probably, in a social situation, be doing dances that they learned when they were younger. You have to consider their economic background, where they were in the country and how old they are. I’ve introduced general 1930s physicality, because we can’t have it too contemporary, but it’s still got to feel like a contemporary story. They have to fit with their costumes; if they are doing very contemporary sitting and moves and greeting in 1930s costume it can look quite strange. These actors are so experienced they don’t have to do very much of that sort of work.

What kind of movements would be considered ‘30s as opposed to contemporary?
It’s not massively different. It’s just about how people carry themselves — a slightly more sensitive uprightness. Also, the women especially, a slight sense of holding themselves up more when they sit down. They wouldn’t have lounged about too much. When they’re dancing, when they’re holding each other, it was just a slightly more sensitive decorum in those days. The play is in a private house and these characters are in a comfortable setting; they’re not out and in public. The characters have to feel real, as well. You can’t just pick a picture out of a book and say, ‘Do that’, they have to feel true.

Could you talk through your process with the Thanksgiving scene, from before rehearsals began through to seeing it on stage and what will happen in technical rehearsals?
We started with the song, ‘Hurricane’. It was written sort of 40 years after the play is set so it’s not a ‘30s-style song but it’s got a lovely swing rhythm so I decided to swing dance to it. We decided to do something that would feel like something you would do at a house party. I started by teaching the cast a swing dance and we just played with that for a while.

Then we staged the scene. It’s not just a dance number; throughout the scene and throughout the dance there are little bits of story that have to happen. We have to see Marianne and Gene, who are brother and sister, having a little moment together. We have to see Mr and Mrs Burke having a dance together. We have to see that Mr Perry is trying to dance with Marianne, and see her not wanting to dance with him. While everyone is dancing, we have to look at it and work out how to pull out those bits of story; work out where the points of focus are.

When you establish a gentle background of dancing and somebody does something slightly out of rhythm or walks through the space, our eye is drawn to that moment. It’s about setting a base tempo of everybody dancing and then drawing actors out of it. At the same time, Arinzé (who plays Joe) is singing the song so we’re not only balancing story, we’re trying to let Arinzé tell
the story of the song as well. All of that is happening at the same time. It’s so much fun because the actors are just so brilliant at filling in the gaps. I would sort of setup systems and then allow them to think what their character might be doing and then fill in the gaps as we went, then I can just keep structuring.

All of that work gives us a basic shape to the scene. Then, you go onto the stage and with a new floor that is raked (sloping), new lighting and sound, everything. It all kind of just goes to mud, briefly. Then we have to go back and carefully, with the lighting, with the staging, put it back together. We also wanted to have the band in the room with the family. So suddenly we’ve got a double bass to fit in and a guitarist. We fit them into the space and we try again, building on the work we’ve already done.

The number couldn’t look like a big choreographed dance because it’s a scene. But it is also a dance and we, as audiences, like to see patterns. It’s very satisfying for us. The scene really needs that moment of everybody having a good time; sort of a climax before the big event. What I’ve done is just picked little moments that suddenly feel magical together. Suddenly they’ll all just turn at the same time or they all do the same move at exactly the same time, and then they go back to doing something different. A little bit like when your favourite song comes on and everybody does the same moves at the same time then goes back to dancing with their friends. We are making sure everybody hits those marks and then giving the actors the freedom to have fun with the dance. They all make me look good because they’re so brilliant at telling the story within the structure of the movement that we’ve given them. Then, it’s on stage in front of an audience and, hopefully, it’s good.

Is swing dancing something that you knew already or did you have to learn it? You have to have a basic understanding of most dance styles, then you learn them on the job as you go. I did know sort of a basic swing. We had to be really careful that they didn’t look like they were on Strictly Come Dancing because they have to be more relaxed and social. Dance halls at the time were really crowded and people talked while they were dancing. You have to take a dance style, teach it and then tell them to not dance it. In a way, to just sort of be with each other. It’s a small living room party, the music not very loud and people just gently dancing. People learned how to dance from a very young age so we didn’t have that social discomfort of being physically close to people that weren’t close family members. People just danced with each other and talked. It was like having a drink together now might be.

How do you work with the Conor McPherson, the Director? This is the first time we’ve worked together. That’s actually part of the job, I think; working out how to facilitate the director’s vision. And developing a good relationship with the actors, they have to trust you. Unless they’ve trained in movement, and then they’re really confident, lots of actors are nervous about movement. These guys are phenomenal actors but most of them are not dancers or dance trained so making sure they feel confident in the movement is part of my job.

Conor will say, ‘Oh, this is what we’re looking for, here’ and then I’ll work with the actors for an hour or two. It’s less of a dance call — the sort of separate rehearsal you might have in musical theatre. Conor usually stands next to me and we try things out; it’s very much a conversation. Even in technical rehearsals, we’re both standing on the stage giving notes. He’s often giving musical notes and then I’m giving staging notes so we’re crossing over a lot. That’s a great relationship; I don’t make something and deliver it to him and he notes it. We literally stand next to each other and make it together. That’s an ideal relationship for me. I don’t know how other movement directors work but, for me, it’s felt like a real journey that we’ve gone on together. The actors really feel then that the director’s on-board and there’s that sense of us all making together. The actors are brilliant at bringing things to you as well. They go, ‘could we try this here?’ and I’m like, ‘Great. Give it a go’.

What do you do when you get a script for the first time? Firstly, I get my pen out and I mark the songs — I put a lot of tabs on it. Then I just read it, read it, and read it. There’s nothing like sitting in the room and hearing it being read though. That first day read through is so important to me because I get to see the actors. I get to see the shapes of who they are and how they are with each other. That’s really, really important. Hearing it come off the page, even unrehearsed is really, really important. The script is important and the story is important. But I would say, actually, being in rehearsal is vital. It’s impossible to come in and just deliver something because I don’t know what the world of the play is, stylistically. I always want to watch some rehearsals; see the style of what they’re doing.

What’s been the most challenging element of this project? The most challenging and the best thing about it has been working out what the show is as we go. This is a new piece of work that’s never been staged before. Just trying to work out what it is, trying to grab hold of the beast. And making loads of stuff. Making something and then realising the show has moved on from that now, it’s not that anymore, and just trusting that process and not
getting disheartened by it. You might make something and you go, 'I really love that.' and then it might not fit the show anymore and you have to let it go and you have to think, 'That's going to go in another show one day.' I'm still choreographing in the technical rehearsals, and that’s really rare. Normally, you get into tech and everything has to be done but because of Conor’s process and because of how brilliant the actors are and because of the time we’ve got, we can go, 'We need something there, now. Let's make something there.' That’s been challenging, on the spot, to make it work, but also brilliant.

How did you become a movement director?
I don’t know. It’s such a weird thing isn’t it, how you end up doing what you’re doing? I thought I’d be in dance, I thought I’d be a choreographer but I love working with actors and I love the theatre process. I studied in South Africa, where I’m from, and then I worked as a dancer for a few years. Then I came over to the UK and I just started meeting people and doing little bits for free, as you do: working on the fringe, making shows, submitting Art Council bids to make your own pieces of work. Then I realised I didn’t want to be on stage. I definitely love working alongside directors and I love working in theatres.

Then as more people see your work, you get more work. I think it’s more important to work out what you don’t want to do because you don’t know all the things that are available. Have goals of ‘I want to work there’ or ‘I want to make this kind of work’ but knowing what you don’t want to do is also really good. It’s important to recognise your strengths and skills, 100%. Knowing what you’re good at. Knowing what your uniqueness is as a movement director is especially, because it’s such an intangible thing. Knowing what you love doing and knowing what you’re good at is really key.

What does professional development and ongoing training look like for you?
It happens all the time. I worked at The Globe a couple years ago, and suddenly we were in the 18th Century and looking at new dances I’ve never heard of before. That meant meeting dance historians at the British Library and having some classes with them. As historical dance can be quite dry, it’s about working out what those dances are, and then making them your own. The production was incredibly fascinating; loads of research, not only of the dance moves, but also accounts of what it physically feels like and that’s the best part. Professional development is happening constantly for me; mainly driven by whichever job I’m working on. And then, those skills are in your bag.

You learn so much from working with different directors as well. You really do. You learn about staging. You learn about storytelling, rhythms, pacing. That’s really important as a movement director because your work has to fit in with that. It’s not isolated from the show. It has to not only be in the world thematically and historically, it has to fit pacing wise and it has to fit with the story you’re trying to tell. You have to learn that as you go, definitely.

What kind of qualities and skills do you think make a good movement director?
Adaptability. I think a certain understanding of the fears and insecurities and pressures that I have to deal with in the people that I am working with. There’s a certain system for actors. They have to be eloquent in all the basics of acting: learning your lines, stage craft, turning up for rehearsals, all the basics. Dance and movement often isn’t included. Even though we are physical beings we’re not actually very physically comfortable. In contemporary society, we’re not massively comfortable with our bodies. We’re just not. And it’s great to be able to empower people. Even just to pick up a chair and move across the stage with it and not feel silly doing it. It’s really important. Trusting that sometimes, when actors are blocking you or challenging what you’re saying, it’s not necessarily because they think your idea is bad. You have to trust that it’s not about you. A lot of the time you go, ‘It’s my job to make them look good. It’s my job to help them do it.’ You have to put all that aside and go, ‘Okay, this is not working. I might need a different approach. How can I help this actor access this thing?’ Also, sometimes you have to be able to go, ‘Maybe, it’s just a bad idea.’

I started quite young and a lot of the actors I worked with were older than me. Now, I’m in my late 30s and it’s slightly different. It can be hard to ask people to do things when they look at you and go, ‘Why? Why would I do that?’ You have to be able to say why — be confident at least to get them to try it. If you change your mind, change your mind confidently because otherwise people can lose trust in you. Holding on to trust is the key.

Is there a piece of theatre or film that you love the movement in?
I love the Anna Karenina film. It’s just so beautiful. The movement is so integrated to the story. It’s sort of seamless. And I’ve always loved companies like Frantic Assembly and Gecko, they’re my big inspirations. It’s so hilarious because when I was younger I really wanted to work for them. I really, really wanted to work for them and now we share certain platforms together — oh my goodness.

I love anything that drives the story forward — I’m interested in movement; anything which feels like people moving rather than dances. There is a world for the other stuff — I’m a massive musicals fan and I love dance. The stuff that moves me and interests me is movement that
is human; movement that is unexplainable, a gesture or a movement that you just can connect with whether it's abstract or it's really small or it's a big dance move. As long as you feel like something is connecting with me, that's really special. That comes from movement directors and choreographers who connect with the people they work with and build trust. Find a way for it to be truthful rather than, ‘Copy me. Do this.’ I very seldom teach movement as in, ‘Do exactly what I’m doing’. I try and work it out together.

**What advice might you give to a young person who might be interested in becoming a movement director?**

See lots of work. Be able to talk about work. I think that’s for anybody who’s interested in this industry at all- being able to talk about work is a part of the job. Being able to explain yourself really well in a rehearsal room is really important. Try and get into rehearsal rooms — assist people. I learned so much from watching rehearsals. Some rehearsal rooms it’s not appropriate — you can’t always bring people in with you.

Taking other movement directors out for coffee and going, ‘Can I just ask you loads of questions?’, because it is about the relationships with the director — 100%. We don’t/they don’t advertise movement directing roles. It’s not like an agent will see an advert and go, ‘I’ll put Lucy forward for that.’ All the work I’ve ever gotten has been through the recommendation of another director. Those relationships are vital. Meet people, talk to them and see lots and lots of work. Work out who you are, what you’re interested in and train up. There are loads of short courses that you can do.

**Do you have a favourite Bob Dylan song?**

I love ‘Sweetheart Like You’. It’s a song that got into my head during rehearsals and it has made a little home in my heart.
PRACTICAL EXERCISES — DEVISING FROM SONG

Conor McPherson began writing *Girl from the North Country* with an idea of setting the piece in a guest house in Duluth, Bob Dylan's home town. The development of characters and plot came after listening to all of Dylan's albums. These practical exercises are designed to inspire devising with a song as the starting point. The song ‘Hurricane’, which features in the show, is used as an example. If selecting your own song, it’s good to choose something with a clear narrative — it can be helpful if the song is linked to real events or places and if there are different cover versions. You may need to amend some of the exercises slightly to accommodate different song contents. These sessions are approximately one hour in length and designed to build a simple devising skillset using naturalistic and non-naturalistic styles for young people aged 14+ working in a group of around 25. You may wish to add in your own warm up games depending on the skills, experience and age of the group. It’s helpful to gather all the material (lists, articles, images) and put them up on the wall for each session.

Note: *Hurricane* features the words ‘shit’ and ‘nigger’, and describes violence, murder and racism.

RESOURCES

- Copy of Bob Dylan performing ‘Hurricane’, copies of *Girl from the North Country* cast, Ani di Franco and Middle Class Rut covers of ‘Hurricane’ (either as audio clips or videos)
- (You can find the *Girl from the North Country* cast version of ‘Hurricane’ here: soundcloud.com/oldvictheatre/hurricaneidiot-wind-from-girl-from-the-north-country)
- Music player and speakers
- Copy of the lyrics of ‘Hurricane’ for every participant
- Post it notes
- Large sheets of paper
- Plain paper
- Marker pens
- Writing pens/pencils
- White tac for sticking things to walls

SESSION ONE — EXPLORING THE SONG

LISTENING (25 MINS)
Ask the group to relax with their eyes closed or gazing at the floor so they are not distracted. Ask them to listen to the song and notice how it makes them feel. Play ‘Hurricane’ — when it’s finished ask how it made the participants feel and if they can articulate why those feelings arose. Reflect on the lyrics, but also the tone and mood, rhythm and style of the music. Ask the group what they understood about the song and record these responses on flipchart paper.

Distribute the lyrics and then play the song again with participants able to read the words as they listen. You may need to highlight particular elements of strong language — you can discuss these later; why were these words selected? Ask the group if their initial emotional response has changed. What do they understand about the song now? Try and agree the ‘plot’ of the song together. Ask who is narrating the story — what is their perspective? Why have they chosen to tell this story?

Explain that this song was written by Bob Dylan in 1975 after visiting the boxer Rubin ‘Hurricane’ Carter, who had been imprisoned for a triple murder in 1966. Dylan visited Carter in jail and shortly after he wrote ‘Hurricane’. Why did Bob Dylan write this song (to make a case for Hurricane’s innocence and publicise the case)? Is this an effective way to do that? Do you know of any other songs that work in this way?
IN DEPTH ANALYSIS (20 MINS)
Split the participants into six groups and make sure that they all have a copy of the lyrics, a large sheet of paper and pens. Each group will be looking for some particular information from the song. Encourage participants to think about the direct and indirect references:

— Make a list of all the named characters in the song and any detail we know about them

— Make a list of all the un-named characters in the song and any detail we know about them (don’t forget the song’s narrator)

— Make a list of all the locations in the song and any detail we know about them (bar, courthouse, paradise, boxing ring etc)

— Make a list of all the lines of text in the song — participants can highlight them

— Make a list of all the objects/things in the song and any detail we know about them (for example a flashing red light, a cash register, a pool of blood)

— Make a list of all the themes in the song

Share all this information back with each group presenting some of their discoveries, and an opportunity for other participants to add information. Notice how any of these could become a starting point for devising a piece of theatre, and that as artists their taste or style will affect their choices about what they’d like to focus on.

Then as a whole group make a list of all the ‘scenes’ in the song — and a little detail (for example the bar where the barman is shot, the courtroom, in the car, in the prison cell sitting quietly).

PLENARY (15 MINS)
Play the Girl from the North Country cast version of ‘Hurricane’ — ask what feels different about this version of the song — how it makes them feel; does it change the story or the role of the narrator? Record these responses. Ask the group to reflect on what they have discovered from the song and this process.

As an extension/homework you can ask participants to find contemporary newspaper articles or poems or images that they feel relate to the song, or other covers.

SESSION TWO — CREATING CHARACTER MONOLOGUES

LISTENING (10 MINS)
Play a different version of ‘Hurricane’ — reflect briefly on how it makes them feel, record these words and compare to the original version. Why is it different (reflect on tone, rhythm, musical choices, voice of the singer)?

REVIEW (5 MINS)
Review any material that participants have bought with a one sentence introduction as to why they selected it. This can be used to inform or support any of the following devising exercises. Images can become start or end points of scenes, or monologues. Articles can suggest locations, scenes or characters that may interact with or be juxtaposed with those from the song. You can add in images or articles that connect to the original story or the wider civil rights movement at the time.

CHARACTER MONOLOGUES (30 MINS)
Give each participant a character that features in the song — you can have multiple participants playing the same characters. You may wish to include the songs narrator.

Lead them through creating a simple character profile — name, age, occupation, race, gender. In noting that some of the information exists for each character in the song and some doesn’t, they will have to create it. Ask each character to think about the events of the night of the shooting featured in the song: where were they? How did come to know about the events (witness, heard from friends, media, police?) What is their opinion of
what happened? Do they feel able to be honest about that opinion (why/why not)? Hot seat a selection of the participants asking them these questions and allowing the other participants to propose questions.

Finally ask each participant to create a minimum six line monologue as that character about the shooting with a particular context — talking to a friend, a reporter, a judge, themselves in the mirror. Participants must consider staging and relationship to the audience.

**SHAREBACK AND PLENARY (20 MINS)**

Share those monologues back with feedback for each — what the audience liked and what they would like the performer to work on. Reflect on how the stories and characters that emerged — how could you tell the story of Hurricane from a different perspective?

---

**SESSION THREE — CREATING MOVEMENT AND SCENE**

**CREATING A SOUNDSCAPE (10 MINS)**

As a whole group start to create the sounds of one of the locations featured in the song — start with the paradise location. Begin with a brief discussion (sound of the stream, countryside, wind, horse’s hooves) and then begin with the group leader acting as a conductor increasing and decreasing volumes. Reflect on what worked well, what worked less well and if you were using all the means of making sound available (mouth sounds, singing, body percussion). How do you negotiate as a whole group about who makes what sound? The importance of making offers, listening and connection as a group, not dominating.

Build a new soundscape — a lively bar or a boxing match and build the soundscape up through layers of sound to create the world. Reflect again on this soundscape — how effective was it? How could you use it in performance?

**CREATING A MOVEMENT SCORE (15 MINS)**

Refer back to the words that were used to describe feelings when you first heard the song select three and ask the group to create a gesture for each word. A gesture has a clear beginning and end is repeatable, for example waving. Play with rhythm, levels, pace and scale to create three contrasting gestures.

Put the participants in groups of four — each participant teaches the other their gestures and the group find a way to link them all together and present them back.

Share the gesture scores back, with each group presenting it through once as they have rehearsed. Then ask each group to repeat with different instructions — using canon for timings of gestures, playing with scale and ‘naturalness’, play extracts of the song (or different covers) over the pieces.

Reflect on what participants notice: how these suggest story, or character or scenes, how these could be used to link sequences of action, or juxtapose naturalistic action to give us an insight into the character’s emotional lives.

**SCENES (25 MINS)**

In groups of four to five participants take as a starting point a location and a theme from the original list. Participants have 10 minutes to create a scene. You could add in rules about using an object or lines of text that appear in the song (they can only use text from the song, must use at least two lines etc). Participants are entirely free to create their own characters. Make sure scenes have a clear beginning and ending and are time limited. An engaging way to introduce this exercise is to have the themes and locations on slips of paper that groups choose.

You can also encourage participants using movements from their scores in any way they choose as part of the scene (though maybe build this in part way through the rehearsal process). It may be useful to play the song quietly while they are rehearsing as a way to mark time and re-connect to the material.

Pause the group after 10 minutes of devising time and introduce the concept of diegetic and non-diegetic sound in film — diegetic being real sound, whose source is visible/present (on a radio, being played or sung or hummed) and non-diegetic sound coming from outside the world of the story, like an underscore or a narration. Ask them to consider how they can add the song Hurricane into their scene — would it be as diegetic sound or as non-diegetic
sound? Give the group two minutes to make this choice and then check in to find out if you need to provide sound for them when they shareback.

Share the scenes back including music and offer feedback — what the audience enjoyed and what they’d like the participants to work on.

**PLENARY (5 MINS)**

Reflect on all the ways that you have investigated and used the song as a stimulus for creating your own work. Consider what elements the group would like to develop next; what other songs might they like to work with, why?

Suggestions of other songs that provide an interesting starting point for devising. Some of the songs use strong language, others have sensitive themes:

1. ‘Smackwater Jack’, Carole King — rural US setting, violence/poverty
2. ‘Dry Your Eyes, Mate’, The Streets — raw, working class emotion/loss in an urban UK setting
3. ‘Mohammed Ali’, Faithless — race, vulnerability, personal growth
4. ‘Up the Junction’, Squeeze — impact of poverty on family life — alcohol addiction, gambling, loss
5. ‘If it wasn’t for Bad Luck’, Ray Charles & Jimmy Lewis — race, poverty
6. ‘Red light indicates doors are secured’, Arctic Monkeys — hi-jinx on the return from a night out
7. ‘Fast Car’, Tracy Chapman — poverty, abusive family relationships and escape
What does your job involve?
I am one of two marketing managers at The Old Vic. My job is hugely varied but a big focus of it is selling tickets for all The Old Vic productions. We build marketing campaigns for shows, which are essentially big plans for what we are going to do in the run up to the show opening, as well as when it is on stage. The activities are planned out in this, which could include what adverts we need to book and what emails we need to send. We also look in to ways we can specifically target shows to different audiences, for example with something like Girl from the North Country we looked at how we could specifically reach Bob Dylan and music fans, as well as thinking about tourists that might visit the city over the summer months. We also have to monitor sales closely, working with ticket agents and the box office team to ensure the numbers all add up. My other responsibility lies in looking after The Old Vic’s website. We recently launched a new website and I oversaw the project, working with an external web development agency. It was a big project to get everything launched in time and now I need to make sure that the daily running of the site is up to scratch, with one of the main aims being to give people an simple online booking experience as possible.

What do you do on an average day?
When I get in in the morning, I usually check sales from the day before to ensure that we are hitting targets. Then I check the website to ensure that everything is in proper working order. My days can differ completely — I could be at my desk analysing booking data or in the auditorium overseeing a photoshoot with cast members. We also work closely with the production, education and development teams to make sure they have all the marketing materials they need and to ensure everything we send out is in The Old Vic brand.

Have you always worked in a theatre? How did you get involved?
I’ve always worked in theatre but didn’t do a theatre degree. I actually studied German and History but loved drama at school and also chose to study theatre as much as possible at university — I took a lot of modules on German playwrights, such as Brecht. When I graduated, I got involved with my local theatre (York Theatre Royal) taking part in a theatre festival called Takeover, which was programmed and run by under 25s. I spent four months shadowing the Head of Communications there and marketing the festival — it was an absolute blast (and very challenging) but after that I knew it was the career for me.

Which part of your job do you most enjoy?
I love being part of the theatre world. Although I’m not a performer, I can still put my skills to use while working in an amazing creative environment with amazing creative people. My job is also full of surprises and it’s fun to always be working on something different.

Which part of your work is the most difficult?
Juggling everything we have to do on a daily basis. I’ve worked at five different theatre venues and they’re all as busy as each other, so you’ve got to be motivated and full of energy to work in the industry.

What is your best memory of working at The Old Vic so far?
The Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead NT Live broadcast was pretty special. It was an amazing experience to know that the show was being broadcast all over the world. I always get a shiver when sitting in the auditorium to watch a preview and think ‘wow, I work here.’. It’s so special seeing something like Girl from the North Country, that you’ve been working on for ages, come to life.

If you were to offer a young person wanting to get into the industry some advice, what would you tell them?
You need to be passionate about theatre — when work is stressful you need to take a step back and appreciate what an amazing industry you are part of. We’re not brain surgeons or paramedics — it’s never a life or death situation, so enjoy it but take your work seriously at the same time.

What is the biggest misconception about working in a theatre?
That it’s a bit snooty with lots of egos. Most of the people who work in theatre are a really down to earth bunch and are passionate about what they do.

Did you have any theatre heroes when you were growing up?
Well, Judi Dench is from York and I still have her signed photo on my fridge, so she’s always been a hero. Also, I had an amazing drama teacher called Mr Crisp, who was really passionate about the kids he taught and got everyone involved in school plays (that always seemed a bit edgier than the normal school play). Even as a year 7 in the chorus, I enjoyed the team spirit of putting on a play and I think that has really stayed with me.
WEBSITES

The Balance
thebalance.com/welfare-programs-definition-and-list-3305759

Black Lives Matter
blacklivesmatter.com

Bob Dylan
bobdylan.com

Community Action Duluth
communityactionduluth.org/about_us_poverty.html

The Guardian
theguardian.com/business/2009/aug/13/us-home-repossessions-rise

Huffington Post

Kaiser Family Foundation
kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/5-02-13-history-of-health-reform.pdf

NAACP
naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet

Office for National Statistics
ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/articles/persistentpovertyintheukandeu/2015

Social Welfare Library
socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/great-depression/american-social-policy-in-the-great-depression-and-wwii/

Wikipedia
en.wikipedia.org