



out of joint

MIXED UP NORTH WORKPACK

Produced by Out of Joint 2009

Contents

	Page
Researching the Play	
An Introduction to Verbatim Theatre	4
The Setting of Burnley	5
What the LAMDA Students Learnt	7
Interview with Robin Soans	9
The Rehearsal Process	12
Actioning & Analysis	13
Exercises To Do	15
Interview with Celia Imrie	17

Introduction

Aim of Workpack

The resource materials in this pack are intended to enhance students' enjoyment and understanding of *Mixed Up North*. The activities present creative and practical strategies for learning in a classroom setting. The resources are primarily aimed at students aged 16+ who are studying Drama at BTEC or A Level. The workpack is in two sections – Researching the Play and The Rehearsal Process.

Researching the Play

Mixed Up North was written as a commission for the Long Project at the London School of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA). Robin Soans and Max Stafford-Clark were asked to renew their successful partnership, having worked on the verbatim plays *Talking to Terrorists* and *A State Affair*, incorporating the students in the process. Robin and Max visited Burnley many times with the students, conducting interviews and gathering information to make the play. In this section, we look at what verbatim theatre is, the research process, and what the students learnt from the experience. There is also an interview with Robin Soans addressing the controversy surrounding the play.

The Rehearsal Process

Out of Joint's Associate Director, Jessica Swale gives us an insight into the rehearsal process for *Mixed Up North*. Out of Joint's Artistic Director, Max Stafford-Clark, uses two stages of rehearsal – actioning and analysis – using the techniques of actioning, status and research; then staging and performance. There are exercises on actioning and improvisation for students to try these methods themselves. Jessica also provides two extracts from her rehearsal diary, and an interview with established actress and cast member Celia Imrie.

We hope you find the materials interesting and relevant for your studies.

An Introduction to Verbatim Theatre

Real Life on Stage by Jon Bradfield

In 1976, Max Stafford-Clark and William Gaskill's Joint Stock Theatre Group produced *Yesterday's News* about the war in Angola. As Gaskill tells it, they were at a loss for what play to do next, and decided to look through the newspapers for a story. The play was written from the company's subsequent interviews with Angolan mercenaries.

Stafford-Clark used the technique again in 1983 at the Royal Court. *Falkland Sound* gave voice to many people touched by the Falkland War: including a woman who ran a support group for sailors' wives in Plymouth and a journalist who'd been embedded with the invading forces on the ship *The Canberra*. A shell-shocked Scots Guard talked to the actors, as did a teacher from the Islands, and an Argentinian woman resident in London who listened in horror to the rolling news of the war.

In 1993, Max Stafford-Clark founded Out of Joint Theatre Company. Out of Joint's first verbatim project, *A State Affair* (Robin Soans 2000), was a companion piece to a revival of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* by the late Andrea Dunbar. Her seminal play was first performed at the Royal Court in 1982, and since then the Bradford housing estate on which Dunbar had lived suffered a deeply destructive heroin and crime epidemic. Max Stafford-Clark says:

"I knew that heroin had become a major problem on these estates. What I hadn't expected was the drive and the commitment of the various care-workers we spoke to: their non-judgmental approach and willingness to cope with young people as victims of social conditions. Whereas the newspapers have exhibited a readiness to blame and to find scapegoats."

This is verbatim theatre's great strength - an advantage it perhaps has over its cousin, investigative journalism. It looks at the whole picture, a wide range of view-points, without needing to find a specific 'angle'. Although of course, the author of a verbatim play edits, censors, and rearranges at will, just as the editor of a documentary would. David Hare acknowledges that the apparent neutrality of the art-form is an illusion: of his play about British Rail's privatisation, *The Permanent Way*, he conceded, "I'm all over it like a rash". His more recent play *Stuff Happens* (about the build up to the Iraq War) openly combined verbatim dialogue with fictional, speculative scenes.

As well as discovering stories untold elsewhere, theatre turns an ongoing, messy event into a comprehensible overview. It brings the strands together, helping its audience evaluate events that may be too big, too close, too current. And verbatim theatre provides a new challenge for actors, because they are playing real people - people who may even be in the audience. The actors in Out of Joint's *Talking to Terrorists* and *The Permanent Way* did not attempt precisely to mimic their real-life counterparts (they did speak of their loyalty to them, the compulsion to 'do right' by them).

Do verbatim texts make for a more truthful art? Perhaps or perhaps not - the best fictional writing has its own truths. But these are all attempts at connecting, and understanding, as fully as possible, with the added frisson that comes with discovering something about other people's lives.

The Setting of Burnley

Burnley is a large market town in Lancashire, with a population of around 73,500. Burnley had manufactured textiles since the Middle Ages, with the first mill built as early as 1296. By 1866 when the Industrial Revolution had changed the landscape of many manufacturing towns, Burnley was the largest producer of cotton cloth in the world. Coal mining also rapidly increased, and by 1800 there were over a dozen pits in the town centre alone.

Since its days as a bustling industrial town with a population of over 100,000 in 1911, it has suffered a similar declining fate to other manufacturing towns, as factories and pits were closed in rapid succession. The last deep coal mine was shut in 1981, and Burnley's largest manufactures (Prestige and Michelin) closed their factory doors in 1997 and 2002.

The effect this has had on the town is unquestionable. As of 2007 it was the 21st most deprived local authority out of 354 across the United Kingdom, and the population percentage currently claiming incapacity benefit is almost double the national average (14% compared to the 7%).



A photograph of the 2001 Burnley Riots



Burnley's Pennine Countryside

Compare the following two articles about Burnley from the 'VisitBurnley' website, and a BBC News Feature.

"Surrounded by hills and moorland, Burnley lies in a hollow where the River Calder and the River Brun meet. Its industrial past belies its rural setting with nearly two-thirds countryside; it has scenery that can rival parts of the Dales, Lakes and Bowland.

Burnley's countryside is a living mosaic of woods, farmland and waterways with over 400 kilometers of cycleways, bridleways and footpaths leading from the South Pennine Moors via the spectacular Cliviger Gorge to the Calder and Ribble Valleys in the shadow of Pendle Hill.

Blond winter grasses, golden autumn leaves, purple heather and spring bluebells provide the landscape with year round colour and it is home to abundant wildlife with heron, kingfisher, peregrine, woodpecker, hare, fox badger and deer all making their homes in the area.

So come and visit this hidden part of Lancashire; relax, unwind and enjoy the beautiful countryside; take a closer look at the rare birds and wildlife; visit the attractions along your route and enjoy a relaxing drink and meal in one of the many pubs and restaurants nearby."

"In the aftermath of racial disturbances in Burnley some residents of the Lancashire town voiced their views to BBC News Online's community affairs reporter Cindi John.

The violence may be over, for now at least, but tension still runs high in Burnley.

One woman - who only agreed to speak anonymously - said she feared being targeted by the British National Party if she spoke publicly. She lives in one of only two white households in her street in the predominantly Bangladeshi area of Daneshouse, but says she has no problems with her Asian neighbours.

"They're all alright provided you give them a chance, some people don't give them a chance and resent them from the word go. As far as I'm concerned a lot of them are my friends and a lot of them grew up with my children," she said.

She said the recent troubles were "a real shocker" but she would not be moving away from the area because of them.

Fellow Daneshouse resident Habibur Rahman agreed the violence was unexpected.

Jim Stalker thought much of the situation had been engineered by right-wing outsiders. "I think the British National Party had a lot to do with it, they've been stirring it up from out of town," he said. And taxi driver Sikander Khan agreed. "It wasn't so much a race issue originally but it's become a race issue now the BNP's taken over," he said. Like many other Pakistani and Bangladeshi taxi drivers in the town he was currently not working for fear of being attacked.

But Claire Campbell from the Clifton Farm area of the town disagreed that race relations had been entirely harmonious before the violence erupted.

"We've had loads of problems. The Asians come round our areas hitting girls and everything.

"I'm not saying we're innocent because we go round and do it to them too so it's just been building up over a while," she said.

In Colne Road's Duke Bar area where a pub was burnt out and shops badly damaged, one long-standing resident 81 year old Mary Howarth, put the violence down to "yobbos".

"We've always lived around here, we're the longest residents in our street, we get on well with everybody. There was an Indian couple who lived near us and you couldn't ask for a nicer couple," she said. "

What the LAMDA Students Learnt

As part of the research process for Mixed Up North, Robin and Max went to Burnley with groups of LAMDA students. Here they recount their experiences.

Clare Rafferty

Having only stayed there for a few days almost two and a half years ago, it surprises me just how strong and vivid some of my memories are of that experience. One recollection I have is being in a community centre surrounded by chaos, as the kids helped with their play's 'get out'. Harsh but indeed hilarious witticisms flew across the room, and this is mostly from the adults! The keys to the mini bus were lost causing one of the kids to scream in horror as she wouldn't get home in time to see her boyfriend. As the search continued frantically there was one young boy sneaking up behind another girl sitting on the pool table in order to squeeze his carton of orange juice over her head. Cue more madness...fun though to watch! We stayed in a beautiful, converted farm house just outside the town and to have Pendle Hill in your back garden was simply an awesome sight to wake up to. This absolutely stunning scenery was certainly a highlight.

Cosied up beside an open fire looking out at the moorlands that stretched as far as the eye could see it really felt like a departure from our lives in London.

When I talk about Burnley now I talk about the amazing scenery and roguish (yet loveable!) young people we met. I think of some of the workers of these community groups; apart from the absolute admiration of the work they do and the difference they make to the kids' lives, it is their witty, sarcastic and genuine ways, that so typify the Burnley people, that I remember. The people I met for those few days; I remember their names, their stories, their jokes and their hospitality. These people for me made my experience in Burnley so memorable.



Lorna Stuart

"We used Arthur the Rat to the dismay and confusion of the Burnley Youth Group to get an accent recording. Arthur the Rat is a story we used in accent classes because it contains all the sounds you need to break-down an accent. We forgot to explain that bit to them and they were completely confused as we sat there nodding away as they read, leaning forward with our dictaphones."



Lisa Kerr



"We went to a youth centre and while trying to interview a couple of the kids, one of them ran around pouring orange juice all over us!"

Tyrone Lopez

"We came across a young guy, nicknamed 'Stiggy', who was not part of the youth group. He was in a BNP youth gang and one of the guys in our year spent some time with him and his mates."



Rose Leslie

“Walking through Burnley you can easily get lost and disorientated. The majority of the housing is very small and terraced. A lot of the houses are boarded up or in very poor shape. It felt at times like a ghost town.”



Kathryn O'Reilly



“While we were there we went with some kids to a project called ‘The Youth Bus’/ Basically it’s a double decker bus that has been turned into a travelling youth centre. It’s filled with computers and games consoles. The bus goes to a different area of Burnley every night to encourage kids off the streets. It was a pity to see that most of the kids spent their time outside the bus drinking rather than on it.”

Judith Amsenga

“We spent a morning in the Houses of Parliament interviewing Kitty Usher, the MP for Burnley. It was really interesting hearing her opinion of Burnley and its ‘lack of’ problems, in comparison to the stories we heard from Burnley residents.”



Interview with Robin Soans

Where did the idea come from for Mixed Up North?

When David Edgar was researching *Playing With Fire* at the National Theatre he met Lisa O'Neill Rogan in Burnley and she mentioned her work with a youth theatre group. This group was trying to put on plays with young people with an equal mix of Asian and white kids with a view to breaking the cycle of mistrust between the two communities. This seemed to be very rich dramatically, especially for a verbatim play. I'd already been thinking of writing a play about four marriages in Coventry, one of which would be a mixed marriage; that project fell through and this seemed a natural successor. And when Peter James suggested the Long Project at LAMDA that seemed to tick all the right boxes.

Did you have a fixed idea of what you wanted the play to be or did it develop from the research in Burnley?

It developed from the research. One of my golden rules is that you don't have a fixed agenda, because otherwise you start moulding the information you find into a fixed pattern, you stop being as inquisitive as you might be otherwise. Having spent a lot of time in Burnley you get a multiplicity of ideas, emotions and situations and you have to find a way of linking them together. The formative moment comes when you think of link. In this instance, it was a dress rehearsal at the Youth Group which went wrong and the aftermath of that - having a question and answer session because they couldn't do the play. Rather like molluscs and seaweed that gather round detritus in the ocean, other ideas come in and ornament that. The two acts of this play are in actual time so there's no hiding; whatever happens in that hour happens in that hour. But on the other hand once you've got that rigid framework it allows you to fill that hour with nearly all the things you've found in Burnley.

Although it's a pity to lose very fascinating stuff you have to be selective for the structure that you've chosen and some material has to be jettisoned. I had a lengthy interview with Sharon Wilkinson from the BNP and although a bit of what she said has leeches into other people's remarks in the play, it seems to me a pity I can't fit her in. It was the same with Dave Edmonson; a fascinating man, the promoter of Burnley Football Club. We went to the House of Commons and interviewed Kitty Usher, the MP, and Alistair Campbell. It's not a waste of time all this, because the more you can accrue information and different points of view about the town the better, but in the final analysis their contribution can't be included because it doesn't really fit in the scheme that you've set yourself.

Do you think that process of selection and the editing process means the play cannot be completely objective?

I know it can't be objective. If you gave David Hare, David Edgar, myself and Alecky Blythe this material you would end up with four extraordinarily different plays, even within the strictures of the subject given. It is a mystery to me that verbatim is considered a restrictive way of writing. I absolutely disagree. The bricks may be the same but the structure you build with them, the house you build with them, is entirely and totally idiosyncratic.

What is your vision of Burnley that you were hoping to get across in the play?

I think there are an enormous number of charismatic people in Burnley who are real forces for good, and they're doing everything they can to try and improve the situation. The vast majority of people I met are well-intentioned even if they don't agree with each other. But Burnley is the victim of economic change. If you look at the historical context, the cottage industry of weaving in Burnley started in the 14th century. It's been going for 600 years then suddenly in a decade it's all gone. Historically, it's a very sudden axe that fell. No social cushioning was put in place to soften the blow; it was an absolute

severance and it's been a tremendous shock. It will take a while for things to readjust, to change and for the place to move on and to find a new identity. In many places like Burnley, South Wales, other mill towns in Yorkshire, Northumberland and Scotland, a traditional way of manufacturing came to a grinding halt.

I would just like to point out there is a social cost for big businesses keeping their profits and not spending some of their profits in putting in social cushioning for the people whose lives have been blasted by the end of that traditional industry. The real villains in this play aren't in Burnley; they're in national government and multi-national companies. Jen says at the end of the play that two or three generations have been written off as collateral damage, which probably has an element of truth to it. In many ways this is an old-fashioned Marxist play – wicked capitalism and the effect it has on people.

Where do the divisions between ethnic communities come into that – we've talked about the effects of economics on people but issues of race also come into the play.

Only as a by-product of looking at this group. This is a play about racism but it's not a play about 'racism.' It's a play about a group of people, some of whom happen to be racist in one way or another. It's such a complex issue, racism; instead of me imposing a political view about this, it's much better to look at a group of people to see what they say, and to talk about the situations they find themselves in. If we think that's racist or if we can understand how that's come about, that's more interesting than me imposing my own view on top of it, which I'm not going to do.

How many trips did you do to Burnley and what did you do on each trip?

At least ten. Before I started the Long Project at LAMDA I spent three days there, just so I could see the territory and meet people. You can get an enormous amount done in three days - I went to an inter-faith feast, I met the MP, and I interviewed 15-18 people. I went to watch StreetYY do their dress rehearsal, and the first performance with the question and answer session afterwards. I was able to get a clearer picture of the territory and I had made lots of contacts, so that when I went up to Burnley on several occasions with groups of LAMDA students I knew where I was aiming for, who I wanted to meet and where the gaps were – if you've got one point of view you always want to meet someone who's got an opposing point of view.

This play has given rise to an enormous number of issues within the town itself, issues of what is acceptable and what isn't acceptable and how people's lives might be perceived to be exploited. So there have been many meetings over the past year, where I have been up and down to Bolton to try and make people feel included and that they have an input in the play. It's very important that we don't seem to be riding rough-shod over people's lives in any way, but people feel incorporated in the process, and if they feel very strongly that something shouldn't be included in the play we've made compromises so it's not. It's extraordinary that this play, out of all the plays I've written, has been the most contentious. Though I would say it's very hard not to find anyone in the play who has not come out looking good and reasonable and well-intentioned.

Were you surprised by the controversy?

No not really, because dignity and identity are very important component parts of the human psyche. People in places like Burnley have had a really rough time because their traditional way of life has been removed and that does a lot of damage to the infrastructure and confidence of the town. I think people are quite protective of the place because they want to feel proud of it and they want to feel proud of who they are, and I absolutely understand that. So I'm not surprised when people get protective of their community and don't want some outsider coming in and, as it were, exploiting it. I think it's important for us to understand that. But that's what I wanted to look at in a way. A lot of communities

that collapsed after Thatcher's era are trying to hang on to a dignity that they had in their lives, which has been trampled over by forces they weren't in control of. It is a bit of a crucible Burnley, the currents run very strong and I think there's a certain amount of justification in their behaviour. On the other hand that shouldn't prevent me from writing a play about the place.

What do you say to people who argue you shouldn't come in as an outsider and exploit their community?

If you're living in the middle of something you have an absolute pertinent point of view. But to put together something that's an overall picture I think an outsider is as well placed as anybody, if not better, to have fresh pair of eyes and an objective outlook. Especially somebody who is a sympathetic and liberal minded outsider and is used to looking at situations like the Middle East, terrorism, and heroin addiction on a Bradford estate.

Someone who lives in Burnley and supports the BNP, for example, might say you are a liberal and that's what the problem is – you can't understand it from their perspective.

But I think if they look their perspective is put in there. It's an interesting question because intransigence is what I'm trying to combat. If you have an absolutely fixed, dogmatic view about Burnley, or anywhere that has similar problems, I'm trying to open up that debate and say there is more to this than meets the eye. Come and look at the play and I might be able to make you at least question your dogmatic point of view by seeing the currents that make people behave how they behave, and to understand the complexity of the situation a bit more. It may well confirm some people in their opinions and make them feel even more strongly than they felt before, but at least you've made them address the problems and have a think about it, and hopefully, and this is very important, entertain them on the way.

Some of the students from the youth club in Burnley came to see the show at LAMDA. What did they think of it?

They had the most fantastic time. They were really overjoyed by it because they felt that they had been listened to, that their views had been incorporated and they recognised themselves. The situations portrayed were germane to their lives and therefore they got a big kick out of it. I hope that will happen wherever the play goes.

How does Mixed Up North tie in with the rest of your body of work?

It's something of an extension. I am quite insistent on verbatim being a flexible and not a rigid form, so any time I do one of these I want it to be a development of what I had before - to have learned about what worked and what didn't work, and therefore to get more skilled at the way I assemble the material. With this one I feel that if you talk about bricks and mortar, that the bricks are verbatim and the mortar is mine, I'm the architect. I've freed the form up a bit to be more theatrically inventive with it.

The Rehearsal Process

By Jessica Swale, Associate Director

Max Stafford-Clark, the director of *Mixed Up North*, is well known for his inventive and rigorous rehearsal methods. The rehearsal process usually lasts about five weeks and can simply be broken into two stages. During the first stage (weeks one and two) we use various exercises and methods to analyse the text and to explore characters. In the second stage (weeks three, four and five) we then focus on staging and performance.

The process of creating *Mixed Up North* was particularly interesting because it is a partially **verbatim** play. Verbatim theatre refers to plays that use real testimony, often word for word, as a script. Theatre makers conduct interviews with participants, transcribe their words and then carefully edit these testimonies to create a final script.

In the case of *Mixed Up North*, the writer and director were interested by issues of race and the question of life after crisis in communities. They took a group of young actors from LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art) to Burnley to interview members of a youth group there. Since the 'disturbances' in 2001, Burnley has often been in the media spotlight as an example of a community which suffers from social problems.

After several visits, the team had gained a significant body of material, and Robin Soans set out on the lengthy task of creating a dynamic text from the testimonies. In order to create a rich text, Soans revisited Burnley several times to gain further insight and interviews. This process took two years. As is often the case in Out of Joint rehearsals, even when rehearsals were well underway, this script was still being tweaked, as the writer has the beneficial position of being present in rehearsals to observe the actors at work. The text is often streamlined and honed at this point before the script goes for publication.

There are many positive aspects of using a verbatim process to create a text. Not only does it give the writer access to experiences outside their own, but the fact that the stories presented are true gives them emotional weight and helps the audience to invest in the stories. However, it is also a challenging medium. The actors must be aware that they are presenting real stories, so it is imperative to treat the material with respect and to paint the characters as truthfully as possible. Yet the actors must also feel free to use their imaginations to develop personal interpretations of the characters, in order to feel comfortable performing those roles.

The characters in *Mixed Up North* are based on real people but many are combinations of several interviewees and all have been developed and dramatised by the writer. The actors, therefore, approach the characters as you would approach a Chekhovian character, looking for their objectives, investigating text, physicality and voice and analysing the emotional journey. Ultimately the play is a performance for an audience, so the actors have to detach themselves from the idea of absolutely representing real life in favour of presenting an engaging and varied performance.

Stage One: Actioning and Analysis

The first two weeks are spent analysing the text, primarily using a process called 'actioning' which encourages actors to fully explore their intentions in every line.

How to 'action' the text.

Before we block (move) any of the scenes, the actors sit around a table with the writer and director, and together decide an 'action' for each line of the scene. An action is a transitive verb (something you want to *do* to the person you are talking to- to challenge, to belittle, to amuse). This helps the actors establish their objectives, their motivation for speaking. Stanislavski, the pioneer of naturalism (believable acting) believed that everything a character says and does must have an established 'objective', so actioning encourages actors to make these specific decisions. By establishing an action for each line, you can clearly track the way your emotions build through a scene. It is all too easy to play a scene on one level of drama, for instance, playing Aneesa's monologue about the arranged marriage as if every line is shocking. However, it is much more interesting dramatically to build up emotion as the scene progresses, in order to show a character's emotional journey and to build tension. By choosing actions which gradually increase in strength (e.g. to focus, to alert, to warn, to grip, to shake, to horrify), you ensure that the scene develops towards its climax.

Actioning is very useful for monologues because it helps an actor to find different levels of drama and establish their relationship with the audience (if the piece is spoken to them, as many in *Mixed Up North* are). It is equally useful in dialogue as it helps establish what you are trying to *do* to the other person. Have a look at the actions in the extract below. Note how they help to establish the relationship between characters and reveal the objectives. Actions are used to help each character establish and dramatise their objectives. After this, try it on an extract of your own choice.

JEN COMES IN FROM THE KITCHEN.

JEN: (QUIZZES) What's going on?

BELLA: (EVADES) Don't ask me.

JAVED: (CHALLENGES) I'm being exploited in this part; (CONFRONTS) you know that, don't you?

BELLA: (CHALLENGES) What do you mean by that?

MAUREEN: (CHEEKS) Cos he is. You know he is.

JEN: (ENLISTS) That salad's getting dried up.

BELLA: (BELITTLES) I think if you recall...it was you wanted the part.

JAVED: (CORNERS) I'm the only proper Asian guy you could get.

BELLA: (OUTWITS) We've got Aftab and Uday.

JAVED: (SCORNS) I'm the only one with the requisite skills, (SHAMES) and I'm not being appreciated.

BELLA: (SHAMES) It's a team effort.

JEN: (REPRIMANDS) You should listen to that. Good advice.

JEN HEADS BACK TOWARDS THE KITCHEN WITH THE SALAD.

Improvisations

An integral part of forming a characterisation is to think about the wider life of the character- what has happened to them before the play begins, and what happens in between the scenes which we see. Often there are clues which help us to form their 'back stories' (their lives outside the scenes) in the text. For instance, Uday tells us 'I'm the last person you'd expect to end up in Youth Work.' He then explains the difficult events in his past which reveal how far he has come, in terms of taking responsibility for himself and his actions.

Research

We also use this time to do research, which includes reading newspaper articles, relevant books, sometimes watching film extracts and interviewing people of interest. In order to understand the lifestyle and experiences of the characters in *Mixed Up North*, we collected articles about Burnley and invited youth workers from the town into rehearsal to share their experiences. One of the most interesting contributions that our visitors made was to run a series of anti-racism drama exercises which they use in their sessions in Burnley. The actors, as participants in these games, gained insight into the type of activities their characters might be involved in. It also helped us further understand the principles behind the work and to explore the themes of the play.

EXERCISES TO DO

1. IMPROVISATION

We use improvisations throughout rehearsals. Try some of the following scenarios as ways to explore the characters and their backstories.

a. Uday and Aneesa as Youth Workers

We know that both Uday and Aneesa are youth leaders; they are two of Trish's 'key workers from the Asian Community'. Think about how they started out. Uday has spent two years in prison after he attacked two white youths who insulted him in a subway. Aneesa has struggled to come to terms with her arranged marriage. They have both put these experiences behind them and now advise young people on how to improve their own lives. Imagine they are running a session where each student in Street YY comes to see them for a weekly chat, to talk through their problems. Each student must come with a dilemma which Uday and Aneesa will advise them about. For example, perhaps Aftab wants to ask about how to talk to Wendy about their future- he knows his family won't accept her as a wife. Perhaps Kylie is worried about what the rest of the group think about her. Improvise their meetings with each of the kids and what they might say.

b. Maureen and Javed have a confrontation

At the climax of Act One, Maureen persuades Javed to walk out of the play because she has been banned from watching the rehearsal. Uday describes Javed as 'wrapped round her (Maureen's) little pinkie'. Look at the build up towards this moment. On several occasions Maureen takes Javed out for a conversation. Improvise these conversations. Maureen wants to watch. Bella does not want Maureen to disrupt proceedings. Javed wants to do the play. What is at stake here? Why is Maureen so determined to watch? What do you think she really wants? Look now at the end of the play where her objective is revealed... can you spot the signs? Try and find the subtext which suggests that Maureen would secretly like to be involved.

2. STATUS

You will need **a pack of cards**.

Begin by splitting the group in half, half take the stage, the other half sit and watch as the audience. Give each active player a playing card (take the face cards out first so that all cards are between 2 and 10). Ask them to look at their cards and then put it out of sight.

They must now imagine they are at a youth group in the lunch break. The number on their card delineates their status, 2 being the lowest, 10 being the highest. They must play the level of their status. Choose a character appropriate to this status level, e.g. a 10 might be the youth leader, an 8 a dominant member of the group, a 3 a quiet and shy individual. Shout 'action' and watch the scene develop.

After a few minutes, ask the actors to line up at random. Now ask the audience to put them in order of status, from lowest on the left to highest on the right. Then ask them to reveal their cards. How clearly did people play their status? Consider how factors like energy, body language, choice of words, mode of address and the taking up of physical space all help to reveal status levels.

Now swap over halves. Ask the second half of the group to, this time, choose a character from *Mixed Up North*. Ask them to choose a status level of between 2 and 10 for their character, and to take that card

from the pack without showing anyone. Now they can begin a scene with all the characters, perhaps an early rehearsal for the Rikki Rajah show or a warm up session. Once they have performed this scene, ask the audience to order the characters in order of the status they played. Now they can reveal their cards. Ask the audience to comment on which factors helped them to 'read' each character's status. Discuss whether you all agree with the decisions on the various status levels of the characters.

3. VERBATIM THEATRE

In this exercise, the group will create a short ensemble piece of verbatim theatre.

Work in groups of four or five. The first task is for the group to find someone to interview. Find someone in the vicinity who is not known well to the actors; perhaps a theatre technician, or, in a school, a teacher or other member of staff. Set a chair facing the interviewers. The group now have ten minutes to ask this person any questions they would like to. They must listen carefully, trying to remember as much detail as possible. They must also watch the interviewee's mannerisms hawkishly, listen to their tones and their manner of speaking. Once the time is up, thank the interviewee and let them go.

Now the group must recreate the interview. One player can be the group asking the questions, and the others must communally play the interviewee. They must sit next to each other and physicalise the interviewee as specifically as possible. They can reply together where necessary, and add detail to each others answers as they remember them. Note how some elements will have been particularly memorable, and everyone will be able to take part in recreating those moments, giving extra volume to reflect their importance. By responding as a group the actors can paint a full a picture of the interviewee. It is also an interesting way to look at how each of us notices different aspects of a persona.

Once you have completed this exercise, do think about what kind of details you found most interesting and why. More often than not it will be small details which sprang out; we are often more interested in the minutiae in stories as we can relate to them. This is a particularly important lesson if you are devising text.

Interview With Celia Imrie

Brief Encounter With ... Celia Imrie by Rebecca Cohen
What's On Stage, 4th September 2009

Celia Imrie is a well known face on stage and screen, having performed in Acorn Antiques in both mediums, the Bridget Jones films, Dinnerladies, and even managing a cameo role in Star Wars: The Phantom Menace. She was last seen on stage in the West End, as Dame Sybil Thorndike in Nicholas De Jongh's Plague Over England. Theatre-goers in Bolton get the chance to see this versatile actress in Out Of Joint's latest piece, Mixed Up North. We caught up with her to find out more.

How did your successful career commence?

As a chorus girl in a pantomime- I was a rat in Dick Whittington!

Tell us about Mixed Up North - what is the premise?

Well, it's really about life in Burnley and how 4 people are trying to cope with the backlashes and disturbances of a battered town in 2001. It's also about the integration of a black and white community. With it being verbatim, it's based on a lot of truth.

What do you find most striking about the powers of verbatim theatre?

The responsibility to be true to people whose stories are being told. They are often both shocking and funny.

Judith Amsenger, a recent graduate of LAMDA, is sharing your role as Trish. Are there any differences in the way you have interpreted the character?

Yes, there are, but it is hard to put into words. We are both travelling our own path although we've not discussed it. She's brilliant and I admire her tremendously (it's hard to tell her to her face!) I'm enthralled by the whole company- everybody is so passionate. I sound like an old age pensioner (which I'm not!) but sometimes, as people used to say to me, young people can lose their passion. It's very exciting.

Racial issues often cause much controversy- although there have been vast improvements regarding ideas of prejudice and discrimination over the years, innumerable problems are still occurring. How does Mixed Up North deal with these issues?

They air them, rather than deal with them. It is far too big an issue for something magic to happen in a play. In 2 hours it's just not realistic. Yet plays are vital instruments for change- more than people can imagine! The play has an allegiance to look at both sides as well.

What attracted you to Out of Joint?

It's been a life-long ambition of mine to work with Max, so I'm utterly thrilled. I hope I can please him as much as he has pleased me.
