Theatre Alibi with Exeter Northcott & Oxford Playhouse

The Ministry of Fear

based on the novel by **Graham Greene**

Education Pack

Putting up the bunting

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A DVD is available from Theatre Alibi at £18 + vat
You can download production photographs
Email us for a copy of the script: info@theatrealibi.co.uk

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Theatre Alibi's Style of Work

Why tell stories?

We think humans *need* to tell stories. More than that, we think this need to tell stories is part of what makes us human, part of the unique intelligence that makes us different from other animals. Telling stories, listening to them, watching them, talking about them, thinking about them... without necessarily realising it, we're processing our experience in a very sophisticated way when we're doing these things. When we imagine a story we rehearse our own urges and inclinations in hypothetical scenarios, like children unconsciously practising how to behave by playing games. By "playing out" stories, we expand our sense of who we are and what choices we have in facing the challenges of our lives.

If we're constantly using stories to get an angle on a chaotic world, then as the world changes, so must our angle. Theatre Alibi is always searching for the right stories to tell and the right way to tell them to question the world as it currently stands.

The way we've chosen to tell stories is through theatre. The immediacy of it appeals to us. In theatre the actor is present in the same room with the audience. As a result, and this is absolutely unique to theatre, a split reality is presented to the audience in which the actor is both himself, here and now, and someone else in another time and place, a character in a fictional world. When we approach our work, we try to take advantage of this split reality. We often begin shows with the actors talking directly to the audience, beginning to tell a story and then slipping from describing a character into becoming them. So unlike many theatre companies we usually choose to reveal to our audience the moment when the actor takes on their role.

Derek Frood as Mrs Dermody

Because reality and fiction are a hair's breadth apart in theatre, it encourages the sense that fiction belongs to reality – it isn't some sort of theme park where things happen that don't relate to reality, it's a gift we have to perceive the richness of real experience. The proximity of real and imaginary in theatre encourages us to relate one to the other. And because theatre admits "play" into the heart of real life it might, in some small way, refresh the playfulness of our lives.

In keeping with these thoughts, here are some of the ways we choose to work:

- We reveal transformations: actors leap from being themselves to being a character (or several) and back again before the eyes of the audience. Simple props and set are taken up by the actors and used to suggest places and things that weren't there before (a duvet becomes a field of snow, a walking stick becomes the rail of an ocean liner)
- We develop our actors' resources to help them suggest other characters, things and places: for example their voices, dance and puppetry skills
- We enjoy working in unconventional theatre spaces, where audiences are made especially aware of the "here and now"
- We incorporate other artforms into our theatre to make it more effective at whisking people from the "here and now" to the realm of the imagination: for example music, sculpture, photography and film

A Note by the Adaptor

In the 1930s and 40s Graham Greene was something of a pioneer as a serious author in choosing to write in a variety of popular forms – he turned his hand to crime novels, political thrillers, spy fiction, romance and travel writing to name but a few. **The Ministry of Fear**, written in 1942, is a spy novel and classed by Greene as one of his "entertainments" rather than one of his literary novels. However, it has been recognised as a book that hovers somewhere between "serious" and "entertaining". Greene stopped separating his books in this way in the 1950s, perhaps becoming suspicious himself of the rigid distinction between the two categories.

Whether he meant "entertainment" as much for himself as his readers I'm not sure. **The Ministry of Fear** was written in his free time while posted in Sierra Leone by MI6 during the war. You can imagine Greene tapping away on his typewriter in the sultry evenings with a gin and tonic at his side, entertaining himself as much as any imagined reader. There's a playfulness about the story that makes it a delight to read. You picture him taking another sip as he decides to make the agent of Arthur Rowe's doom an amateur fortune teller at a garden fete, and to mask a sinister spy ring behind a genteel charity called "Comforts for Mothers of the Free Nations." The novel also contains a generous helping of intrigue, action, romance, comedy and larger-than-life characters, all of which make it a gift to adapt for the stage.

And yet this choice of popular form by Greene is not as light as it may seem. As the novel progresses it becomes clear he felt the outrageous plots of popular fiction best reflected the turn history had taken since the onset of the Second World War. Arthur Rowe, the central character of the book, says to his mother in a dream during a heavy air raid,

> *"...You used to laugh at the books Miss Savage read - about spies, and murders, and violence, and wild motor chases, but dear, that's real life: it's what we've all made of the world."*

To Greene, it seemed that an old sense of moral and cultural order was being destroyed along with the buildings of London. Amidst the wreckage it was hard to know how to get about. New paths would have to be improvised through the chaos of tumbled values.

We were also attracted to the novel because it has a peculiarly contemporary feel for a book written in 1942. Its flavour is very fashionable at the moment – there are no end of classy thrillers, existential detective stories, and political comedies on TV and in the bestseller lists nowadays. But there are deeper historical resonances that make **The Ministry of Fear** chime with a modern audience. Then, as now, there was paranoia about hidden forces working within British society to destabilise and destroy it. Then, as now, there was a sense of the powerlessness of the individual in the face of great historical forces, then as now, a sense of moral confusion in the face of seismic change.

At the heart of **The Ministry of Fear** is the character of Arthur Rowe. In him we get a satisfyingly complex portrait of a man up to his neck in guilt and despair. Rowe was moved by pity to kill his terminally ill wife. This seems, for Greene, to epitomise the moral confusion of the age in which the book was written. Pity, although the natural human response to suffering, can lead you into a moral impasse from which it is impossible to escape without hurting someone. Rowe randomly opens a prayer book in a dusty auction house:

> *" 'Let not man prevail,' he read, and the truth of the appeal chimed like music. For in all the world outside that room man had indeed prevailed; he had himself prevailed; it wasn't only evil men who did these things. Courage smashes a cathedral, endurance lets a city starve, pity kills... we are trapped and betrayed by our virtues."*

Greene offers no easy ways out in the novel. A telling detail in Rowe's feverish dream as he tries to sleep on a London Underground station during an air raid is that he imagines he can't step in any direction without hurting the very ground he treads on:

> *"...whenever he tried to move his feet the ground whined back at him: he couldn't move an inch without causing pain."*

But move he must. Greene paints a hugely likeable character in Rowe but he seems to lament his inertia. So it is with some hope that Greene ends the novel by sending Rowe stepping towards love. And this optimism against the odds was another reason we were attracted to the story.

The Research and Development Process

Months before rehearsals for a show begin, many theatre practitioners choose to have a period of Research and Development to kick off the business of turning a script into a living, breathing piece of theatre. Theatre Alibi gets together as many of the people who will be working on a show – the writer, director, musical director, designer, lighting designer, sound designer and actors – to try things out in a creative and playful atmosphere, away from the pressures of production.

What's an R&D for?

- To discuss the meaning and flavour of the story so everyone has a shared sense of what it's about.
- To discover any bits of the script which need further development.
- To have a go at staging some of the more challenging moments in the story.
- To give the director, designer, musical director and lighting designer an overall flavour of the show and to indicate any specific jobs the set, music and lights need to do to tell the story.
- To help the musical director choose which instruments to use for the show.

What happens in a Theatre Alibi R&D?

1. At the beginning there is a "read-through" of the script. Everyone sits round in a big circle and reads the play out loud without doing any of the action.
2. Discussion. For a good chunk of the first day, everyone talks about the story. This discussion is often structured in the following way: First everyone splits into four or five groups and each group writes down all the things they think the story is about on a large piece of paper. Then everyone gets back together and compares notes. Next, each group draws a "graph" of the story. First they think what over-riding, yes-or-no question the story is asking the audience. For example, will Arthur Rowe find happiness, or will he survive, or will he do the right thing etc? Then, on a large piece of paper, they draw a diagram with the events of the story along a horizontal axis and "yes" at the top and "no" at the bottom of a vertical axis. On this diagram they plot a graph, deciding how close to yes or no the answer to the question is at each moment of the story. This gives a pictorial sense of the highs and lows and the ups and downs of the show.
3. For the rest of the week the director works with the actors, playing with different ways of staging the trickier moments in the show. These moments might be when what happens in the script can't literally be shown on stage. For example, when a bomb explodes, or a fire burns in a window, or a man wades waist deep in a pond. Or they might be moments when we want to show something physically that is invisible or intangible in real life. For example, a sense of claustrophobia, or how the atmosphere of a whole city is affected by an air raid, or the nostalgia of visiting an old-fashioned fete.

from top: Craig Edwards as Mr Rennit, Derek Frood as an A.R.P. Warden, Jordan Whyte as Anna Hilfe

The aim of the R&D week isn't to completely solve all the difficult moments in a show, but to get a rough sense of the right approach. From these rough solutions everyone can get a sense of the emerging style of the show that will be developed during the main rehearsal process a few months later.

The Director's Interpretation and Approach
A conversation with Nikki Sved

Why did you choose to adapt this book?

It's probably fair to say that Dan Jamieson (the adaptor) and I really like the book! And we both really like Graham Greene's writing. He's a writer who crafts words and narratives brilliantly. He has a real eye for characterisation and for painting a very complete world. He's so vivid in the way he creates time and place. It's like opening a window on a very particular world, I think.

There's also the fact that **The Ministry of Fear** has never been done before on stage. It's exciting that we get to paint that picture first. Greene described the novel as one of his "entertainments" and yet it's a really complex psychological study as well. It looks at dark material in a way that is very compelling. So it's got a great mixture of vivid, delicious characterisation, it's a good thriller and it also has some darker aspects. Walking that line between light and dark is something that we as a company are particularly interested in doing.

Another reason we chose the book is the fact that many aspects of the story seem particularly resonant now. The book imagines an enemy working secretly on British soil during the Second World War. There are spies at every corner and a sense that people are looking over one's shoulder the whole time. As a society we're fascinated by conspiracy theories and since 9/11 the notion of an enemy on our own soil has loomed large. This book deals with that fear – a sense that you can trust nobody, that nowhere is safe.

There are also universal human themes in the book. It will never be inappropriate to tell a love story, for example, and guilt will always be with us. But there's something extraordinary about looking at these emotions against the backdrop of the Blitz. It sets them in such sharp relief when people are operating in a shattered city, with shattered lives and shattered homes.

What is the flavour of the company's work and how is it a match for the material?

The company is always, always led by story, and **The Ministry of Fear** is nothing if not a darn good story. Working theatrically with a story that has that sort of narrative drive is very exciting. The fact that it would appear difficult to stage is positively an attraction for us. So when an explosion is called for in the book, we're excited about putting it on stage using actors' bodies and props, lighting and sound. Theatre squeezes you towards finding inventive and exciting ways of showing things – that's part of its joy. With a talented physical performer, a beautiful prop, an extraordinary piece of music, there's almost nothing you can't bring to life. Those sorts of challenges come up again and again in the book because it's constantly moving from location to location. We have to treat the stage as a playground. How might you imply place? What's at the heart of a fairground? How do you paint it with the single sweep of a brush? That aspect of the novel meets our work very well.

Also, as theatre makers, we're naturally interested in the workings of the human heart and the book is full of emotional complexity, the central character is so weighed down with pain and guilt. In the middle of this playful construction of scenes, there's the opportunity to be very emotionally truthful. For us, it's important that we honour that opportunity. Putting this story on stage shouldn't just be a matter of showing off and celebrating our own skills, we want to tell the story in a way that is emotionally truthful.

Also, the material is funny! There are meaty comedy characters and surreal, eccentric humour - exquisitely observed vignettes that draw in some ways on the music hall tradition.

What's the idea behind the design?

The set has a great many jobs to do. It has to be able to move from scene to scene very fast. Because of that, it doesn't make sense to think very literally – that would make the design hugely cumbersome and probably not very interesting. What we looked for instead was a much more complete sense of the world we were in, of a London that was virtually destroyed, of skeletal, almost wounded buildings, jagged shapes – sharp remnants of what might

Left to right: Michael Wagg & Benjamin Warren, Derek Frood as Fullove

have been. This reflects not only the historic moment at which the play is set but also Rowe's psyche. Nothing seems permanent to him, there's no solid ground. We looked at the shapes that were created by the ravaged buildings of the Second World War. You often see these fragmented and fractured silhouettes against the skyline that are monumental in scale. They're not just wreckage, they're frightening and imposing as well. We thought very sculpturally about the space. This also allowed us to make a set that was full of practical opportunities – you can climb, you can use height, you can play against it – the image of bunting against the set is really powerful. There's always a feeling of how oppressive the world of the show is. Any sense of freshness or greenery absolutely sings against it. There are moments in the play when that's a very useful thing to draw on. For example, when Rowe is thinking about the past as a sort of sanctuary, to be able to show a shot of green against that metallic bleakness is very powerful.

Light was an important aspect of the design too. The period itself really invites you to look at light because of the blackout that was imposed during the Blitz. During our week of research and development for the show we played a lot with images of searchlights probing the sky for enemy aircraft. We looked at ways of using light to focus on character too. Sometimes in the story we wanted a feeling of interrogation, of lights being shone at people to question them. So we've really embraced the idea of actors manipulating light in a very upfront way. You can also use light to set the landscape of bombed-out London in very sharp relief.

What is the flavour of the music?

Over the years we've come to use music as a form of storytelling, and musicians as storytellers in their own right with as much to say as the actors and their own particular way of saying it. It's an amazing resource and we work with music in a very integrated way.

For this show we're using the sax and clarinet on one hand and the double bass on the other. It's quite an unusual combination because they are both instruments that play a single line, they're not polyphonic. What you get is quite a sparse sound that is absolutely appropriate to the world of the story. The music is stripped back to its bare bones, but those instruments also have an extraordinary capacity to convey emotion - they almost sing – and there's such a range of emotions in the piece for them to draw on. You can also pick up on certain musical genres in rather a wonderful way. You can really draw on the high drama of *film noir*, for example. And these instruments can really point the humour of the piece. The way you can play with jazz and lighter forms of music is a real delight. They're such instruments of suspense too, which suits the "thriller" aspect of the show. You can get edgy with them. These instruments are also entirely appropriate to the period but don't feel in any way "dated".

Being Arthur Rowe
An Interview with Chris Bianchi

Chris Bianchi as Arthur Rowe

Who is Arthur Rowe?

Arthur Rowe is, I suppose you'd say, the central character in the story. Essentially, everything that happens, happens to him. He is kind of a hero, although most of his time in the story he's not being heroic. A lot of the time things happen to him... he's not very dynamic in a "James Bond" way, he doesn't go round looking for adventure, it kind of happens to him. I suppose physically he's not dissimilar to me, possibly a couple of years younger, I'd say he was in his mid forties I suppose. Young middle-age. He's a kind of staid, middle-class gentleman I think. Not well-heeled, but he's ok, he doesn't need to work at the moment that the story is happening. He's got sufficient money to live, although he does live in rented accommodation, so he's not rich by any stretch. He's reasonably intelligent, although through the story there are things that happen to him that betray his naivety at times, but then I think that's true of a lot of the characters in the story. There are times when you think, well would you really do that? And you kind of accept it because it's part of the fun of the story. But for all that, he is quite intelligent. He's a man who suffers a lot of guilt due to things that have happened in his past and there may be some connections with Graham Greene in terms of his background and upbringing perhaps, which are reflected in how Arthur Rowe behaves and who he is, but that's conjecture really. Graham Greene was a Catholic and there's a cliché about Catholicism that it imbues one with guilt, starting with Original Sin that you're born with. Arthur Rowe definitely carries a lot of guilt around with him, which doesn't really leave him. It alleviates at times and there's a point where it appears to have gone from his life, but it doesn't really leave him, he's always got a modicum of guilt. Which kind of weighs him down at times, but that can also make him interesting. I think part of the challenge for me as an actor is to portray someone who is guilty and a little downbeat and yet not be dull! Because that could quite easily be the trap that you fall into. There are a lot of times in the story when he's down, depressed and I think it's important that that doesn't become something that audiences want to look away from. And he's very confused as well. A lot of the time he's very confused, which is as much to do with the strange things that happen to him and the pace at which they happen to him as much as his own inner befuddlement!

What happens to him, in a nutshell?

The story starts with Arthur going to a fete in a small park, winning a cake and finding out that he wasn't supposed to have won a cake. The cake contained something secret within it. Then he gets chased by various bad guys who are in Britain representing Germany during the Second World War, and not representing in a kind of team way, but are German spies, effectively. And so it's him trying to get away from them.

How did you build his character?

I don't know whether I have a method particularly. There are things that would seem sensible to do. With this one, because it was based on a novel, it seemed worthwhile reading the novel to pick out what was useful in that. Clearly the writer, Dan Jamieson, has made an adaptation, rather than a verbatim copy of the novel, so there are things in it that may be changed or developed. So you can only look to the novel so much for context for the character. But you look at it, try and find out who he is, how old he is, where he's from, what his background is, get as much information as you can from the story and the script and then try and fill in the gaps for yourself, try and put things in, if they're required that seem to fit with the rest of it in your mind. And then you try and work out how he might behave, how he might dress, how he'd move, whether he's got an upright, athletic gait or whether he isn't quite so athletic, those kinds of things. I've tried to find a little bit of a physicalisation of the guilt he feels in that I try and feel it on my shoulders. That affects how he walks, how he moves a little. Guilt is a big part of who he is and the theme that he carries through the show, so I try to find a way of showing that. There are other things that

Left to right Chris Bianchi as Arthur Rowe & Craig Edwards as Mrs Bellairs

are to do with the particular demands of working on the set that we have. Because if you were just doing the film of it then you'd just behave like him all the time, you'd always have his physicality, but there are things... because the set has slopes, funny little steps, things like that, you have to do things physically that aren't as naturalistic as they might otherwise have been. That's an interesting thing you have to do with his character. You have to negotiate the terrain whilst still being Arthur Rowe, or showing Arthur Rowe. Climbing up the steps, over the slope, climbing through holes in metalwork, and yet it being corridors in a hotel, for example. It's a good challenge.

What do you find difficult about inhabiting the character?

You don't want the audience to look away from him, look away not because it's unspeakable or distasteful but because he's not very interesting! It's a funny one really because obviously everyone else in the play is playing very big, and I think, very entertaining and interesting characters. So you want to be interesting enough that people are interested in your story, but you don't have to try to be so interesting because the others are covering all the exciting stuff. I love it. It's a great challenge, having Arthur Rowe to play, looking at mad characters, working out ways of dealing with them. It's great fun.

What did you enjoy about inhabiting him?

Sometimes I get to do acting and it's a job where you have to play five different characters in a show and often you're just playing the outside of a character, you play almost a caricature, which is fun but it's limited in terms of how far you can go with it, and how much new stuff you can find. What's great potentially about Arthur Rowe is... because he's the only character I've got to play in the show, he's well written, he's got a lot of things that happen to him and that he does, and so there's a lot to find out, a lot to explore. That's something that I love as an actor.

Do you think he has changed by the end of the story and if so, how?

We haven't looked at the end yet in depth in rehearsals so I'm not exactly sure. My feeling is that he's at least forgiven himself in part for what he felt so guilty about. He's got less of a weight on his shoulders. He's also fallen in love again, which is a big thing for him because in some ways he was stuck in the past, that the woman that he loved was the woman that he lost, that he was guilty about her death, and he's found a new love. I don't think he'd ever forget what happened or the woman who was his wife before, but he's got something to look forward to. At the beginning of the story he didn't have anything to look forward to, and was, on one or two occasions, suicidal. By the end of the story he's got a life that will have some contentment.

The Design
An interview with Trina Bramman

What were the starting points and inspirations for the design?

London during the Blitz was a well-documented period of history, so luckily this meant that there was plenty of visual reference material for me to select from. The opening image of the story, of a quaint little fete set in the middle of bombed buildings, was a great starting point as it was such an interesting juxtaposition. So I started by collecting lots of photographic images of the aftermath of the bombing – buildings reduced to rubble with the remaining bits of skeletal framework sticking out at weird angles and with domestic items strewn amongst the mess. The people in the images seemed to be carrying on as normal, looking at books on the shelves of an almost completely destroyed library and milkmen and postmen clambering over piles of rubble, continuing their deliveries. The landscape of wreckage and destruction formed the normal everyday backdrop to life in London at that time and it became clear that a fete in the middle of it all wasn't such an unusual image after all.

I also looked at paintings by official war artists. There are some drawings by Henry Moore of people sheltering in the underground stations in which he uses sculptural, swooping lines to create a sense of the curved walls. I find it really useful to think about the sculptural qualities of images as it helps later on when I begin to work in 3D. My favourite image, which I kept returning to and which became one of the major influences for the finished design, was a pastel sketch by Graham Sutherland of a bombed lift shaft in Paddington. It's fairly abstract but looks like a crumpled, curled-over scaffolding structure, set against a vivid orange, yellow and blue burning sky.

Below are links to some of the images that inspired the design

www.portsmouthnowandthen.com/galleries-and-articles-01/images-5/blitz-bombed-002.gif

http://www.mediastorehouse.com/pictures_1226502/londoners-made-homeless-by-a-german-air-raid-during-the-blitz-world-war-ii-october-1940.html

http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2009/10/13/article-0-003B435F00000258-219_468x340.jpg

http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2009/08/17/article-1206978-0056AF8100000258-147_634x668.jpg

Henry Moore: Tube Shelter Perspective (1941)
http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=9674&tabview=image

Graham Sutherland: The City: A fallen lift shaft (1941)
http://138.38.48.36/large.php?uid=66940&sos=1

Paul Nash: The Ypres Salient by Night (1918)
http://www.iwmprints.org.uk/lowres/117/main/1/377601.jpg

How did you move towards the design?

The first thing I did was to take all my images and group them together into a few big collages that I could stick on the walls around me as I worked. I grouped them into people, wreckage, paintings and specific locations that crop up during the play (such as nursing homes, fetes and train stations). Then I sat looking at them for quite a long time trying to decide what it was about these particular images that interested me. I began making lots of very rough charcoal scribbles, just copying some of the shapes that jumped out at me, such as the skeletal bits of broken roof rafters and girders, the curved Tube station walls and train station roofs, the heaped piles of bricks –combining them and adding rough, human forms to see how they would look against the shapes. This was a shorthand way of trying to get an idea of composition – the 2-dimensional, front-on picture I wanted to find – and disregarding at this stage any of the practical needs of the set.

Having spent the Research and Development week working through the script with the rest of the company, I already knew certain things about what was required of the set. First it had to work as lots of different locations – various streets, a boarding house, a Tube station, a parlour, a garden, a train and so on – there were very many, so none of them could be fully filled-in, realistic locations, only hinted at – but this is quite normal with Theatre Alibi's work. Some of the other considerations were the ability to use onstage lighting that could be manipulated by the actors and the fact that there would be two musicians on stage who would need to be placed somewhere

The Final Set Model

London on Fire

appropriate and visible. We also thought it was likely that we could be quite open about where the props were placed and not necessarily try to hide them before or after they were used.

So with all this in mind I started taking the compositional shapes I had drawn and recreating them in tiny, rough, paper models (about 1:100 scale) beginning to think about how the shapes I liked could work in three dimensions and how they could be occupied by actors. When I found something I liked the general shape of, I refined it slightly by working at a bigger scale (about 1:40) with materials that might more closely resemble the textures of the finished model – cocktail sticks and kebab skewers where I thought there might be girders and bits of thin wire as crumpled bits of metal. It seemed clear that the design I was moving towards was a kind of exploded framework that could be added to with props to create the changes in location. At this stage I started feeding in the practical needs of the production. I incorporated a humped walkway that I thought might serve as a good way to journey through the space or perhaps to represent the station platform or the edge of the river or a pile of rubble to climb over, as well as providing a space underneath it where props could be stashed. Then I started looking at the higher bits of framework, adding a moving arm from which a light and the fortune-teller's tent might hang. These elements were working but it was feeling rather empty so I revisited my composition sketches and re-drew a more dynamic shape that swooped up and curled over and used this as a template to add more 'stuff' to what I already had. I added more points at which lights could hang, a couple of places where actors could get up quite high and a shelf that could act as a desk or seat or window sill. The next stage was the painstaking creation of an accurate 1:25 scale model, which was a delicate business due to the skeletal style of the design. Happy with the finished structure, I looked at colour and took the blues in the Graham Sutherland piece and used them in the structure and floor and some of his sky colours on a gauze backdrop. I decided to create echoes of the structure on the floor and backdrop by adding bits of shadowy line-work to tie the whole thing together. The final piece I added was a silhouette of a cityscape that sits behind the gauze and can be back-lit to give a sense of the rest of London looming in the background.

The Music
An Interview with Thomas Johnson

What instruments did you choose for the show and why?

Jordan Whyte with Adam Cross on sax & Nick Laughlin on Double Bass

One musician plays the double bass and the other plays a selection of wind instruments - tenor saxophone, bass clarinet and B flat clarinet. The B flat clarinet is the normal clarinet that people are familiar with and obviously the bass clarinet is a big, deep one. The tenor saxophone is the second deepest in the standard range of saxophones. I chose those instruments because I wanted a distinctly jazzy feel to this score, a Forties jazz feel. I wanted the music to have the atmosphere of smoky bars where suspicious, mysterious things are happening. Double bass and tenor sax felt absolutely appropriate, with the double bass being plucked, doing walking lines and with smoky tenor sax over the top. That was my starting point in approaching the music but then I thought, I don't just want the score to be that, I want it to have other, more classical sounds. The double bass is really useful for that because you can bow it like a cello and suddenly it changes from a jazz instrument into a classical instrument. And then with the clarinets and bowed double bass I had a completely different texture to saxophone and bass. Also, the bass clarinet is a really deep instrument and I was excited by the idea of having a bowed bass growling down at the bottom and adding another really growly, deep instrument. You can get some extremely ominous, scary sounds with those two instruments and I was thinking from the outset about the section in the story when the German bombers come over. Bowed bass and bass clarinet can make the scary rumbling of German bomber aircraft very effectively. Originally I was just going to have bass clarinet and tenor sax as wind instruments, then I realised I might be painting myself into a corner because all those instruments are really deep. So, quite late in the day, I decided I needed a B flat clarinet as well, so that I had the option to go high. And now, about three weeks into the process I'm really glad I made that decision. Otherwise the score could have ended up quite stodgy. The high clarinet gives all sorts of other textures. It gives us real tension. It can do screaming things that the bass clarinet could never do.

Are there any other particular influences on the music for this show?

There are two distinctly different palettes that I was working from in the score for this show. One is smoky jazz. I've been listening to a bit of Charlie Parker and Duke Ellington, all that Forties jazz, and a bit of big band stuff. There's a madness to some big band music, an eccentricity. I've borrowed a bit of that big band madness for the part of the story when Rowe is going through the corridors of the Regal Hotel. There's lots of lovely stuff to use from the 1940s. But the other palette I'm working with is *film noir*. The scores of Bernard Herman, who wrote the music to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and *Cape Fear*, have a fantastically dark feel, an archetypal murder-mystery sound. I wanted to use some of that epic, heightened sound for the score in this show because it feels appropriate for the story. I also went on YouTube and looked for English brass bands because in the opening scene of the show I wanted to do a version of a brass band for the garden fete. Because the actors are creating the garden fete themselves physically, I wanted them to create the soundscape as well. I didn't want it to be created by the musicians, I thought it would much more fun to have the actors do the whole lot. And also, the beginning of the book is so odd and surreal, I wanted to contribute with the music to that surreal feeling in the show. I think having the actors being a brass band adds to the sense of dislocation that Rowe feels. Also, a key to my approach has been that Graham Greene calls the book an "entertainment". A lot of my musical choices have been with that in mind. I wanted to find various ways of the music being overtly entertaining. Hopefully, that first section with the brass band is funny as well as everything else. That's also why I've gone quite boldly for different genres. I want the audience to enjoy the "heightened-ness" of the film-noirish music and to enjoy the smoky jazz of the other bits. All the choices I'm making are one notch higher than they might normally be in scoring a play.

Solving a Moment
The Séance

In the show, Mrs Bellairs holds a séance at her house. Everyone sits round an oval table, holds hands and waits for a voice from beyond the grave. This presented a number of problems to stage. A table to seat six people is a large piece of furniture to get on and off stage at all easily. And once you've got the table on stage, how do you sit six characters round it so that the audience have a clear view of what's going on? Sit everyone round evenly and the audience will be presented with a row of backs downstage. Shift everyone to the back of the table and they can't hold hands in a circle, as the time-honoured lore of séances says you must to get through to the nether world. Also, Mrs Bellairs turns out the lights, also a séance tradition. The scene could be played in "stage darkness", some sort of half-light, to suggest darkness but let you see what is going on. But a murder is committed in the dark and for the purpose of the story we don't want to reveal how, or by whom. And yet we *do* want to see Arthur Rowe's face to appreciate the emotional turmoil he's going through.

In the R&D we hit on an idea that solved both the issue of sightlines and of getting a table on stage. Why not tilt the table to give the audience the sense that they are looking down on it from above? The characters behind the table would need to be raised up on the set so that they could be seen over the top edge of the table. The actor downstage would have to crouch or even lie on the ground so we could see over his head. Everyone could hold hands and be seen by the audience. And if the table needed to tilt, surely the legs would be a hindrance. Why not just use a table top? This could be brought on and off stage and manipulated by the actors more easily. They would need to hold the table between them though, using elbows, knees and waists. Actually, in practice, this turned out to be perfectly possible.

The whole cast

We imagined in the R&D that the table would start flat at the beginning of the scene then the change of perspective would happen when Mrs Bellairs turned out the light. However, in rehearsals it felt better to see the table tilted from the outset, allowing the audience to enjoy the visual game of altered perspective from the start of the scene. When the lights go out we keep a tight spot of bluish light on Arthur Rowe who is sitting at the top of the table. This small pool of faint light reveals his face and the hands of his immediate neighbours but no more. When the lights go on, the murdered Mr Cost is discovered slumped across the table.

However, this solution had created a new problem. At this moment in the story, nearly all the characters leave the table. How was it to be held up by the dead man, Cost, and Miss Pantil? We tried to work out a way for them to hold it between them but it was difficult and looked obvious that they were supporting it. Finally, we placed the dead Cost slumped behind the table out of sight when the lights went on, not across the table. This gives the characters a reason to move the table out of the way to reveal the corpse. Willi Hilfe whisks the table top off stage without the audience noticing particularly, because their attention is led at that moment towards the body and the action surrounding it.

Practitioner Fact File

The Director

Name: Nikki Sved

Why did you choose to be a director?

I was more interested initially in being a performer. But at university everyone got a chance to direct and it was then that I discovered that I could do it and I liked it, and that my interest in performing informed my directing. I carried on performing when I left university, but I think the lifestyle of a director began to appeal to me more and more – having to sell yourself day to day as a performer didn't appeal to me very much. I would have found it difficult. Also, it's easier as a director to follow your own path artistically. I'm now the Artistic Director of Theatre Alibi.

How old were you?

I went to a drama group once a week from the age of seven to eighteen. I decided to be a performer then! It was at university when I was about twenty that the thought of directing entered my head, although I was given a bit of Twelfth Night at school to direct when I was fifteen and I really enjoyed that.

Where/how did you train?

As I said, I belonged to a drama group, which was run by an inspirational woman. I was in school plays, did Drama O Level, Theatre Studies A level, and a degree in Drama at Exeter University. My training as a performer continued at Alibi – we got the opportunity to work with an inspirational Polish theatre company called Gardzienice, and I learnt on the job from Alibi's then Artistic Directors, Alison Hodge and Tim Spicer.

What's your role in the process of making a show?

The writer drafts generates several different ideas for a show and I help choose the best one to develop. Then I read initial versions of the script and comment on them. After that, I start thinking about what means we might use to tell that story - what sort of music we might draw on, what the set should be like, how we would people the show, what sort of actors we ought to be using. Then I cast the actors. You find actors in a mixture of ways. Sometimes you're lucky enough to have worked with people that you think will be just right. Sometimes you see someone in a show who you think will be just right. So, I bring things together prior to rehearsal – people and resources.

Before we go into rehearsals, there's a Research and Development process. It's a bit like a playtime. We spend a week working on an early draft of the script with the actors, the writer and the designer when we try out ideas to see if they will work. It's a really nice time ahead of rehearsals when we can try things out and if they fail miserably, it doesn't matter at all. You can take risks and try things that you've never tried before. It's a scary job making a piece of theatre. That fear can be unhelpful creatively. So, a Research and Development week is a way of freeing things up and allowing yourself to make more exciting and interesting decisions. As a director, I select which bits we're going to work on. I choose what seem to be key, defining moments that set the tone for the whole show. Also we tackle moments that beg a theatrical solution, things that you wouldn't imagine could be put on stage.

Between the R&D and the rehearsal process I discuss things with the writer that came up in the R&D. The other key bit of work that happens between the R&D and rehearsals is working with the designer to develop the design. It's helpful to have the designer on board from very early on in the process. Our particular style of work means that the action on stage is very integrated with the set. This requires close collaboration between the director and designer. As a director I have to think very practically about what has to happen on stage. That's a good input to the design process.

During the rehearsal process itself, a lot of the things I do are the same as in the R&D. I'm selecting what to work on and when, making sure we get through the material in time. I'm co-ordinating and bringing together all the elements, keeping my eye on the whole picture. Although people are throwing in ideas all the time, it's me who gets to say yes or no to them, because it's helpful to have one person doing that. In the end I would probably never say no to an idea if lots of people were saying yes, because I trust the people that I work with. Also, it's my job to put my own ideas in. The other thing that I do in the rehearsals is to develop performances – I help the actors to access a performance, to

find the ways that characters show how they are feeling, and to discover who the characters are. My job is also to stage the scenes, to work out how to show the action in the script, but also basic things like how to get a chair off stage at the end of a scene.

Toward the end of rehearsals you have the tech week when you add the technical elements to the show. I make decisions with the lighting designer and the sound designer about how sound and light will work from moment to moment. Because I've been in rehearsals with the actors I know and understand the scenes. The lighting designer will have a very particular skill in terms of, say, having a sense of colour on stage but he doesn't know the show as well as I do. So, in the tech, we marry the two things together – it's a very intense and hefty job.

Once the show's opened, my job is a matter of looking at how it works with the whole additional element of audience response. You learn a huge amount from having an audience there. Often they respond in an entirely different way to how you expect. I'm in the luxurious position of being able to watch the audience and the show. I'll watch and make notes over several nights, then we give ourselves time to make some changes in response to those first few performances. After that, I'll be a baby-sitter for the show – I'll go out and see it several times on tour. Often shows get better and better as actors get to know it. It's also possible for things to go off the boil. So I go out on the tour now and again and give notes to the actors, which helps keep the show alive for them.

What is particular about working for Theatre Alibi?

How the work is generated in the rehearsal room feels very particular. The storytelling is very particular too, if not unique. We try to make shows where we enjoy what live theatre can offer us. You often see images being constructed rather than it happening in secret. We never switch off the lights to change the set (which often makes life difficult!). We really enjoy revealing the transformations from actor to character and from location to location. We also draw on a particularly wide breadth of forms – music, film, puppetry, our set designs are quite sculptural.

The Composer / Musical Director

Name: Thomas Johnson

Why did you choose to be a composer/MD?

I studied English Literature at university. I'd specialised in Drama, but completely from an academic point of view. And I hadn't actually done any theatre at all prior to that. But I've been a musician since I was six years old. I came out of university thinking, "What the hell do I do now?" By pure chance my cousin was working with a touring circus that summer and he said, "Do you fancy just joining in for a laugh for the summer?" My cousin and I had been playing music together since we were children so I thought yeah, why not, it'll be good fun to do that for a while after college. So I went and toured the South West of England with the circus, with my cousin, playing mad music. At the end of that summer it just came together in my mind that I'd been really interested in Drama from an academic perspective at University for three years and I'd been a musician since I was six, but doing music with this circus just made something happen in my brain. I thought, this is what I want to do – I want to do theatre in a practical sense but bring my musical skills and experience to bear.

How old were you?

I was twenty-four, something like that.

Where did you train?

I did English at Oxford University, but I had no formal music training as a composer. I started on the violin at the age of six. I went through the process of a classical training. Then, when I was twelve, I bought a guitar and taught myself how to play. Much later when I was 24 or so, I learnt the accordion for a theatre show, and I've ended up playing the accordion quite a lot since then. But fiddle is my first instrument still.

What's your role in the process of making a show?

The first thing I do is read the script. Not particularly carefully, just read it to get the general sense of it. Then I have to decide what musical instruments to use. That's the very beginning of the job and in a way it's harder than it sounds. Within that decision I start also to think about the style – whether or not there's going to be period music, whether or not it's going to be geographically specific to where the play is set, is it going to have a folky feel, a classical feel, a jazzy feel, talking very broadly. Then I have to find the musicians and employ them, which takes ages. This is all quite a long way ahead of time, before the production starts to rehearse.

Then I'll read the script again, but very much more thoroughly this time, so I really get the shape and rhythm of it. I'm looking at this point for where the music should go in the play, picking moments where I think there's a gear change in the dynamic of the play, the rhythm of it. I go all the way through the script marking where music goes and also what it might feel like, "This paragraph might be clarinet and mandolin, that bit might be a soprano sax solo." While I'm doing that I start to get a sense of different themes that build up throughout the whole show. And I'll start to make those decisions when I read the script. I'm not particularly thinking what the music is at that point, more like titles. That's all done before we start rehearsing.

When we start rehearsing, I write the music. I don't write any music until the first day of rehearsals because I want the music to be completely integral to the whole process. I don't want to go off on a tangent that isn't useful for the show, so I make sure I'm constantly writing music in response to what I'm seeing in rehearsals. Writing the music can take up to four or five weeks. The writing process is a combination. First I'll sit in rehearsals watching the actors work with the director, taking notes about how long scenes are lasting, the feel of the scenes and how the music might work. Then I'll go away and write some music and teach it to the musicians and help them find the right interpretation. Then the musicians and I will go in to the rehearsals and place music into a particular scene. That happens back and forth through the whole rehearsal process.

There comes a point when you've got to the end of the play when you go back to the beginning and tighten it all up. The director does that as well, but my job is to make all the music sound nice and make sure the actors and the musicians know how the music works with the text. Also, I tighten up all the cue points and make sure it's all flowing with a really good rhythm.

Then the show opens and my job after the show opens is to take thousands of notes. That's to help the musicians and the actors know where they're making mistakes, whether a particular piece of music could be louder or whether they could hold back the moment to start it, for example, lots of really detailed things. I'll do that on the first and second night. Then I'll come back half way through the tour and do another load of notes and then that's the end of my job!

What is particular about working for Theatre Alibi?

It's a lovely company to work with. Very friendly. Very organised. There's a lot of technical support, a lot of people around to help you. Sometimes I'm working with a company and I feel in a bit of a vacuum. There might not be anyone who can go out and find me CDs or a piece of music I want to hear, for example. There's a lot of support at Alibi.

Stylistically, I suppose, Alibi is much more a storytelling company than most companies I've worked with. Which is interesting for me, because it's subtly different to what I'm used to. I find that exciting.

The Designer

Name: Trina Bramman

Why did you choose to be a designer?

It was when I was looking for university courses. I was doing my Art and Design foundation course, and I had to choose something to do. I'd already decided that I wanted to do something artistic. It wasn't so much that I desperately wanted to be a theatre designer, I looked through prospectuses and the course jumped out at me. I was interested in working big, and I was also interested in making models, and when I went to visit some of the courses, I could see they were making scale models and I was entranced by them – there's something magic about

scale models. Also, I saw them working on big puppets on one of the courses, big body puppets. The variation between the styles that you work in appealed to me. It seemed you could do virtually anything.

How old were you?

I would've been 19. That was during my Foundation year – 18, 19? I always knew I wanted to do an artistic job. I was good at other things too, but I liked Art most.

Where did you train?

Nottingham Trent University. I did a three-year degree course in Theatre Design. It gives you a chance to test your skills in all areas of theatre design – costume, lighting, propmaking. Also, you do a placement, which gives you a chance to go and work in the business. I did my placement at Komedia in Brighton working on a children's show similar to the ones I've done at Alibi, on a similar scale. We were in a church hall, working until two o'clock in the morning, so I was used to the hours before I even started earning money as a designer!

What's your role in the process of making a show?

My role is to create everything that you can see on the stage, apart from the lighting. I work alongside the director, the musical director, the writer, the lighting designer, the actors and the musicians. It's a collaborative thing – we work off each other. We're all working together at the same time, and I take on their ideas as they work with what I give them. I create the world of the show.

The first stage is getting the script and reading it. The first thing I do is just read it for fun. You can't help but see things in it the first time. But the second time I might do little sketches in the side of the script, just things that come to mind. You start to think about the problems it throws up, the things that seem impossible to create on stage. There are always things that seem impossible.

Then we all get together as a team, all the people who are going to be working on it, and spend a week looking at the difficult bits of the script, seeing how we can solve things. During that week I do little, private sketches that I don't show anyone. Also I note down the ideas that come up, if they need a chair or a platform, for example – practical things that get worked into the show, not so much aesthetic things at that point. Things that I need to take into consideration.

At the end of the Research and Development week I have a meeting with the writer and the director to discuss where the design might go visually. Then I go away and panic and start drawing things on the train on the way home, making sure I haven't forgotten anything, writing things down. Then I start coming up with the first ideas. That's usually drawings to begin with. I begin by drawing really loose sketches that no-one else would probably understand, and then I start making little models. I talk these through with the director and the writer just as a first stage and then go away again – there's a lot of working and reworking. When I've got a more definite model to show, I go through the script with the director and see how the set that I've designed might work for each part of the show.

Then it's refining it and finalising it and getting together technical drawings ready for it to be built. I also liaise with the painter about the textures and colours I want. Then we go into rehearsals. It goes mad from then on because we start making things and just getting on with it.

What's particular about working for Theatre Alibi?

The fact that we all start production time together and the production team are making the props and costumes at the same time as the actors and director are creating. So we don't know about our last bit of making until the actors have finished their last bit of making. We always have a good whinge about this but it makes the whole thing more vibrant, more interesting. They're not just props that you don't care about, they're important things, key things and it's nice as a maker and a designer to be working that way. If we just made all the props before rehearsals started the quality wouldn't be as good because a lot of the decisions are made in collaboration with everything else that's going on. If you made things beforehand they wouldn't serve the action so well. I don't know how many other companies get that luxury. The design team make lots of compromises dependent on what the action needs, which is very different to rep theatre, where the design process is very separate.

Stagecraft
A Mysterious Stranger Visits Rowe at his Lodging House

Near the beginning of the show, Arthur Rowe is visited at his lodging house by a mysterious new resident, Poole. Poole seems very interested in the cake that Rowe won at a garden fete the previous day. He appears to want it at any cost and finally tries to poison Rowe to get it. Rowe is saved when his house is demolished by a German bomb and he escapes unhurt.

It was clear from the outset that this scene was full of narrative ingredients. Not only is our protagonist visited by a murderous German spy, but the whole event is underscored by an air raid that finally destroys Rowe's house. During our week of Research and Development we played with how the actors could build the picture around the central encounter between Rowe and Poole. We were already trying ways that the actors could sometimes be the ordinary people of London, the innocent bystanders to our story. Throughout the show, whenever they aren't playing characters, they often inhabit the stage as a chorus of anonymous Londoners, scuttling about their daily lives under the threat of the Blitz. As well as giving a feel of the broad context in which the story happens, they could also heighten the feeling of what was going on at key moments.

In this scene we played with keeping the chorus in the background to give a sense of all the other people across London subject to the same air raid. They sit and drink cups of tea like Rowe and Poole, looking fearfully up at the sky as the sirens start and the bombs fall. In the R&D we tried using the chorus to make the air raid as much as possible too. They made the wail of the sirens with their voices, they searched the sky with torches as if they were searchlights, they made the booms of the bombs by drumming on the furniture and rattled their teacups to show the shockwaves of the explosions. Much of this imagery remains in the show.

The ingredients in the scene now comprise

Light – the encounter between Rowe and Poole happens in a contained area of dingy, nicotine-coloured light centre stage. This is provided by two fresnels out on the front-of-house bar gelled with a chocolate colour (158), two toplights also gelled with the chocolate and backlight gelled with full C.T. orange (208). To find them on the lighting plan, the FOH fresnels are circuits 27 and 28, the toplight is circuit 113 and the backlight is circuit 214. The margins around this area are shadowy but the gauze cyclorama upstage shows a stylized silhouette of the city skyline picked out by three floodlights gelled red (circuits 602,603 and 605) as the air-raid progresses. Upstage, from the shadows, two of the actors rake the sky with "searchlights". Haze is fed in from two smoke machines stage left and right to show up the beams of the searchlights. Smoke-machines are properly known as hazers and are controlled from the lighting desk on two channels, one to control the intensity of the haze, the other to control the speed at which it is blown out of the machine. Torches proved too weak as the searchlights, so now the actors have a 150 watt pin-spot each (a small theatre light with a narrow beam) to manipulate.

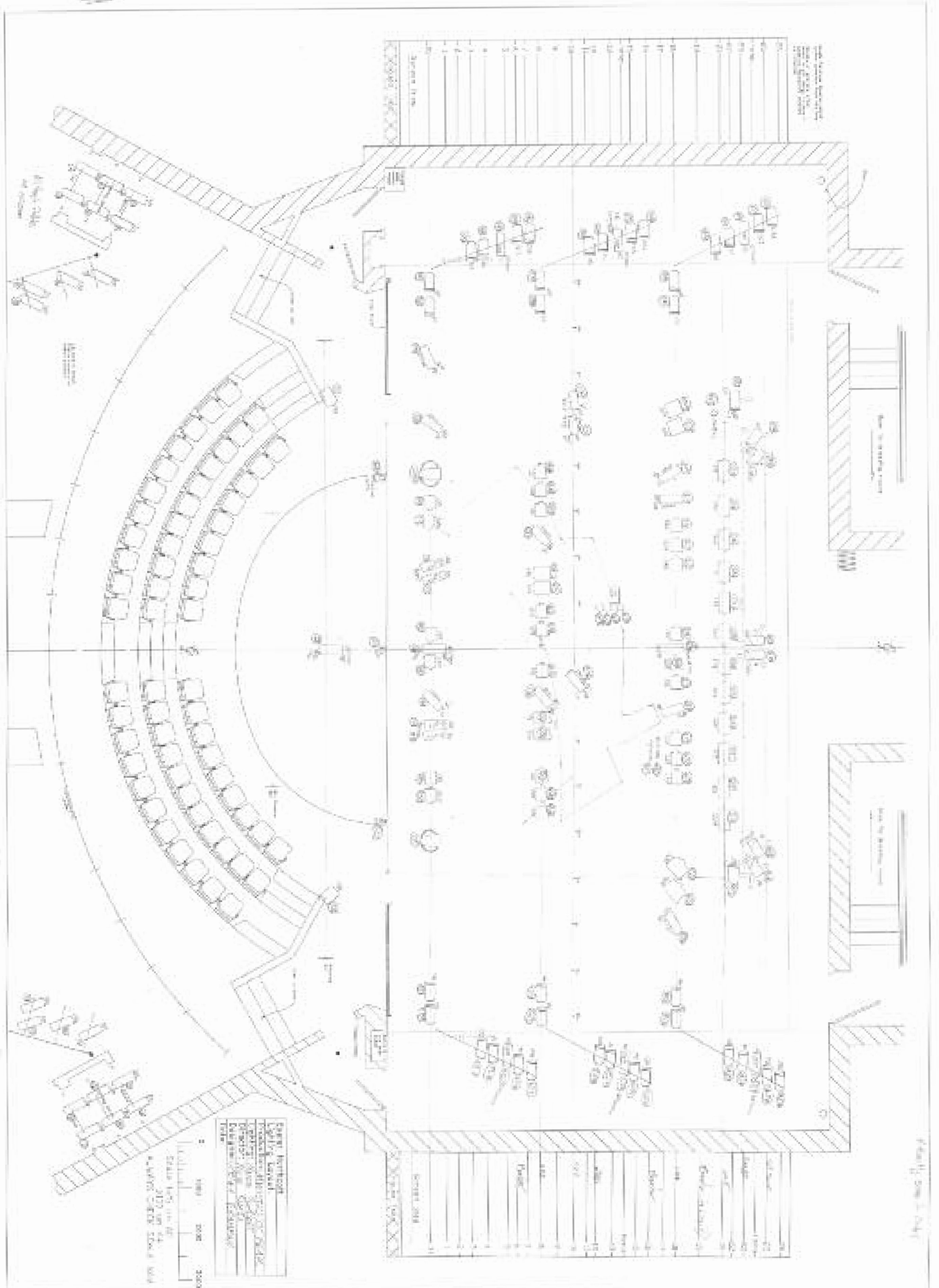
Music – the scene is underscored throughout with a rhythmic, bowed pulse on the bass to simulate the throb of bomber aircraft approaching. This sound is amplified and slightly distorted to give it a more menacing growl. The bass is joined by bass clarinet, brooding and fearfully expectant.

Sound – we hear the recorded sound of air raid sirens starting all over London. In the end the actors voices couldn't beat the eeriness of the real sound. As the air raid progresses we hear the muffled detonations of the bombs falling closer. The explosions are bassy and powerful, designed to be felt in the pit of the stomach as much as heard. The sound for the show is operated with a Q-Lab sound programme on an apple mac PC. There are five speakers on stage to provide the sound. Two are front-of-house, one stage left and one stage right, big speakers with a full range system to give a good sub-bass range to the sound (powerful deep sounds.) There are also two 350 watt Mackie speakers mid-stage left and right and one speaker upstage right near the musicians which acts as a monitor so they can hear themselves when they are amplified.

Action – Rowe and Poole carry on drinking tea and eating cake as the air raid swirls around them. In the background the chorus of Londoners drink tea and look up fearfully. After the bigger explosions they rattle their cups on their saucers with the aftershock. They also drone repeatedly, "Where are you? Where are you?" This is the question Graham Greene says the engines of the bombers seem to ask as they pass overhead.

Exeter Northcott Lighting Plan

To view A3 pdf of the lighting plan click here



Rehearsal Games and Exercises

A sense of 'play' has always been key to Theatre Alibi's approach, informing every aspect of our theatre making, from team building and warm-ups to generating, rehearsing and performing each show. Below are some of the games and exercises we use:

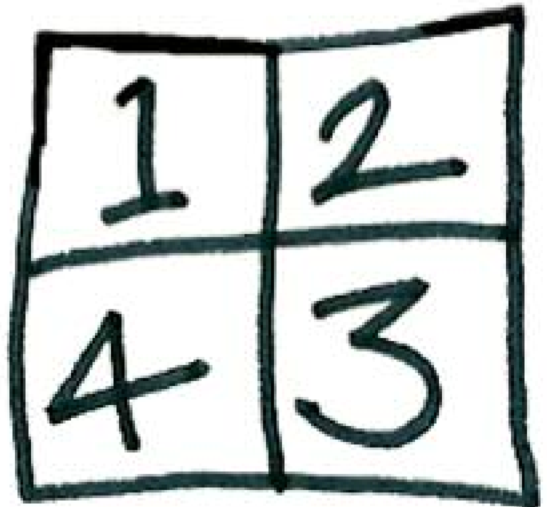
Making a Graph of the Show

We use this exercise at the beginning of rehearsals to get a sense of the shape of a show.

In small groups, spend some time thinking what is the central question the show asks the audience. The question must have a yes/no answer. For example, "Will the central character ever find happiness?" Or "Will x and y ever get together?" Or "Is Z a good person?" Or "Will Grandpa's silver watch ever be found?" etc. On a large sheet of paper draw a graph. The horizontal axis represents the sequence of events as the story unfolds. The vertical axis represents the answer to the question, with YES at the top and NO at the bottom. Draw a line on the graph to show what the audience might think at each moment in the story. You should end up with a pattern of peaks and troughs that show the shape of the show.

Four Square

Mark out a square on the floor with masking or electrical tape about four metres by four metres. Divide the square into four equal squares and number them clockwise 1,2,3 and 4. Get a large ball or football. One person stands in each small square and the rest of the players form a queue outside the big square. To play, the person in box 1 serves the ball by bouncing it once and hitting it upwards with the palm of their hand so it lands in someone else's square. That person returns the ball by hitting it upwards with the palm of their hand into another player's square and so on. Play continues until someone fails to return a shot or someone knocks the ball right out of the square. The disqualified player joins the back of the queue and a new player steps into square 4. All the other players move round clockwise towards the server.



Shoe Game

Everybody takes off their shoes – one person has them all in a pile at their feet. Stand in a circle. The player with the shoes takes one and throws it to a player on the other side of the circle. That person throws it to another player and so on until everyone has caught and thrown the shoe and it has returned to the first player. Carry on throwing the shoe in the same pattern. When everyone is used to this, player one picks up another shoe and throws it after the first, so there are two shoes travelling back and forth across the circle. Gradually player one introduces more and more shoes until, ideally, they are all in circulation.

Throw a ball behind you

To be played in groups, with one ball between you. The person who has the ball throws it over their head behind them and someone else must catch it. The aim of the game is collectively to prevent the ball touching the floor for as long as possible. The game is improved if everyone is moving around the space. Players can suggest ways in which the game may be played more effectively

Keep a ball in the air

Stand in a circle and keep the ball in the air by tapping it upwards (as in volley ball), passing it across the circle. Begin by counting collectively and see how high you can go before the ball is dropped.

A few thoughts: Don't apologise! Take your time and relax. Try not to be 'frightened' of or to 'attack' the ball. Take suggestions from participants for rules that might allow the group to keep the ball in the air for a higher count. It's a good game to return to several times over a period of time and see how skills improve.

Grandmother's Footsteps

One person (Grandmother) stands at one end of the room, facing the wall. The rest of the group stand at the other end of the room, facing Grandmother. They try secretly to approach Grandmother, who at any moment can turn around. If she sees anyone moving, they are sent back to the beginning. Try to see how far you can get away *with cheating!*

Yes Let's!

Anyone can suggest an activity and everyone shouts out "Yes Let's!" and carries out the suggestion with as much enthusiasm as they can possibly muster. No one is to suggest "Let's stop"! It's a useful game to refer back to if you're trying to remind pupils to approach suggestions with a spirit of commitment.

Touch backs of knees

Get into pairs. Each person tries to touch the other on the back of their knees, whilst avoiding being touched themselves...

Impulses

Partners face each other. One of you will be sending an impulse (A) and the other receiving (B). On an out-breath, 'A' touches 'B' on the shoulder, stomach or forehead. In response and on an out-breath, 'B' moves away the specific part of the body that has been touched and then returns to a neutral position ready for the next 'impulse'. Try to work as precisely as possible.

A point of balance

Work in pairs. Face your partner and stand with your toes almost touching. Hold each other's hands, maintain eye contact and slowly lean back until your arms are straight and you've found a point of balance. Slowly bend your knees, keep leaning out and move down until both of you are sitting on the floor. Come back to standing, while leaning out and finally draw yourselves towards each other so that you're no longer taking each other's weight. Try to complete the exercise with no talking.

Top Craig Edwards as Major Stone with Chris Bianchi as Arthur Rowe in background. Bottom Michael Wagg as Reverend Sinclair

The wrong name...

Each person walks around the room, points at objects and shouts out the wrong name for them!

Opening the door

Working individually, and on a given command, each person mimes opening a door, seeing what is behind it and responding to it. A long lost relative, a disgusting ball of slime, an adorable kitten... It's important to try not to predict what's behind the door. Surprise yourself.

One word storytelling

Tell a story in pairs. Use one word each. Don't pause. How is the game improved if you keep active? Walk around the room. Try playing a game at the same time. Mirroring? Touching the backs of knees? How does the game affect the story? Watch other pairs at play.

Keeping equidistant

Each person chooses two other members of the group. Don't say who they are. On a given command they must attempt to remain an equal distance from each of them.

Some members of the group can step out and watch if the game is repeated. Look at the quality of interaction and the movement of the group.

Text and game play

In groups of two or three write a love scene, preferably with some element of conflict. Keep it simple, just two or three lines each.

Once everyone is secure with their lines, try playing a game while speaking. Allow the game to influence the speaking of the lines. Really *play* the game, don't show it.

Try out different games. What effect do they have? Try contrasting games – very still ones perhaps or ones that need a great deal of movement. Do they illuminate the text in a particular way? Select the game or games that work best and show your piece to the rest of the group.

You might want to use this as an acting exercise, using the game play as part of the rehearsal process working towards a more naturalistic version. Remove the game but ask the actors to work with the memory of having played it

You may choose to use the game play to inform staging or indeed as part of a devising process that incorporates games as part of the finished piece.

Another option is to use game play that isn't necessarily obvious to an audience (for example games that use eye contact) as a means of maintaining genuine interaction between performers.

Props becoming different things

Select a prop and use it as something different, so a toy spade can become a dagger or a turnip can become a ticking bomb! Limiting your means creatively can squeeze you into being inventive and playful.

Suggested Reading

Theatre Games	Clive Barker
Impro	Keith Johnstone
Impro for Storytellers	Keith Johnstone
101 Drama Games	David Farmer