

FACTFILE:

GCSE DRAMA

Components 1 & 2



Set Design and Artistic Director

Component 1 – Devised Performance.

During the process of creating, developing and realising your set design for the devised performance, you should compile a file of evidence which can be used in your presentation to accompany the final set. This document indicates the type of evidence which you should include.

Learning Outcomes

Create Ideas

Design students should be able to create ideas by researching the following:

- The pre-release material;
- The professional practice of creating a set;
- The materials and resources for developing set ideas; and
- A range of genres, design styles and practitioners.

The Pre-Release Material

As a set design student you will work with a group of between 2 and 6 students to choose one stimulus from a choice of 3, for the development of your devised performance. After research of the chosen stimulus, you will begin to work on the development of your set ideas for the group devised performance. It may take some time for your group to decide on specific performance so it is very important to be patient and to contribute to the discussion which will lead to the final outcome. At this stage it is vital that you have researched set design ideas so that the input to the group gives you scope to develop your final set design.

What is Set Design?

Anyone who has ever watched a play has most likely noticed the background at some point during the performance. The background setting in a play generally lends a certain air or feel to it which usually makes a performance believable and adds to the story.

Set design, which is sometimes referred to as scenic design, refers to the design and creation of the sets used in a play on stage.

The primary function of a set is to provide the audience with some context for the play but it can also be an opportunity for a designer to create something exciting and original to draw in the audience. It is most important for a designer to begin with the ideas which might be written by the playwright but then to think innovatively by finding creative ways of helping to tell the story and essentially communicate meaning for the audience.

As set designer for the devised performance you are part of a team. Not only do you have to create a concept that is in line with the director's vision but you have also to decide how it will be built, painted and decorated. The look of the stage as a whole is largely the responsibility of the set designer and it can be as interesting as your imagination and ingenuity can make it. Ultimately your stage set should significantly contribute to the effectiveness of the devised performance and to the overall success of the production.

To learn more about some of the many important moments, movements and artists in theatre history, use your web browser to research:

- Classical Greek Theatre
- Medieval theatre
- Japanese theatre
- Teatro Olimpico
- The Globe Theatre
- Castle theatre, Cesky Krumlov
- Drottningholm Palace Theatre
- Perspective Theatre Scenery
- Inigo Jones
- Adolphe Appia
- Edward Gordon Craig
- Baroque
- Bauhaus
- Modernism
- Neoclassicism
- Naturalism
- Realism

What do set designers do?

A set designer needs to begin with a brief. That is, the designer needs to design a set for a specific stage in a specific theatre. Set designers who work in traditional proscenium arch theatres may be quite constrained in their designs as they are limited to the size and shape of the stage. They may be restricted by budget and need to design a composite set which will be used for the whole of the play with some clever changes to suggest changes in time or location. Sets may need to be portable as well. Designers who are working in more modern theatres with more open stages, may have less restrictions and may be able to 'fly' their sets onto the stage from the fly tower above the stage.

A set designer usually begins the process by reading the script paying particular attention to the settings and background descriptions. This will predict what type of sets are required in the design for the play. Collaborating with other members of the production team is a vital part of the set designer's job. A set designer will usually discuss the sets with the director in order to create settings which will help to create and enhance the look and feel of a production. Set designers will usually collaborate with lighting technicians, prop makers and builders, among others.

Research is another extremely important part of a set designer's job. Creating sets for plays which are written in different time periods will require extensive research using books, photographs, as well as online research and YouTube. Contemporary sets also require similar research to ensure the location is accurately and authentically represented. After initial research a set designer will usually make some basic sketches to reflect their thoughts on how the set might look. While doing this they need also to adhere to a budget for

materials and labour costs in the building process. Once a director has approved the sketches, the specific detail can then be refined with measurements so that the builders can follow a building plan. At this stage a set designer will usually build a 'model stage', which represents a scaled-down 3-dimensional replica of the actual set and will often include model characters in proportion to the model.

Drawing and communication skills are very helpful skills for a set designer so that the set reflects the director's thoughts but allows the designer the opportunity to use their creative potential to design unique sets, within budget, with details which add authenticity to the play and communicate the playwright's intentions and meaning for the audience.

Requirements for Set Design students Component 1

A01; Create and develop ideas to communicate meaning for a theatrical performance

In their 5–7 minute presentation, set design candidates must:

- explain their design concept;
- present a summary of research on the pre-release stimulus, influences from design styles and professional practice;
- discuss initial ideas and explain, with reference to materials and resources, how these were shaped from research into final design;
- explain how their final design product contributed to the effectiveness of the devised performance; and
- explain how their final stage set communicated meaning in the devised performance.

The final design will be used for the devised performance and candidates will be assessed on the communication of meaning for theatrical performance through their presentation and the final stage set.

Component 2 – Scripted Performance

During the process of creating, developing and realising your set design for the scripted performance, you should compile a file of evidence which can be used in your presentation to accompany the final set. This document indicates the type of evidence which you should include.

Learning Outcomes

Create Ideas

Design students should be able to:

- Investigate a range of playscripts and select a script suited to the make-up of the group, taking account of their skills and preferences;
- Research the script's context including style and genre;
- Research and explore a range of appropriate materials and equipment; and
- Research professional practice in design for performance.

Investigate a range of playscripts and select a script suited to the make-up of the group, taking account of their skills and preferences.

With your group you will select a published script from a range of scripts. It should suit the number of performers and should allow you, as a set designer, the opportunity to design and create a set which will enable you to meet the assessment criteria for the component. It is important that all aspects of the script are fully discussed to ensure the choice is right for all. The script will probably contrast in style and genre to your devised performance and if you have followed a set design pathway for devised, this will be your opportunity to develop your skills in another direction. If this is your first attempt at set design, ensure that the script allows you to evidence your skills.

Research

Context, style and genre

The context for a script relates to the facts or circumstances that surround the play. It is important that the context is researched and understood by the director, performers and designers. The context is generally defined in terms of the social, cultural and historical background of the play.

Social Context

The social context is linked to the period or time in which a play is written and generally defines the characters as being of working, middle or upper class. External influences which impact on the play are also part of the social context and can include factors such as war, social unrest or the living conditions of the time.

Cultural Context

Cultural context is about how the values and attitudes of the period can affect the behaviour of the characters in the play. The ethnic origins of the characters can also have an impact on how they speak and behave and the development of the plot. Cultural context can range from a play having royal patronage to the influences of comprehensive education.

Historical Context

The historical context is the background to the period of time in which the play is set and refers to what is happening in terms of the political climate which may affect the characters and the plot as well as the influence of actual historical events.

Style

Style can be defined as how the play is performed and communicated to an audience and can include ideas such as over-exaggeration, stillness high energy and physicalisation. Practitioners can also be referred to in terms of defining style including the work of Brecht, Stanislavski or Berkoff. An example of Physical Theatre style would be the work of the local theatre company, Bruiser.

Genre

Genre refers to the category or type of theatre which is being presented. A play cannot always be defined as one specific genre but is generally based on comedy and/or tragedy and developed under those two broad headings. 'Naturalism' developed as an authentic and natural setting and acting genre and was a direct reaction to Victorian melodrama while 'realism' refers to a 'slice of life' and realistic acting and may require limited or no set. This is now described as a 'non-naturalistic' genre.

Learning Activity

Once your group have chosen the script for performance, consider the following:

- The social, cultural and historical context of the script;
- The style and genre of the script; and
- How the context, style and genre will influence your designs.

Begin by drawing some initial designs which can be discussed with the group and make notes as you develop your ideas and improve your drawings until you are at the stage when you can begin to build your model stage.

Many scripts will have specific directions and ideas for the set which have been written by the playwright. These may not all be suitable for the stage on which your group are performing and of course there will be a budget to consider but you must begin your design by adhering to the playwrights suggestions.

You should develop collages of materials also at this stage for display purposes and discussion with the director, other designers (lighting and costume) and your chief technical personnel. Be sure to clearly note historical periods (whether original or in a new interpretation of a classic work) and discuss visual interpretations with costume and lighting designers well before you start to build your set.

All set designers will create some sort of 3-dimensional model and for the purposes of GCSE drama, the student will be required to:

- sketch initial ideas for the set of Scripted Performance;
- create a scale model or present sketches/photographs for the final set of the scripted Performance;
- apply use of materials, colour, shape and texture;
- communicate meaning and realise artistic intentions; and
- present the set design in performance for an audience.

For more information about set design for students visit;
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/z39x34j/revision>

Creating a Model Stage

A scale model should be a solidly constructed semi-permanent representation of the performance space using foam core base and museum board/card to reflect the dimensions of the stage from an accurately scaled proscenium to wings, backstage, cyclorama, back walls, rake/floor incline and most important exits and entrances. The standard model stage should be 1 :24 or a quarter inch for each foot.

Material you will need for your model stage set:

- pencils, pens, paints and erasers;
- set-square;
- foam board for base;
- styrofoam for carving/sculpting shapes;
- sculpting tools (range of cutting knives);
- museum board, illustration board, card stock;
- masking tape, PVA glue;
- scrap materials for curtains, wings, tabs etc.;
- miniature dollhouse or model scale furniture; and
- 3D printed elements for backdrops etc.

When creating a full box set, (for example for a school stage) don't forget to create accurate scale for materials such as curtains, drapes, borders and tabs and use actual materials which may be backed with card. The model box should be painted with matte black paint unless your design demands a specific colour. Using the same dimensions as those of the stage, sketch and cut the set and major elements of the foreground using simple card stock.

Requirements for Set Design students Component 2 – Scripted Performance

A02: Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions in performance

Set

The candidate is assessed on their presentation and on **the set design** in performance, including the use of materials and equipment in the realisation of the design.

In their 5-7 minute presentation, candidates must include 4 sections and show:

In Section 1 – **a design concept**.

This should show all set requirements for the performance taking account of the background, style and genre of the script:

In Section 2 – **a rationale for the set**

This should include how the candidate decided on a specific concept from a range of ideas and the reasoning for the selected choice. It should also include research ideas on choice of style to reflect mood and context:

In Section 3 – **an outline of the process**

In this section the student should be able to show the development process from concept to realisation and the reasoning as to how that concept communicates the meaning and artistic intentions of the text. It should include sketches and/or photographs of the ideas and the process:

In Section 4 – **a model set**

This section reflects the thinking process and realisation of the final design into a £d model stage built to scale and functional for the group to see how the performance will operate on the stage.

Useful Links

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/z39x34j/revision>

<http://stageandscreendesignireland.ie/designers>

www.andywalmesley.com

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/job-profiles/set-designer>

www.stageone.co.uk/events

<http://www.theatredesign.org.uk/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2015/mar/10/how-to-become-a-theatre-designer>

Professional Practice

Local Set Designer – Stuart Marshall

Stuart Marshall lives in Belfast and is a design graduate of the University of Ulster. He works as a designer and a scenic artist and his work has been seen across Ireland, the UK, the USA, Australia and the Far East. He has worked with a wide variety of local theatre companies and venues and in particular has had a long association with the Lyric Theatre, with over 75 designs there since 1993. He was a founding member of Prime Cut Productions and has designed many local and Irish premiers for the company.

Since 2010 he has been a visiting lecturer in Technical Theatre at Queen's University, introducing students to set design and collaborating with them on productions.

In 2014 he designed the set for Bruiser Theatre Company's production of Cabaret at the Mac Theatre in Belfast.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. To view this image click on the link:
<http://stageandscreendesignireland.ie/content/uploads/2015/06/absencemodel10.jpg>

Fig 1 – 'The Absence of Women' by Owen Mc Cafferty

Lyric Theatre, Belfast 2011 – Set Design by Stuart Marshall. Two elderly men, Gerry and Iggy, look back on their working lives during the 50's and 60's in England. The set is abstract, multi-locational with a Beckett influence. It reflects the tired and jaded lives of the protagonists but also has practical aspects for the characters to sit at times on stage and allows for fluid scene changes.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. To view this image click on the link:
<http://stageandscreendesignireland.ie/content/uploads/2015/06/cabaretmodel01.jpg>

Fig 2 – ‘Cabaret’ Award-winning Musical

The Mac Theatre, Belfast 2012 – Set Design by Stuart Marshall. The set reflects 1930's Berlin, in the seedy Kit Kat Club. The design has elements of naturalism with the well-worn proscenium-arch staging reflecting the old music hall theatre but has symbolic doors of different sizes and shapes, at different levels suggesting freedom and exits but also creates the impression of being trapped.

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<http://stageandscreendesignireland.ie/content/uploads/2015/06/200511SH544.jpg>

Fig 3 – 'Brendan at the Chelsea' by Janet Behan

Naughton Studio, Belfast, 2011 – Set Design by Stuart Marshall. The set is naturalistic and is functional and realistic to reflect the bohemian Chelsea Hotel which was the writing location for the playwright Brendan Behan who is the central character of the play.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. To view this image click on the link:
<http://stageandscreendesignireland.ie/content/uploads/2015/06/cabaretmodel02.jpg>

Fig 4 – ‘Cabaret’ – the Musical at The Mac, Belfast, 2014

This image shows the set during building process – Set Design by Stuart Marshall)

For more detail about Set Designer Stuart Marshall and images visit:
<http://stageandscreendesignireland.ie/designers>

How did you get started in the set design industry?

I suppose my career started when I was at school. I went to Methodist College, Belfast and was inspired and encouraged by two wonderful teachers – Kieran Pope, my art teacher and Joan Mc Pherson, my drama teacher. Mr. Pope developed my creative talent and encouraged me to apply to the Art College and Ms. Mc Pherson asked me to design the set for *Guys and Dolls*. That gave me the opportunity to research Damon Runyon’s underworld of gangsters and gamblers in 1950’s New York. I also got the opportunity to create new sets for Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Mid-summer Night’s Dream*.

I then went to The Art College, Belfast and studied graphic design. During my time there I managed to get part-time work painting sets for The Lyric Theatre. This gave me so much experience. I worked for Jim Carson who had a workshop in Lanseer Street and he was building the sets for the Lyric and a range of other theatres. Every month there would be a new set and for me this was very exciting as I was learning on the job. I knew at this stage in my life that I wanted to be a set designer. With costume design, everybody seems to have an opinion about whether they are right for the character or not, as people all wear clothes and everyone seems to know so much about costumes. There is a lot of history with clothes and in a period play they need to be right. With set design you can do your research and create a set and people don’t seem to notice the set so much or have an opinion especially when you get it right. People don’t seem to notice the set when it works and I like that. I think set design is more creative and people don’t generally know a lot about sets.

I didn’t ever study set design. I just learnt the trade through a lot of experience and I feel that worked well for me. It isn’t perhaps the conventional route but it’s the one which evolved for me and shaped my future. I finished my degree at the Art College and got a job as a graphic designer with a local company but I

continued painting sets and at this stage got some work myself as a set designer. I built up a network with people in the industry and developed relationships with all the local theatre companies.

After a short time working as a graphic designer I took the plunge and went freelance as a set designer and the rest is history. With the contacts I had made I was able to get enough work to keep me busy. I have never looked back and I love my job.

Where do you start with a set design?

You start with the script. I read the text many times before I even think of the set. Very often when you meet the director he will have some ideas for the set but these are generally notional. Occasionally a director will have very clear and fixed ideas but this is quite rare. Sometimes the director will have no ideas whatsoever and will rely totally on the designer to come up with ideas. At this stage I might suggest a few ideas but I prefer to be as open as possible until the next meeting which will generally be a few weeks away. So, I begin to draw sketches and as quickly as possible and begin some research of the period of the play. I rarely keep my sketches as they are generally only scribbles. I still like going to libraries like the Linenhall and I will look at photographs in books. These might be of buildings and people of the time and I will also look at artists of the period and their work. Of course now I find myself looking on the internet but I still like to look in books at photographs, images and pictures.

Then I will build a small, rough, box set usually 1/50, which will not be the final product. I like to work as early as possible in 3D and begin to move things around. At this stage also I like to have two or three ideas which I will bring to the director. It is really important to be flexible and when I meet the director next I might start with a simple idea and make some suggestions so that hopefully the director will come up with the idea I really like and that way they will have ownership. I can use the basic box set to show the director my ideas and once the ideas have been agreed, I will build the final box set in 1/25 which for some stages can be quite large. I find it is much easier to build an original box set which will be discarded and then build a final box set. This way I find it is easier to make changes rather than have to start again.

How do you develop your initial ideas and where do you get your inspiration?

Every play suggests different lines of enquiry so I get my ideas from everywhere. I get ideas in my head at first perhaps and then try to extend the ideas into something more practical.

I remember I was asked to do the set for 'La Chunga', a South American play by Mario Vargas Llosa which is about a gambler down on his luck. I couldn't actually come up with an idea and there is no information from the playwright so I went along to the initial rehearsal and sat in while the play was being read. I tried to imagine myself in the location of the play as one of the characters and then came up with an idea. I had an image of a wall with a hole in it almost like an overhead drain and these people were living in a remote part of the world but had nowhere to go. As I listened to the script being spoken, I closed my eyes and this was the image I started with and developed into what became a working set. Usually the playwright will give you some clues at least for the number of entrances or exits which you will need and this is the practical starting point which is essential. With Shakespeare you don't even get that but at least with Shakespeare it can only be upstage right or left.

It is very dangerous to change something which the playwright has written.

The temptation is always to do something different but this is very risky.

I never look at other designs of a play. I always start from scratch and with my own ideas.

In 'Cabaret' for example there are very specific entrances/exits and locations and it is set in the Kit Kat club in 1930's Germany with some other locations. The club is a metaphor for ominous political developments of the late Weimar Germany and as the musical shows the more seedy side of life and exposes some of the harsh realities of both love and hate, I decided to expose the beams of an old faded theatre and reveal the bare beams and decaying plaster in places. I loved building a full proscenium arch on an open stage and researching the colours and textures of this period. I really enjoy detail of painting damp corners and peeling paper and adding authentic dressing and props to the set.

What are the essential ingredients of a set design?

The initial concept is the starting point. You need to know the stage for which you are designing, the space you have, the number of exits and entrances you need and the number of people who will be inhabiting the space. You could have ten people and the set needs to look isolated or you could have two characters and the space needs to look claustrophobic.

You need to know how many locations are required and if you have the budget for a composite set or a number of sets which might be flown.

You start with your basic plan and then you can add interest and then texture and colour. At all times you need to be true to the text.

How do you reflect the overall style and genre of a production?

You need to start with researching the images for the play. This is when I like to look in lots of books. Now I can type in suggestions and see what comes up. I like to create stories for the characters as to where they might live and the streets where they might walk. What was happening at that time and working tangentially often helps me to come up with ideas which will work on the set. People are very important in set design and I always put in a character from the play on the model box set which is dressed in an appropriate costume so that I can see that they will blend with the set and fit into the location. I also enjoy looking at paintings of the period which will show images of people in specific backgrounds. This really helps when it comes to adding colour.

What is the process from the initial design through to the production?

The initial talk with the director is paramount and after that, a few sketches or scribbles. Then after looking at lots of images, photographs and pictures, I will make my first basic model box stage. When I go back to the director, we agree the final design concept. I will then build the final model box stage with all the detail and furniture and added characters and at the next meeting there might be a 'what about if?' and also I might need to talk to the lighting designer about colours and even to the costume designer about a costume getting through a door or maybe a short costume on a high level platform or perhaps some movement which is required on different levels on the stage. Generally at this stage in the process everything has been set and it is just a matter of ironing out a few problems.

At this point the problems can be budget. Sometimes the set has to be trimmed back because of costs but you can sometimes find some money from the props budget or another source especially if the director wants to have all the detail of the set included. This has just happened at the panto at the Waterfront. The director wanted to use all my ideas and found the money by saving somewhere else. Set dressing can add a lot of expense and the marketing people can sometimes find sponsorship or persuade shops to lend items in return for some advertising in the programme. Also it helps if you have people who can source items for you as it is very time-consuming but very rewarding to find set dressing and detail which will add to the overall concept. This was very important in a recent production of *Educating Rita* which was set in a study in Queens University which was filled with Frank's memorabilia and personal items which he had collected over a number of years and which Rita could not initially appreciate.

Do you always make a model stage and what materials do you use?

Yes, I always have a set box. The initial box will be thrown away and the final product which is made to scale will be used by the set builder and the production team.

I start with MDF for the floor and then start building with foam-board, mounting board and thick card for the main set. I will use PVA glue to put it together and maybe sand paper for carpet or sometimes polystyrene for unusual shapes. I also use modelling clay at times which I will fire in the oven. Card is used for furniture and sometimes matchstick wood for legs of chairs or scaffolding etc. Materials from model railways are great for outdoor scenes and materials from dolls' house collections can also sometimes be useful. I can download images for wall pictures or for the cyclorama and can print scaled-down wallpaper. I always include at least one 3D figure made in scale to the set, usually in a pose, to create a living character that will inhabit the scene. Everything will be painted using the actual paint for the stage. Bits of fabric and material are also useful in the model stage.

How involved are you with building, painting and dressing the set?

I don't usually build the set but will always paint and dress it and make all the props. I like to get on to the set as soon as possible and as soon as a section is built I will start to paint. It is much easier when the set is being built in a workshop and then dismantled, brought to the stage and all the detail and finishing touches are added. Sometimes it is built on the stage and all the painting and detail is then added. Some designers simply design and walk away but I am always hands on through to the final phase and as close to curtain up. Sometimes I will go back and add detail during the previews.

I use ordinary household emulsion matt paint or sometimes I will send for scenic paint. Sometimes I will mix my own colours or sometimes send online for specific paint. It is always water based with high pigment content and of course fire resistant as health and safety are very important. All fabrics on stage need to be fire-retardant.

The set is usually made of ply or MDF and needs an initial coat of paint, usually white before the colour is added and then sometimes enhanced or changed. Canvasses are used less and less but are still a great fabric for backdrops.

How important is set design to the initial impact?

Most stages are now open stages without a curtain and so when the audience come in they are looking at the set for ten minutes before the play begins. They immediately get an idea about what the play and the concept and period. This will often have a subliminal effect on the audience as they don't consciously analyse the set when they come in but just let it happen as a backdrop to the play. A good set will capture the image of the play and hopefully draw the audience into the stage when the lights go down in the auditorium. When the play starts, the audience should not be surprised or distracted by the set but be able to concentrate and focus on the acting as the set pales into the background.

How does the set design add to the overall meaning of the play?

A set should not have a special effect on the production. It is there to serve the play. Audiences should not come out of a play saying, 'it was a great set'. The set should work with the play and for the play and I think if you don't notice it significantly, then it is working well and obviously adding to the overall understanding and meaning. The set should enhance the meaning and not change it.

It should be the same for lighting and sound and we should work as a team by helping each other to blend together with our ideas. The lighting can sometimes be toned up or down in the final dress rehearsals rather than change the colour of the set which is now fully dressed and functional.

If it is a minimalistic or abstract set then it is important to look at the overall space and shape for balance and aesthetic effect. This is especially important when there are different levels involved and sometimes clearer exits and entrances need to be made. Stage markings can then be used to position furniture and other moveable parts of the set.

Health and safety comes into play throughout the design process but especially in the final days when the wings are being used to store set and furniture and props etc. are being carried on and off in semi or complete darkness. A set designer should have used the model stage to work through all the aspects of change and there should be no surprises at this time. Some theatres will have a fly tower and sets can change with speed but a lot more thought and planning needs to go into a set which has a number of changes.

What designs have been most successful in production?

I did the design for 'Of Mice and Men' a few years ago at the Lyric and I think that worked really well. It was just one of those plays which seemed to come together successfully when all the aspects of lighting, sound and costume were added. It was also a play which I was able to research a lot. I liked the style of the play. It was very open and felt that we had captured the period and mood and atmosphere. The set was very simple and uncluttered and that was perhaps another reason why it worked so well. Also, I felt we worked well as a

team and all collaborated and talked a lot about the meaning of the play and the ambience which we were trying to create.

'The Spelling Bee', was another play which I really enjoyed designing the set. It was at The Mac and again an open stage with lots of audience interaction and engagement. It was a new play and a premier for Northern Ireland so audiences did not know what to expect. The set was well used as it was about a television game show and as a comedy there would be a lot of movement and lots of fun. There was a lot of colour and spectacle but the characters were all very real and had a story to tell.

I think I like naturalism as a style and enjoy designing an O'Casey play. I enjoy adding the detail on an authentic set which captures the significant elements of the period.

Professional Practice

Local Artistic Director – Paula McFetteridge

Outlined below is a personal account of the professional practice of Director Paula Mc Fetridge.

Paula has been Artistic Director of Kabosh since August 2006. For the company she has directed the premiere productions of *Green & Blue* by Laurence McKeown, based on an oral archive of serving RUC and Garda officers during the conflict; *Mabel* by Maria Connolly, staged in the Annesley Garden and Castlewellan Castle; *Those you pass on the Street* by Laurence McKeown, commissioned by Healing Through Remembering to look at Dealing with the Past; *Belfast by Moonlight* by Carlo Gébler with original music by Neil Martin, an oratorio staged in St George's Church to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the foundation of Belfast; *Inventors* by Carlo Gébler, Vincent Higgins, Seth Linder and Jimmy McAleavey, a celebration of Ulster invention in a pop-up barn; *Ghosts of Drumglass* by Rosemary Jenkinson, a Halloween installation in Drumglass Park; *1 in 5* by Marina Carr, Rosemary Jenkinson, Nicola McCartney and Morna Regan in the former Limavady workhouse; *The West Awakes* by Kieron Magee, Laurence McKeown, Rosaleen Walsh and Jimmy McAleavey staged in five exterior locations in West Belfast; *Belfast Bred* by Seth Linder, a food and drink walking tour of Belfast city centre; *This is What We Sang* by Gavin Kostick in the Belfast synagogue and Synagogue for the Arts, Tribeca as part of the 1st Irish Festival 2010 (winner 'Best Production' and shortlisted for 'Best Director'); *Two Roads West* by Laurence McKeown set in a moving black taxi; *Carnival* by Lucy Caldwell in a Speigel tent; *Henry & Harriet* by Carlo Gébler in working city-centre shops; as well as numerous bespoke theatre events for Healing Through Remembering, Trauma Recovery Network, Relatives for Justice and Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Paula was the recipient of the Belfast Ambassador Award 2014 for her work in using the arts to tackle difficult social issues and the NITB NI Hero Award 2012 for her work in cultural tourism. She is a member of the Intercult pan-European Corners Project and a fellow of Salzburg Global Seminar Session 532 'Conflict Transformation through Culture: Peace-building and the Arts'.

Prior to Kabosh her many award-winning credits include: Artistic Director Lyric Theatre 2001-2006; Artistic Director of convictions, produced at Crumlin Road Courthouse by Tinderbox Theatre Company (winner 'Best Production' 2000 at the Irish Times/ESB Awards).

• How did you become the artistic director of Kabosh Theatre Company?

I had been Artistic Director of the Lyric Theatre for 6 years: having reversed the spiralling audience numbers and selected the architects and design for the new theatre I felt it was time to move on to a different challenge. The founder and artistic director of Kabosh was moving on after twelve years at the helm and I decided to go for the job when I saw the advert. My reasons were twofold – the Creative Producer of Kabosh at the time was Jo Egan and we had previously worked together on the highly successful 'Wedding Community Play Project'; and I was interested in creating a project for the contentious Long Kesh prison site which I believed would be possible given the site-specific artistic focus of Kabosh. I underwent an arduous

90 minute interview for the post including an unseen task and presentation conducted by representatives from Kabosh and the Arts Council of NI.

• **What are the important features of a Kabosh production?**

- It is commissioned by Kabosh from professional artists
- It is inspired by the sites, people and stories of the north of Ireland
- It is frequently staged in non-theatre spaces
- It is presented by the cream of local practitioners
- It has something political and socially relevant to say

• **How do you begin the process of devising a piece of theatre?**

I look at a narrative, commemoration, story, person or site that I believe has resonance / is of interestoften this evolves from something I have read, something someone has told me, a location or heritage site I have visited or a 'problem' to be explored theatrically. It is discussed with my colleagues and the Kabosh board to see if the idea has potential. Then we commission a playwright to come up with a new play that is fit for purpose. The playwright is given quite clear guidelines regarding scale, possible audience, potential location, timeline for delivery.

I provide detailed feedback on each draft of the script – there may be up to 5 drafts before we go into the rehearsal room. In rehearsals we spend the first week editing and discussing the play around the table before we get onto our feet.

• **Can you describe a production your recently devised from the initial idea to the final product?**

I will describe two very different recent productions:

1. *Green & Blue* by Laurence McKeown, premiered October 2016 in Girdwood Cultural Space; it has toured a range of arts and non-arts spaces. This was created in partnership with an umbrella organisation called Diversity Challenges. Over a three year period they gathered a unique oral archive from serving RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) and An Garda Síochána officers who patrolled the border area during the height of the conflict (1970's / '80's). They were keen that the archive be shared with as wide a community as possible so they produced a tender calling from artists interested in creating a piece of work based on the archive. Laurence McKeown in partnership with Kabosh submitted a tender to create an hour-long piece of touring theatre that could be followed by facilitated discussions.

Over 15 months Laurence worked on the script submitting drafts based on two characters in an imagined open space on the border, I provided regular feedback. I spent time considering how to give voice to the person behind the uniform, how to depict isolation and how not to make the play a history piece. Two actors were recruited to do informal readings of the script at different stages in its development for the board of Diversity Challenges and Garda/RUC representatives to ensure authenticity and maximise police buy-in. This would be a part of the creative process when working in partnership with an organisation from the voluntary sector and in particular when creating a piece of work based on collated stories (other Kabosh productions where this has been the based include *Those you pass on the street* produced in partnership with Healing Through Remembering and *This is What we Sang* based on an oral archive from the Belfast Jewish community).

Kabosh raised the money to produce the play and premiere it at the Belfast Festival. The play was rehearsed for 3.5 weeks and a design team (film-maker, costume & set) and production crew were contracted.

2. *Mabel* by Maria Connolly, premiered October 2015 in Castlewellan Castle and Gardens. There is an Ulster historical circle blue plaque for Mabel Annesley, water colourist and resident in the grounds of Castlewellan Castle but very few know of her existence. As it is now leased by the Christian Centre Missionaries there is no public access to Castlewellan Castle unless you are on retreat. Maria Connolly, actress and playwright, who I have collaborated with on many occasions was fascinated by Mabel and the location. After several conversations she went off to see what she could find out. Given the history of the site Kabosh went into negotiations with the new residents of the castle, the grounds people, local historians and Down Borough Council to ensure access, buy-in and authenticity.

It was agreed the play would promenade through gardens and into the castle and be performed by two actresses (one as Mabel and the other everyone else). As it was promenade and for small numbers (20 max) it was decided the play would be 50 mins: facilitating multiple performances each day.

The script went through several drafts, there were several site visits with the production team and after 3 weeks rehearsals the project opened.

• How do you select and reflect the genre and style of the production?

The genre and style is determined by the project themes and perceived audience. Also taken into consideration is the space (s) it will be performed in; is it likely to tour? How to maintain the authenticity and production quality in a range of spaces: for example *Green & Blue* it is envisaged that this play will be staged in abandoned / reclaimed police stations north and south so the importance of the film as backdrop and location / theme driver for the audience was key in making that design decision.

We have staged a number of productions in heritage and religious sites – the style must be respectful to the location without detracting from artistic integrity.

In 2014 I wanted to create a project to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the first IRA ceasefire – an important turning-point in our recent history. I believed a play was not the genre to commission as many of our society were not ready to engage in a narrative that challenged their perception of the past. Kabosh commissioned a 20 minute piece of orchestral music from Conor Mithell, performed once at the gates of Belfast City Hall by 20 musicians at 12 noon on 1st September 2014. This score became the backdrop for a visual art installation.

• How do you develop your initial ideas?

I need to be interested in a story, a location or a commemoration and want to know more about it. I tend to ask myself 3 key questions:

1. Am I the right person to tell the story – what am I able to bring to the story that somebody else cant
2. Is it the right time to tell the story – this determines whether it will fall on deaf ears or not. It often enhances engagement if the production is timed to coincide with an anniversary or a commemoration as people are more receptive.
3. Who is it for – this doesn't need to be absolute but it must be given consideration as this determines style of publicity, ticket prices, location, style, genre. It provides a production focus.

The best bit of advice I was ever given was to thine own self be true – create something that you would like to engage with and no matter the scale maximise quality.

• What stages do you go through after the initial design ideas?

Initial designs are determined by budget (both production team size and material), durability needs and production location as well as what best serves the project. After initial conversations with the design team

individually there are collective meetings to ensure the production has overall style and everyone is singing off the same hymn sheet. Then elements of the design are tested in the rehearsal room to ensure they are user-friendly and enhancing the production before final build, edit or making. The design can change right up until opening nights with elements being altered and on occasions even removed.

• **What strategies do you use in rehearsal to develop the performance?**

The key aspect for me is ensuring the script is tight and there is nothing surplus to requirement. It is the raw material and so has to be taught and fit-for-purpose. During the script discussions, each actor is encouraged to take ownership and fight for their character's voice. I always tell actors to imagine they are playing darts with each sentence – land each thought as if aiming for a bullseye rather than a thought tailing off.

As well as the language being sparse each movement must serve a purpose – one of the hardest things is to stand stillthat is why it is the most powerful. Props and furniture are only introduced if they are a necessity. It is as important to listen and hear as it is to speak. Each moment must be true – if doubt is introduced by the actor I stop and ask for clarity. Each project is like a piece of music – each word or action begets the next and there is an ideal running time.

I never tell an actor how to do something but rather share a story or a thought and talk around a moment so the actor imagines other possibilities and brings a fresh eye to the material. A rehearsal room must be fun – a place to play, a place to be safe. The art of theatre-making is very vulnerable.

• **Could you suggest any games or techniques to use in rehearsal to motivate young actors when working together to devise a production?**

Anything to enhance the sense of ensemble is useful: collective counting where each individual adds a number so as a group you count as high as possible without overlapping or get a football and play 'keepy-uppy' aiming to increase the number of hits each day.

For creating new narratives that are socially relevant and unique to the creators: each bring in a news paper article or photo that highlights an issueshare it with the group and then discuss possible ways of sharing the conversation theatrically. Ask the class to bring in a short interview they have conducted with their parents / grandparents / guardian about a memory when they were the same age. Ask another member of the group to 'perform' it first person.

Go on a reccy around the school or where you live exploring a short route – did you notice anything you never saw before? Do the same walk with a piece of music you have chosen for that location. Where on that route would you like to bring an audience to? Why? Create a trail using music, objects, words for an individual audience member wearing headphones. How would you change it if there was 10 in the audience and you couldn't use headphones? Would you have short multiple dramas? How do you link each place you stop?

• **How do you create mood and feeling on the stage?**

It is about finding truthfulness in a moment and making sure you leave room for an audience. It needs to be unfussy. It can be enhanced by sound, lights or smell. Each key moment needs to be earned – the production rhythm needs to drive to key moments so the audience feel safe but not curated. Moments are not effective if they are cheap.

• **How do you ensure the performance expresses meaning and has impact on an audience?**

It is about leaving room for an audience – not bombarding them continually or seeking shallow emotional reactions. The whole production needs to have an arc and each vignette within that also needs an arc. You can ensure a performance expresses meaning but it is harder for an audience to disengage if the project elements are of a high quality and display an honest commitment.

- **How do you move the production from page, to rehearsal and then the stage?**

Having a collective vision that is communicated to each member of the team at each point along the creative process. Each production is different as the process is tailored for the practitioners involved and the needs of the project but a major element is putting the 'right' people together. This comes from experience. The other important element is giving the process sufficient time – shortening a rehearsal period is false economy, being clear about production expectation on a regular basis is imperative. It is also about flexibility – the creative process is not formulaic, things will change and it is about having the confidence to be radical and trust your instinct.

- **How do you communicate your ideas to the sound, lighting, set and costume designers when producing a production?**

Initially via email and then face-to-face. Where possible I like them to read the script, see the location and share their thoughts. I talk a lot about what the project means to me, why I am doing it, why I am doing it now, its relevance, where it will be staged, who I think it is for, the restrictions imposed by budget and timescale.

You develop a shorthand with those you work with on a regular basis. This is based on their working patterns, the language they use, the process that best complements their skills, what they thrive on and what stunts their creativity.

I work with a range of designers and it is about putting the 'right' designer on the right project. They attend several pre-rehearsal meetings. They share drawings and thoughts. Post the readthrough on the first day of rehearsals they share their designs with the actors. When they are played with the ideal design is agreed on.

Paula Mc Fetridge (Artistic Director of Kabosh Theatre Company)

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