



*frantic*assembly

THE BELIEVERS

By Bryony Lavery. Directed and choreographed by Scott Graham

A Comprehensive Guide
for students (aged 14+),
teachers & arts educationalists

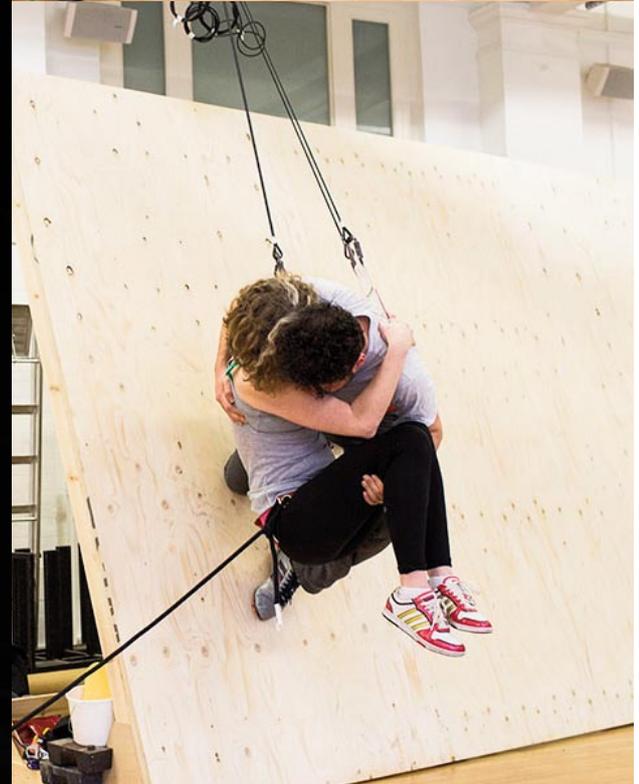
By Scott Graham



Contents

- 3 Introduction
- 4 Beginnings and Wrong Directions
- 4 Breakthroughs
- 5 Casting
- 5 Setting the Rules
- 6 Belief and Need
- 6 Objectivity and Subjectivity
- 7 Skills Building
- 7 Tiny Hugs
- 8 The Importance of Play
- 8 The Order of Attack
- 9 The Sound of The Believers
- 10 Aftermath
- 11 The Ritual
- 11 The Hug
- 12 Exploding Crockery
- 13 The Perfect Storm
- 13 Finding the Moments
- 14 The First Preview
- 14 Last Minute Discoveries
- 14 The Creatives
- 16 From an Observer's Perspective
- 21 Bibliography of Inspiration

Eileen Walsh (Marianne),
Chris Colquhoun (Joff),
Richard Mylan (Ollie)
and Penny Layden (Maud)
Photo top right by Scott Graham
All other photos by Helen Maybanks





Richard Mylan (Ollie)
and Eileen Walsh (Marianne)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

Introduction

Before I begin, the usual disclaimer...

Our resource packs are intended to offer an insight into the rehearsal room of a Frantic Assembly production. Written by the artistic director they provide unique access to how the production was made, moments of inspiration and moments of frustration.

I am still reserving the right to resist turning this pack into a teacher's manual and will avoid all reference to Key Stage whatnot as I want all kinds of practitioners, students, teachers and thinkers to feel at home here. I also don't know Key Stage whatnot from Key Stage thingy and believe that teachers and students can do a better job at applying what is applicable to the courses they teach or study.

Anyway, as ever, I hope that this pack offers valuable insight and feedback is always welcome. Hopefully it offers a glimpse of the many twists and turns that occur when making a show. Creativity is not a constantly linear thing. The only linear thing is the time that constantly ebbs away!

Inspiration appears in many forms. It can be sudden and it can be surprising. Don't be fooled by projects that reference difficult tomes as inspiration. It does not have to be like that. Inspiration comes from the people that you chat to on a daily basis. It can be that focussed pep talk or it can be that comment apropos of nothing. With that in mind I would like to thank Andrew Upton for the very exciting chat ages ago. I would like to thank Maggie and Alan Picken for pointing me towards *Mama*. I would like to thank Mary Anne Hobbs for playing that track by Tiny Leaves on your afternoon show. And thanks to Vicky Featherstone for suggesting I read *The Secret History*. Thanks to Eddie Kay for the brilliance and the laughs.

That is how inspiration happens.



Scott Graham
Photo by Helen Maybanks

Beginnings and Wrong Directions

Initially all that existed was a title, *The Believers*, and the briefest synopsis – it is about belief systems. Apart from that I was starting from scratch. I had an interest in how these belief systems might clash and potentially devour other systems or possibly show restraint and sensitivity without compromising their own held beliefs. I was also interested in what one system might find attractive in another.

The first research and development session was driven by the book *Religion Explained* by Pascal Boyer. It is a fascinating read but it took the project down an academic and anthropological route. The week unearthed some lovely stuff but I felt that this anthropological stance was missing the point.



Eileen Walsh (Marianne)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

It dissected belief and told us why people might believe in something. It did not get inside that belief and show us how it feels. I found myself much more interested in the visceral stimulus to believe and kept returning to the conclusion that that stimulus lay in fear.

I started looking at horror films, as they inspire us to believe in the absurd. By 'believe', I mean we react as if what we are seeing is real. We show fear, our heart rate quickens, we implore grotesque acts of violence to make the terror stop. Our moral code is shot.

I was interested in how far our belief systems might bend and alter when presented with different situations. That might be fear and terror or it might be the promise of great rewards.

I wanted to know how far we would go to protect what we believe. (Ultimately that became about how far we would go to get what we need. See *Belief and Need*).

These were all the early directions but many of them are still applicable in what became *The Believers*. When you set out to make a show it can take at least two years and in that time you can change direction, take wrong turnings, get lost, or meet sudden

inspiration. Hopefully this resource pack helps chart that journey in a way that does not just explain history. It is most useful if it can help illuminate a path forward for you. Are there lessons to be learned? Are there things you can avoid? Are there inspirations to be found?

Breakthroughs

The Kristy Bamu Story

One of the initial breakthroughs in trying to work out how to create a show about belief that would not feel like an anthropological exercise came through reading about the tragic death of Kristy Bamu at the hands of his sister and her boyfriend in a flat in London.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-17255470>

It is a horrific story of torture and abuse. What made it fascinating was the pleading of the perpetrators to the victim's parents to come and take the boy away. The perpetrators insisted the boy was a witch and that they would kill him if the father did not take him away. They seemed to fear for their own lives.

It struck me that the belief of the perpetrators must have been incredibly intense. It was based in a fear of the boy. I thought it would be a real theatrical challenge to enter the minds of the killers and find their fear. That might mean seeing this poor boy as they see him. A malevolent and powerful witch who means them harm.

This switching of 'realities' seemed important to me. If we could achieve that, then we could get inside belief. Wouldn't it be something to see the horrific predicament of this boy at the hands of his sadistic tormentors and then see those tormentors as 'heroes,' fighting for their lives against this demonic force?

The Believers never became that show but the thought process was enough to kick me clear of the anthropological trap I had found myself in. It also gave me the conviction and tools to approach Bryony Lavery to join me on this project.



Chris Colquhoun (Joff) and Eileen Walsh (Marianne)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

Mama

A couple of friends of mine shared a short film they had found on the Internet. It was Guillermo Del Toro giving a passionate introduction to a short film called *Mama*. The film itself is less than two and a half minutes long but is a master class in dramatic construction and tension. It also contains a startling physicality.

I started looking for more info on *Mama* and it appeared that Guillermo Del Toro had decided to create a full-scale version of the film. Footage of a movement test for this is on the web and is genuinely chilling.

A lot of our physical exploration and fascination with ropes came from this.

Links to both of these films can be found in the Bibliography of Inspiration.

Casting

I think *The Believers* illustrates why I cast actors and then get them to move. The four performers were cast on their acting ability and their potential to give their best physically. Eddie and I were confident we could introduce them to the physical world and get them strong and confident physically. When we had achieved that, we knew that their acting skills would then come to the fore.

This group of performers have been brave and tireless. They have been relentless in interrogating this project and their passion for it being the best it can be has been such a boost.

I have said before that there is a benefit to putting actors through this physical process rather than relying on the ability of dancers. All those rewards come towards the end of the

process when the actor finds they can do something physically remarkable, and then remind themselves that they are actors and then bring all those wonderful skills into the mix. They now just happen to be twenty feet up a wall and walking at 90 degrees while they do what comes naturally.

Setting the Rules

Possibly inspired by the success of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, I decided to be as minimalist as possible with *The Believers*. Actually it was more of a reaction against *Lovesong*. I adored *Lovesong* but I recognised how easy it would be to place every show in a domestic setting and have conversations across kitchen tables. This would lead me to exploring worlds that we have already mined. I had had enough of people disappearing through beds or coming out of fridges!

I did not pass any of this on to Bryony as that would limit her imagination when writing. It was for conversations between designer Jon Bausor, Eddie Kay and myself. Eddie and I had explored the most economical way of conjuring the world of *The Believers*. We had played with ropes to create the illusion of people sitting at a dinner table, we had talked about seeing things from different perspectives and playing walls as floors. Jon created a wonderful set that embraced this ambition and offered some brilliant solutions too.

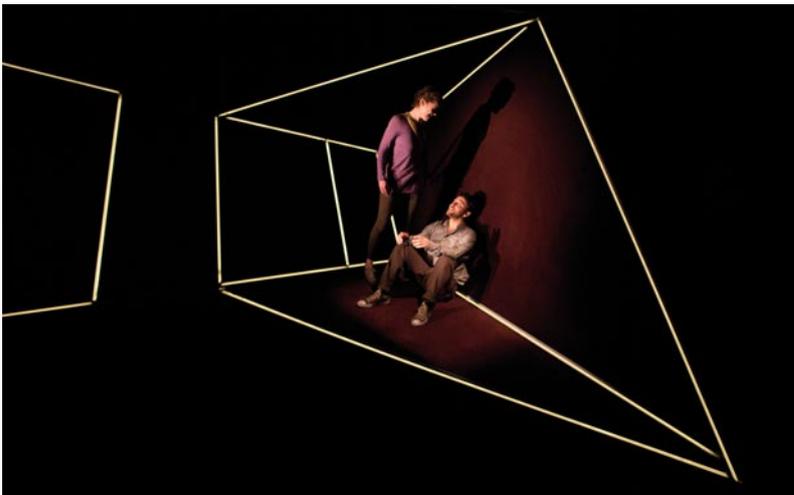
Jon's initial set included the frame of a bed that would be revealed on the near vertical wall. There was also a table frame. Everything was just presented as a metal frame.

I wanted to avoid anything that could appear complete and offer comfort to the protagonists. I strongly felt that they are post trauma and are desperately looking for that comfort but are unable to find it. Memories are fragments and shards. It is the opposite of *Lovesong*. Within *Lovesong* memories are so rich, they are tangible, they can embrace you and dance with you. No such luck here.

So we found ourselves within this minimal world, constantly having to create our environment. Soon, the table was too clumsy and fussy and was cut. We would just use the ropes. Next to go was a frame toilet. Soon after that, the bed frame was cut.



Richard Mylan (Ollie)
and Penny Layden (Maud)
Photo by Helen Maybanks



Penny Layden (Maud)
and Richard Mylan (Ollie)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

This felt like the right direction to be heading and an even more telling moment was to happen soon after.

Rehearsals had been exhilarating and fruitful and then ground to a halt in a scene where one character had to offer wine to three others. We tried so many different versions where he would bring in a couple of glasses and then his partner would bring in more glasses and the bottle of wine. None worked. The actors became clumsy, as if they had never offered a glass of wine before! They held the horrible plastic glasses in a completely unconvincing way! All of this while being advised by the world's worst director. It made mugs of us all. The obvious answer was to cut all the bottles and glasses and trust our initial instinct. The props appeared fussy and problematic in this world of outlines and shards. The decision was made to lose all props that did not have a significant part in the narrative.

This is obviously quite a big decision. The script is littered with references to tables and chairs, beds, roast chicken, white wine, chocolates, serving spoons, etc. and my instinct was to show none of them! I felt I had to hold my nerve. I thought of how we all felt on *Curious Incident* where we (the creative team) did not know whether we were making something good but just felt we had to be brave and follow our instincts. And that paid off handsomely!

The decision was made to lose all props that did not have a significant part in the narrative. The decision meant that we would sail perilously close to the rocky shore of mime (did I just say that?) but we would work hard to avoid that!

Belief and Need

I have spent so many months struggling to explain what this production would be about. It is not an easy one to capture. 'It is about belief.' That is so huge and vague and unsatisfying.



Eileen Walsh (Marianne)
and Penny Layden (Maud)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

Belief is so subjective. And instantly people think about religion. I wanted it to be more than that, and I felt it needed to be something much more close to home and immediate. Many people might recoil from religion or spiritual belief citing its absurdity but I did not want to go down that route. I wanted to explore how and why the seemingly absurd can be so vivid in people's lives, offering comfort and succor. I did not want to get embroiled in a religious debate about belief. I wanted to explore something much more basic than that. The more I thought about it, the more Bryony's script developed, the more I thought that the crucial element is not *belief* but *need*.

It is the need of Marianne and Joff that makes them engage and invest so heavily in a world they have, up until this point, ridiculed. They need comfort. They need to know that everything is not their fault. They need to find happiness for themselves and for Grace. Maud and Ollie promise this. That has got to be attractive!

This opens the debate far wider than religious truth or fallacy. As with Pizarro and Atahualpa in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, Marianne and Maud face off with what seem irreconcilable viewpoints but the more they look at each other the more Marianne recognises that Maud possesses what she needs; namely comfort, security, warmth, a conviction that things will be ok. This attraction is not about God. It is an attraction to anything that can fulfill those needs. It is more about need than belief.

Objectivity and Subjectivity

I wanted to take the audience into a world where they might entertain believing in something that they would ordinarily rule out, to take them to a place where they find their moral compass awry. To do that I felt I had to engage them on a visceral level. Fear would be the key to an audience believing and, just as when we will the hero to drive the stake through the vampire's heart to save us all from the terror, it would also be the magnet to entice the moral compass.

In theatre, as in many art forms, we side with a narrator. This can be very useful but I felt that if we were to get beyond our prejudices about belief then we had to be careful about an audience identifying too heavily with one couple over the other. Otherwise the leap to find themselves ready to believe the unbelievable becomes too great.



Penny Layden (Maud)
and Richard Mylan (Ollie)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

Often an audience knows more than a character. They know who did it. They know who is going to get it. They know who is bad and who is good. I wanted to present a world where we see things from the perspective of all sides. This would essentially present a world of subjectivity rather than offer any objectivity for the audience.

This comes back to my initial thoughts on our dealings with belief. Unless we experience what it feels like then we will never really understand what it gives a character and why they embrace it.

This quest for subjectivity means that whatever a character feels should be taken as truth. If they suggest that someone else is a pig then we should see what is pig-like about them. We stay inside the mind of the beholder. We do not venture outside and form an objective opinion of

the suggestion. That way we can potentially experience what formed the suggestion. Is it fear? Are they repulsed by them? If so we should experience that repulsion.

As long as this is applied across the characters then it should still represent them fairly.

Skills Building

Skill building is always a massive part of a Frantic Assembly rehearsal process. Eddie and I decided right from the start that we were not going to go down the lifts and throws route we often take our cast down to build skills and strengths. We still introduced them to the joys of circuit training, Pilates, aerobic training, skipping, etc. as we often do. Much of this show would be performed in harnesses at 90 degrees to the floor. This requires intense core strength to make it look effortless. (A measure of its success is unfortunately never being complimented on the achievement!)

The Believers would not require us to train our cast in boxing techniques (*Beautiful Burnout*) or in finding a physical fluidity (*Lovesong*) but we decided to take them through physical focus, economy of movement and physical story telling. *The Believers* is about loss and ache and the need to comfort pain. Two of its most important protagonists are never seen and one of them is dead. As such, much of the physical story telling is about what is not there. This requires physical subtlety and precision. We aimed to build up the skills and confidence needed.



Eileen Walsh (Marianne)
and Chris Colquhoun (Joff)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

We played with an exercise called Tiny Touches. The four performers worked as one group with one of them in the middle, passive with their eyes closed, and the others around her. The performers on the outside simply touch the person in the middle and she gives a little pulse in recognition. That touch can be anywhere. It starts off simply but can build in frequency.

This leads to a greater physical articulation for the person in the middle. They are becoming more and more receptive to reading touch and responding. By responding to several touches at the same time or within a short time they will find themselves contorting their bodies into new shapes. Their movement vocabulary is increasing and they are becoming more and more aware of touch and their own physical movements and physical potential.

The performers achieve a remarkable fluidity and receptiveness in a very short time. That skill needs to be focused somewhere. That is when we had a play with Tiny Tugs.

Tiny Tugs

This is a play where an event shatters the lives of two families, obviously changing the lives of two children and their parents forever. We decided to explore the private moments of our characters. Post-traumatic event, what do they think about? What do they miss? What secrets torment them?

We got some fishing wire and some crocodile clips. Not our usual rehearsal tools! We attached the wire to the clips and then attached clips to the clothing of one of our performers. The other performers took the end of the wire and stood well back from the central performer.

Stillness was key to this exercise. After a good deal of stillness one of the outside performers would gently tug on the wire. The performer inside was free to experiment with how they responded to the tug. What was it? Was it a heart bursting from within? Was it the insistence of a small child? If so, is the character longing for that world? Aching for that touch to return?

Even within these scenarios there is the possibility of various interpretations. Does the performer ignore the tug or respond immediately? Do they try to walk away? How hard does the tugger, tug? How present does the child become? Does the central performer respond, turn and scoop the child up into their arms? Is this a secret moment? What happens to the tugs and responses if there is someone else in the room?

This is why we were focusing on the physical precision and the potential of physical story telling in the Skills Building section. If we had not empowered our performers in this way, the Tiny Tugs exercise might have yielded crass and clumsy responses. As it was, they were subtle and heart breaking.

But they never made it into the show.

I think this is always a good sign when you cannot include material that made the company cry in the rehearsal room!

The Importance of Play



Eileen Walsh (Marianne)
and Penny Layden (Maud)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

When working on a project like this over many months you have been buzzing with possibilities, with potential scenes and moments, and now, suddenly, you have a script in front of you.

It is important that that moment does not signify the end of 'play' and 'what if.'

I was adamant that the creation of the text should not then become the defining limitation for *The Believers*. The text should still be a launch pad for ideas and possibilities. I also felt that there were many exciting aspects that we had discovered that were not in the text. This is no fault of Bryony. She has delivered a beautiful play that aches with need and loss and absolutely captures what we set out to. I just wanted to keep those other creative avenues open, as I believed there was to be a powerful visual/aural element to *The Believers*. With respect, it was

always going to be more than the words on the page. I needed to keep all my collaborators in a mind frame where they were still thinking about possibilities rather than solving the 'problems' set by the text.

I think 'play' is important in other ways too. The rehearsal room needed to be a fun place to come back to each morning. We work extremely hard but never at the expense of having a laugh and enjoying ourselves. This is how you get the best out of people. By doing this project and tour, performers and crew not only had to apply themselves wholeheartedly but they were also committing to being in each other's pockets for several months. That is the nature of a tour. It requires good, kind, and emotionally intelligent people if it is to succeed with everybody intact. A healthy balance of work and play in the rehearsal room can go a long way to securing this.

The Order of Attack

The Believers has a slightly difficult chronology. It moves from Now to Then and back to Now. That in itself does not seem difficult but the desire for minimum setting and props, zero costume change does make it more problematic.



Richard Mylan (Ollie)
and Penny Layden (Maud)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

There is a common sense rule in performance to never play the ending before you get there. That combats a sense of inevitability that can pervade through a play that ends in tragedy. It was the simplest and most telling note to receive when Steve Hoggett and I were performing in *Tiny Dynamite* (by Abi Morgan). We thought we had just delivered such a deep and nuanced performance, full of electricity between the protagonists. Director Vicky Featherstone came into the dressing room afterwards and said 'What on earth are you doing? You are playing the ending!'

It was true. All the love and tension we thought we were bringing to the stage was actually fatalistic and depressed because we knew how it would end. What a ridiculous and indulgent thing to be doing! Luckily, Vicky is very diplomatic and constructive in her criticism!

When rehearsing *The Believers* you are, of course, most likely to start with the first six scenes. These

all exist after the traumatic event. They play the ending. All other scenes, apart from the last, exist before the event. To avoid starting off on a fatalistic and depressed footing, I decided to start rehearsing from scene 7 onwards and then return to scenes 1-6 and scene 18 later.

Those middle scenes that occupy the 'then' part of the play needed to be full of hope and possibility. It is this promise that compels the protagonists into their extreme actions. The 'now' scenes have then earned the right to be full of guilt, self-loathing and anger.

Another reason for setting out like this was so that we could start our rehearsals having fun rather than dealing with the heart-breaking denouement of *The Believers*. Not that we had any trouble having fun. That rehearsal room was home to some dark, dark humour and I am not sure I have ever laughed as much in rehearsal as I did on *The Believers*! The point is that I feared getting embroiled in the emotional wreckage and then having to ask my performers to drop it all and find the fun.

The Sound of *The Believers*

Grace

Bryony Lavery originally wrote words for Grace. That was always going to be problematic because there was never going to be a performer to play Grace. We explored a couple of avenues. One of which was that Ollie screams the words with all the disdain he could muster to capture his possible revulsion at the behavior and attitude of his neighbour's child. That presented a considerable leap for the actor but it also gave him a very simplistic and extreme reaction to the child. Even if he did not really feel this revulsion, the delivery made it look like he did.

It struck me that maybe sound would be our saviour (specifically sound designer Carolyn Downing). Perhaps we hear **the effect** of Grace's demands rather than the demands themselves. Maybe her voice is like fingernails down a chalkboard to those that hear her this evening.

That request for a screech then became more refined. Maybe it was a violin that had the potential to become clear and beautiful? That way we could lace a Grace theme through the show. It can be harsh when she is at her most demanding and more delicate when she is just a memory.

As it turns out, it did not quite happen like this, but this was the break through in the presentation of Grace.

The Soundtrack

I felt that *The Believers* was about people trying to capture a fractured memory. I felt that memory shimmered around them delicately and risked being scared off and lost forever.

I also wanted to find some music that would capture the fear and danger of the night that Grace dies. I created a playlist of artists like Jon Hopkins, John Metcalfe, Cliff Martinez and Hybrid to share as inspiration for the creatives. The more I listened to this playlist the more convinced I became that Cliff Martinez's soundtrack to the film *Solaris* captured all that shimmering quality I was looking for to suggest memory. (That should be no surprise as *Solaris* was also about memories!) It is a beautiful soundtrack. It is both delicate and insistent too. It returns to the same sounds and themes and swirls around our

heads. It is both hopeful and mournful. We would have some of that!

Another perfect discovery was the music of Little Leaves (*A Good Land, An Excellent Land*). This was used in the Aftermath. I felt it was important to start the Aftermath with as close to silence as we could manage before we introduce the track (*Abraham*). Achieving silence in a theatre is not just a case of not playing any music. There is air conditioning, moving lights, and haze machines, all creating an ambient buzz. I think we failed to get anywhere near the silence I had hoped for but one of the tricks we employed to create the illusion of silence in this moment was to have an almost imperceptible sound playing under every other moment in the show. By dropping that out at the correct moment we emphasise the 'silence.' If that is effective then it means that the first piano notes of *Abraham* become hugely significant.

Additional sounds were created by Carolyn Downing. She was very careful not to go too literal with our sounds. The script calls for thunder and lightning and wind and rain. We did not want to go too gothic



Chris Colquhoun (Joff)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

or too Radio Four daytime drama with it. Carolyn created a beautiful and restrained sound design littered with clattering pipes and gurgling drains. These noises remained at an almost subliminal level until after the first preview, when we realised that the production could allow for us to be a bit more on the nose with all design elements. In the case of sound we were surprised (and horrified?) to find that we could, even needed, to go more Radio Four on it!

Carolyn also worked beautifully and dynamically with lighting designer Andy Purves. There was not a moment that they did not craft together. Both designers are brilliant collaborators and bring so much to the mix.

Together they crafted the *12 seconds of terrible chaos* as the parents set off looking for the missing girls. This was directly inspired by roughly 12 seconds of chaos from the trailer for the film *Cloverfield*. My ambition was to set Andy and Carolyn the task of creating a section that bursts into life and then drops back into oppressive silence while Eddie and I choreograph the fractured movements of the parents in and out of light. As time ran out it became clear that this was only ever going to be a sound and light moment. Anyway less was more, as it had been in many other parts of the show. What they created was a harrowing and chilling 12 seconds of heartbreaking screams and terrifying silence, of retina burning flashes and deep, deep darkness. I am so glad our shape throwing did not get in the way!

Aftermath

Eddie Kay was interested in exploring how each character would react, post traumatic event, to a treasured item of clothing. The exercise was as simple as that. They each knew that it belonged to their daughter. Each parent has lost a child. Two mortally, two spiritually.

Eddie gave them time and space to think and come up with a sequence. This did not have to be overly choreographic. Just precise. As they were working we offered them a little guidance as we saw their sequences emerge.



Penny Layden (Maud),
Scott Graham
and Richard Mylan (Ollie)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

This led to four beautiful moments, each complex and heart breaking. I immediately felt there was something in this. It captured loss without blame. It was a reminder of the scale of loss we were dealing with. All theological/spiritual arguments aside, we are talking about the death of a child.

I felt that the death of Grace needed an Aftermath that, following the words, the food, the drugs, the wine, the laughter, the screams, etc. should be deafening in its silence. Where are these people in the quiet moments that follow the trauma? We know where they are when they are angry. We get that from scenes 1 to 6. What about those moments where they hide from each other to enact those little rituals that keeps the memories of their child alive?

Theatrically, the Aftermath immediately follows the moment we find that the girls are missing. We take a great chronological leap forward. In rehearsal we played with all four having individual moments with the item of clothing of their daughter, as Joff and Marianne have but we changed the moment for Maud and Ollie. Seeing them with the item of clothing was telling the wrong story. It looked like both children had died and, although Joyous loses her faith in God (a spiritual death) it was confusing to reach the end scene and find out that Joyous was 'still here' (p.8).

We changed the Maud and Ollie bits into a joint scene using the upper level. They were seen embracing. We appear to look down on them as they are at 90 degrees to the floor. Their embrace starts to dissolve as Maud's feet slowly come from the wall and it appears she is flying away from Ollie.

This spectacular effect was short lived as it placed lots of strain on Richard Mylan, playing Ollie. (Again, it looks effortless when it works but it actually involves a lot of strength). Richard was carrying an injury in his shoulder and we found that we had to come up with a plan B.

Cue myself and Eddie Kay scampering over the set on the last day of the technical rehearsals to find something nearly as visually satisfying as the moment we were losing, which would still make sense within our delicate Aftermath.

What we stumbled upon was simpler and, dare I say, better than our spectacular first attempt. It was simply Maud appearing in the upper doorway and leaning out, constantly moving away. Ollie appears behind her and places a hand on her shoulder. She is convinced to return but never takes her eyes off the horizon.

The beauty of this moment is that it was the motif we had already set up. In the first few scenes Maud does not take her eyes off the horizon as she contemplates the 123 steps from her house to her neighbours, Joff and Maud. And in that horizon is her neighbour's house. Her intention from scene 1 to 6 is to march over there and drop the bomb that she ultimately delivers in scene 19:

Stay in your own house and and Drown (p. 81)

The Ritual

At the heart of *The Believers* is a ritual performed on a young girl. After the event it is referred to as something simple:



Richard Mylan (Ollie)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

A nice warm bath
Herbs
Candlelight.
Some prayer.
Not rocket science. (p.68)

Bryony suggests the ritual with these words:

(Then... another something... something joyful?
A suggestion of candles.
A smell of something wonderful...
Some music...
All suggesting some sort of religious ceremony...) (p.67)

How to tackle the ceremony was always a big question. When people asked that question it was normally followed up with a 'good luck!'

I decided to flip the focus away from the ceremony itself and focus on the effect it was having on the parents. For one couple it is justification of their faith in a kind God and for the others it is an incredible breakthrough with their daughter. It is all of these wonderful things but it is also merely 'a nice warm bath' with all the trimmings. Actually the addition of 'Not rocket science' is the most damning aspect. It can be taken as a criticism of Joff and Marianne's parenting skills that such results came from such a simple action. It is the power of positivity over negativity and is shaming for Joff and Marianne. (See *The Perfect Storm*)

The Hug

What is it that Maud possesses that Marianne lacks? Is it faith? Blind faith? Is it comfort and security? Happiness?

What is that tension between them? If Marianne were merely repelled, there would be no tension. Surely she is attracted and repelled by what Marianne represents/possesses? If she could feel what Marianne feels then the pain would go away.

'Feel' is the important word here. It is not an intellectual argument, as both Marianne and Joff make clear in their drunken conversations with Maud. Marianne is even more forthright when the two women are alone for the first time,

Maud *I love you.*
Marianne *No, you don't.*
Maud *God loves you then.*
Marianne *No! He/It/Whatever! Doesn't!*
It's All Crap.
'Shit.' (p. 60)

This outburst comes just before a surprise hug that Maud inflicts upon Marianne. Crucially, Marianne does not resist.

I was far more interested in how belief would feel rather than how you might explain it. Maud struggles to give it words but she still has a conviction that she can convince Marianne. This is what led me to focus on the touch between the two women. I wanted this to be where Marianne feels what it is like, to feel how the future might be with hope and security.

(I was adamant from the outset that I did not want to disparage belief. Belief can come to non-believers in the form of sudden epiphany; therefore it would be foolish to disparage it. This is why the focus is on how it feels. This is why we wanted to get inside belief.)

Initially they hug in the bedroom and it almost makes Marianne break down. There is a hint at the power of this hug and how much Marianne needs its warmth. Once she gets a hint of this I wanted to play with how much she is attracted to and afraid of its potential. That potential must haunt her and



Eileen Walsh (Marianne),
Chris Colquhoun (Joff),
Richard Mylan (Ollie)
and Penny Layden (Maud)
Photo by Scott Graham

have some influence on her reasons to stay after she has broken down in the bedroom and demanded that she, Joff and Grace leave immediately. That is why I created a sequence where Marianne walks backwards from the darkness only to be followed by Maud. When Maud reaches her she submits to the power of the hug. This power must offer hope to Marianne. As much as she dismisses it, she desperately needs something to make things better. Maud's promise of a better future is infinitely attractive, even if it defies Marianne's logic. Besides, all the evidence suggests it works for Maud!

Realising the simplicity of this hug motif helped Eddie and I transform the 'witnessing Heaven' moment that exists between the two women into a hug that buzzes with an energy, which reverberates through Marianne. It is an energy that she has ached for and so far resisted.

Marianne and Maud stand in opposition but, like many similar theatrical and literary characters in a similar situation, there is much of one in the other. This is recognised by both characters, although never verbalised. It might be the reason Maud fascinates and infuriates Marianne. In fact when Marianne says,

I don't like you (p.59)

She could easily be talking about herself.

Maud might want to help Marianne because she recognises some of that vulnerability and pain in herself. Maybe herself before she found belief. Often it is this simple 'truth' that gives people the evangelical desire to convert others.

Exploding Crockery

There was a startling stage direction in an earlier draft of *The Believers*. All four appeared to be around a table laying out plates and cutlery. They continually adjust the knives and forks and plates. This was based on an exercise in an early development session but what was remarkable was what came next. Once set, the instruction was for the crockery to explode!



Eileen Walsh (Marianne),
Chris Colquhoun (Joff),
Richard Mylan (Ollie)
and Penny Layden (Maud)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

While this is not impossible it is a real challenge. And what do you then do with all the bits? Our floor had to be smooth and clear for the set to move around. This spectacular moment (presuming we ever got it to work) might scupper all of that.

Before discarding it I thought about where the stage direction had come from and what the intention behind it was. The crockery adjustments suggested every day life carrying on but it was executed with a tension that rumbled underneath. The explosion was surely that tension coming to the surface.

Instead of taking the direction as an instruction for the design team, I realised Bryony had written the perfect direction for the actors and me. There was nothing absurd about it. The actors must create the kind of tension that would compel the crockery to explode. What a wonderful

description of the tension in a room! Instead of getting caught up in the mechanics of the stage direction we should have been considering its ambition.

This felt like a really exciting breakthrough!

And then the scene was cut!

Oh well.

The Perfect Storm

No not that storm. Another, more metaphorical storm.

What we have in *The Believers* is the clash of two cultures of positivity and negativity. One tells its child they are clean and good. The other tells its child they are dirty and bad.



Chris Colquhoun (Joff)
and Eileen Walsh (Marianne)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

When Marianne snaps at Maud with, '*she is not dirty! She is just a challenge*' (p. 60) we feel that she is protesting too much. So much of their language when referring to Grace betrays this negative perception of her daughter. Joff shares it too. Somehow she is tainted and unclean. Marianne's anger at Maud might be fueled by her own guilt.

Joff and Marianne's negative comments about Grace are completely opposed to Maud and Ollie's comments about Joyous. Even her name says all that they feel about her. She will set Grace a good example.

As the evening wears on the adults talk about good and bad, clean and unclean and the children know which one of them is which. These roles have been enforced over the years.

The adults also perform the ritual, the cleansing, the baptism.

Later that night Joyous and Grace take all of this to another level.

But this is a disaster all in the adults making. They have assigned the roles; they have simplified the language and drawn the lines. They have mapped out the ritual. They have essentially left the loaded gun on the table.

As we were developing the story, I talked about one of those incidents in the USA where, for example, a pro gun family, after extolling the virtues of gun ownership, have left the gun cabinet open and their child gets in and blasts a sibling to death. It is of course a tragedy, but it is also kind of inevitable too.

The simplicity of reducing everything down to good and evil and the ritual might work as a panacea for the adults but it has catastrophic effects for the impressionable children, who have heard and absorbed all the information they need to play their roles in the perfect storm.

Finding the Moments

Once the piece is starting to come together you have the opportunity to step back a bit and see what it actually is you are creating. From this distance you can see what needs to be done and the importance of what might have seemed incidental so far.



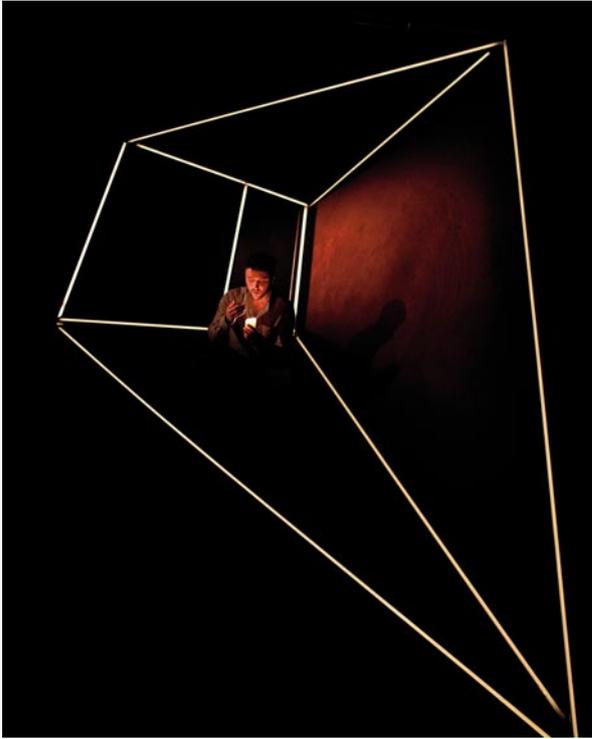
Penny Layden (Maud)
and Chris Colquhoun (Joff)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

The offering of the drugs to a susceptible Joff was always going to be significant. As was Ollie suggesting that Marianne follows him outside to lock up the bantams. Once those scenes were up on their feet it was apparent just how significant and loaded each moment needed to be. Each moment was filled with temptation and, ultimately, betrayal. We decided to construct these moments so that they happened simultaneously. That way we could be quite heavy and deliberate with the symbolism. It is fine to do this as long as you can then look at it and then go 'ok, too much.'

The knock on effect of this deliberate moment is that all of the ingredients in that moment become significant. There are very few props in this show but here we have a real coat and a real cigarette lighter. They are so linked to the action of betrayal. They then have a potency throughout the play. The lighter is linked to Ollie's candles. The lighters also appear in *The Ritual*. Therefore, *The Ritual* is linked to the notion of betrayal. And this is where we came in in scenes 1 to 6. It is not explicit but it should be implicit in the playing of Joff and Marianne.

The point here is that we could be much more deliberate with the timing of the coat/drugs moment than we initially thought. It was important to take our time with it as the implications and imagery of this moment would ramify through the show. The cast took a little convincing, as it feels heavy and clumsy to hold this moment beyond what is natural. They were encouraged to connect through the choreography of this moment first and then act it later. No actor likes being told this!

It was important to let the actors see as much of these significant moments as possible. If they always remain on stage during the technical rehearsals then they will go for the whole tour not knowing what audiences see. It is much easier for them to invest in these difficult moments when they have a clearer knowledge of how it all comes together and the impact it possesses.



Richard Mylan (Ollie)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

The First Preview

The first preview was a disconcerting experience. Five weeks of rehearsal and an exhausting technical week culminated in a damp squib of a show.

What was wrong? Had I been so immersed in the task of getting the show to this point that I had not noticed that it was fatally flawed? Have I steered all this talent onto the rocks?

I had to think quickly. There were so many beautiful things about the show and there had been an air of excitement among the team that we were finally going to have a public audience for our work. I realised that I still had a conviction that all the right ingredients were there; there must be some way to bring them all together into some powerful whole.

It struck me that what we had all just watched was a beautiful painting. It was crafted to within an inch of its life but it remained two-dimensional. It was not leaping out and embracing or shaking us.

The next day we all set about giving the production a bit more oomph. We all knew what was needed and it was now about finding time to tick off all the adjustments needed. A lot of those tasks required the generosity of the Drum staff and Theatre Royal Plymouth management. Black outs became proper black outs, adding a richness to the darkness from which lighting designer Andy Purves could make characters emerge beautifully. Sound exploded and whispered around our heads. Jon Bausor even introduced a whole new character! (By the way, did you see Grace?)

At 21.00 that night it had become clear that our hard work was well worth it.

The show leapt out at us and gripped our lapels for its 70 minutes before releasing us, shaken and very proud.

Last Minute Discoveries

Picture this. It is 1.30am. The evening after our first preview. Visible through the window of a harshly lit living room, two grown men attack each other in a series of embraces, each one more and more sub Strictly Come Dancing. That is what inspiration looks like!

Eddie and I had a sudden moment of clarity and found neither of us really liked what we had created for Marianne's religious epiphany moment. This led to us leaping about the living room of our flat looking for a new simplicity to the moment. It was a simple touch, a simple embrace, yet one that had to electrify and exhilarate Marianne.

So instead of going to bed we are suddenly full of life and prancing around a kitsch apartment without thinking of closing the curtains first. Inspiration does not wait for these actions. You just have to let it go!

The Creatives

I had a fantastic time working with practitioners at the top of their game. Each brought so much to this project and you can see and hear it throughout the show. It was my first time working with Jon Bausor but we hit it off spectacularly and will be looking for an opportunity to work together again soon.

I just want to flag up the input of Eddie Kay, whose title below does not quite capture his input and importance to me on this project. He was the perfect foil, offering inspiration, guidance and support throughout. His name might not appear in reviews but I really could not have made the show you have seen without him. Thanks Big Man.

Anyway, enough of the bromance. I wanted to ask the creatives what their ambitions were when they set out on this project.

Eddie Kay – Associate movement director



Eddie Kay
Photo by Helen Maybanks

My initial attraction to *The Believers* comes from not knowing what to believe. I've been asked many times 'What do you believe in?' only to answer 'If you mean do I believe in god I can only say no. How can I believe in something I have never seen, heard, touched?' Some people may think me a fool but what I believe is what I experience. There are so many belief systems surrounding us and not all of those are of a religious nature. We are faced with the decision to believe or trust in something or someone new every day. It is a thing we all have an opinion on and in most cases we want that opinion to be trusted/believed. So for fear of upsetting anyone, I put all threads and systems of belief aside. Ultimately my attraction to *The Believers* is the opportunity to work with four highly skilled actors and help them believe and trust in their physical strengths and weaknesses. Only then can we give to those observing something to believe in, because within it they see themselves.

My creative ambition was to challenge the viewing experience of the audience by blurring the lines between what is visually possible and what is not, whilst developing a physical vocabulary drawn from the habitual movement of the performers.

The excitement in working on this project lies in the unknown. Discovering the subtle shifts and honest reactions to the ambitious tasks we set for the performers brought the potential to light. Working in this way is full of conversation and in turn gives the artist complete ownership and the freedom to keep it constantly alive.

Jon Bausor - Designer

I was interested in the way the play explored the sense of reality and our belief in the very rules, memories and experiences that we depend on to live our lives. I was excited by the ambiguity and time shifts. For me it conjured a design that could reconfigure and redefine our sense of space, rather like the film *Inception*, or a drawing by MC Escher, constantly changing viewpoint and what is floor, wall and ceiling.

I was excited to explore the idea of levitation and defying the rules of gravity, just as we hear in stories of so called holy figures walking on water, or floating in mid air. I was also inspired by the extreme angle in which Salvador Dali's paints the crucified 'Christ of Saint John on the Cross' and the triptychs that hang above religious altars.

Above all I wanted to find something that gave the viewer an experience that felt sacred or somehow religious and for me light was the key. The light that is embedded in the set is heavily influenced by the work of the light artist James Turrell, who's installation work transforms the viewers state of mind, and places them into a sacred, meditative space using light as a transformative, revelatory medium, not unlike the place that Joff and Marianne are briefly taken to.

Bryony Lavery – Writer

To work on something about Belief... purely as a phenomenon without going into the dogma/theology of a particular faith...and working with, ahem, Scott Graham on exploring how belief might manifest itself physically...to set belief against doubt.... to understand the physical and mental representation of truth....

Andy Purves – Lighting designer

Bryony's words and Scott's preoccupations are always incredibly visually strong and collaborating with them both offers an unparalleled creative challenge that often takes my thinking and my approaches to lighting and space to very different and surprising places. Oppressive darkness and vacuums, impossibly distorted realities and perspectives, shifting ambiguities and the occasional complete rejection of the presence of gravity - all amazingly exciting things to be working with.

My creative ambition was to disorientate, to stimulate, to challenge, to question.

From an Observer's Perspective

Written by Victoria Meager, Coordinator of Performing Arts, City and Islington Sixth Form College

When Inga (Frantic's Learn & Train Manager) asked me if I was interested in observing some rehearsals for Frantic Assembly's new show, *The Believers*, I jumped at the chance. To watch a company such as Frantic Assembly work through a text and see how they master the obstacles of the devising process would be brilliant; not only for me to pass on this knowledge to my A level Drama students but also



Richard Mylan (Ollie)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

help me to continue to develop as a theatre practitioner because, as we all know, you never stop learning and each new cohort of students brings fresh challenges and the need to be inventive!

I first came across Frantic Assembly back in 2007, when I made a chance booking for my A2 Drama students to see *pool(no water)* at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Never had a production engaged and energised my students so much through the innovative use of set, ostensibly a swimming pool that swiftly changed to a hospital, longue, etc, to the soundtrack that accompanied us on the rollercoaster of character journeys which tangled and collided. This was something new and invigorating. That year saw some of the highest grades we had achieved at A2 level for, the now obsolete, Unit 5. Something had caught those students and stopped them in their tracks – performance became

something more than just Brecht and Stanislavski, it became a collage of styles and 'tricks' to create performance outcomes that gave new meaning and fresh perspective. From that point on it became a must to include Frantic Assembly in the schemes of work for both the AS and A2 Drama groups.

Othello, Lovesong, Beautiful Burnout, production after production Frantic Assembly was helping my students to think intensely about physical awareness and the semiotics of human behaviours, inspiring them to push that little bit more and take risks that little bit further. Hand in hand with the accompanying production workshops, my students gained confidence in their performance skills and dramatic acumen that enabled them to face the demands of the course head on.

A level Drama student motivation is high at City and Islington, and there is a culture of independent rehearsal, involvement in practical performance work and professional performance visits. However the students are, typically, more challenged by the written, theoretical parts of the course and from my experience developing writing confidence has to start start with practical investigation and play.

The AS and A2 units serve as a means to familiarise students with performance concepts and permits students to put their experiences down on paper. The emphasis on practical exploration work in Drama requires the development of a wide range of skills including listening, negotiating, problem solving, communicating ideas, compromising and the leading and accepting of other's leadership. These are demanding and sophisticated skills and having a professional company such as Frantic Assembly to recognise this need in their work is an extraordinary thing.



Eileen Walsh (Marianne)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

Frantic Assembly's productions are geared in almost every way to inspire and challenge traditional ways of thinking about drama and show that approaches to performance can no longer be compartmentalised as Epic, Naturalism or Physical Theatre. Although these labels have their place, what Frantic is doing is challenging these titles and saying that contemporary performance is an

amalgamation of all that is good about a theatrical experience and that boundaries are obliged to be crossed and confronted to stir up the 'norm', turn beliefs on their head and in the process create a visual and aural feast. Over recent years, there has been a noticeable move away from traditional acting courses at university and an increase in students wanting to study contemporary, collaborative and devised theatre degrees. In many ways Frantic Assembly and other companies such as Complicite, Kneehigh and Filter are facilitating this change in opinion of what a performer is and what theatre can be.

For me personally, the chance to observe Frantic Assembly in action was an exciting prospect. My degree in Theatre was obtained from Dartington College of Arts, a place synonymous with an experimental and multi-disciplinary approach to the arts, firmly rooted in post-modernism. I have now been teaching drama for 12 years, specialising in A Level Drama and Theatre Studies for the last

9 years. As with all teachers, there was a point where I simply wanted to have confirmation that what I was doing was 'OK' and that I was supporting my students in the best way I could as far as their drama education was concerned; what works for me, may not work for my students. There was also an element of wanting to do something 'different'. The Believers observations were a chance for me to reassess my current knowledge of theatre practice and how I could implement new strategies in my teaching to help my students get the best experience from their drama education.

Walking in to Studio 3 for the preliminary meeting at the Jerwood Space was like the first day of school; people were meeting and greeting each other, some were gathered around a table discussing the model box of the proposed set which had fantastical ideas allowing the actors to appear and disappear and be suspended from the set at 90° to the floor, literally turning the world on its axis.



Jon Bausor, Scott Graham, Eddie Kay and Bryony Lavery with model box
Photo by Donna Marie Howard.

There was a reserved excitement in the room that only something new and special creates. But there was also an immeasurable awareness of the scale of the task ahead – to make these incredible ideas come to life. Inga spotted me in the crowd and greeted me warmly; she then introduced me to Scott and Eddie, who – it transpired through the observations – are a formidable innovative duo. I said to Scott that, "I've read the rehearsal draft script and it's a great text, I think the final performance will be brilliant", "We hope so" replied Scott. His reply intrigued me... Here was a man with hugely successful shows under his belt and plaudits galore and yet there was a feeling that the production could go one way or another. At that moment, I realised that regardless of whether you are directing a student performance, a school production or a big budget West End show there is always that feeling of "this might not work" and it's this element of doubt that makes drama specialists so unique; it drives us to make it work

in whatever capacity. The "we" were the people in Studio 3 who were all there for one reason, to make *The Believers* happen.

What followed was a full company read-through of the script and, for me, one of the most enlightening and beneficial parts of my observations. I couldn't help but think how useful it would be to film this and put extracts of it on the Frantic Assembly website to share as the read-through is a practice revelation with regards to casting, collaborative awareness of the text demands and harness a joint sense of ownership and responsibility to get the production off the ground. The read-through showed the text to be a bittersweet tale with moments of joviality juxtaposed with a dark foreboding of what was to come. The characters were skillfully read by the cast who drew out the nuances of the characters, even at this early stage of textual investigation.



Chris Colquhoun (Joff)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

The series of observations I did reminded me of something very important and often forgotten when we are jumping through hoops to get our students through a syllabus, which is: the task that we give our students when we ask them to devise, normally in a 6 to 8 week project time, is enormous. Intermittent rehearsal slots, fluctuating group dynamic and the sometimes infuriating ebb and flow of generating material can challenge our students beyond words...but along the way there are the often overlooked highs, where they learn to accept each others' ideas, the moment someone says "that looks awesome", the time you find out that a student has directed a scene - something they would have never considered before, the moment in a trust exercise when a student has to put all their might in to trusting someone to be there for them when they fall.

Devising theatre is bloody hard work but its rewards are in abundance, where student talents and creativity can coalesce. The sense of pride and feeling of triumph at the end of the process is something that cannot be copied or substituted.

And so, I return to Scott's reply, "We hope so". For me, this translates to serendipity. Performance is serendipitous, a series of happy accidents that leads us to make discoveries. It is often the hardest part of our job to say it's OK to make mistakes in drama but it is often these 'mistakes' that become the most significant and beautiful imagery in student work as they arise from an unconscious playfulness with a stimulus.

The following rehearsal notes are what took place in the rehearsal room combined with my own italicised notes on how these could be explored and further developed in the classroom. I do hope that they are useful to you and give you some insight of what it was like to be in the rehearsal space.

Rehearsal Notes

Warm ups

These involve the whole company (not just the actors). They are physically intense and serve 2 purposes, 1) to get the company physically fit to cope with the demands of the show and tour, 2) to prepare mentally and physically for the rehearsal about to take place. Music is fundamental to help motivate and energise and there is lots of humour in the warm up to motivate people when they are waning, however there is a clear moment when people focus. Use of countdowns to give people a competitive edge.



Penny Layden (Maud)
Photo by Helen Maybanks

This could link to the study of Meyerhold's Biomechanics

Warm up activities;

Skipping

Ankle circle (with knees together) which rises up through the body
Calf and thigh stretches

Waist rotation side to side and up and down

Full body stretch

In a circle, the company does small jumps from side to side – into

alternate leg kicks – into jacks (repeated x4)

Arms up, down and to the sides in 2 beat pulses

Shake out and stretch

Jumps again but these are slower with hops on each foot to a count of 4

The routine is then repeated on a smaller scale (lower energy)

Running on the spot at 40%, 50%, 60%, 90%, the 100% for 10secs into a slow jog (20%)

Stretch out of arms and legs including a shoulder roll and back stretch

The company then divides in to pairs and do circuit training;

Skipping – squats against the wall – tricep pushes – ball passes on the floor with feet raised followed by press ups – touch and dodge (boxing style) – planks on 3 sides (front, left and right) – handstand (supported by your partner) and held seated position against the wall.

Floor work;

Crunches on toes, heels, then feet raised, crossed legs raised, raising torso, feet together then crunches side to side.

Stretches;

Yoga inspired incorporating 'salutation to the sun'.

Rope play

Time was spent exploring the possibilities and limitations of characters being tied together with a length of rope. This rope play was way of understanding the relationships within the play and preparing the actors for when this would be shifted to a 90° on set. This exploration also emphasised the need for core (torso) strength.

Throughout this there was a wholly collaborative approach with an open dialogue between Scott, Eddie and the cast. The cast have several suggestions about how the ropes tension impacts on their movement. One moment where the characters of Maud and Marianne stand face to face and then slowly fall towards the floor with their feet in the same position, remaining parallel to each other. This creates a beautiful image and could be seen as a literal interpretation of Maud's faith/dominance over Marianne.

The rope play also changes my perception of the characters/the world of the play as it shows the world literally being turned upside down foreshadowing the events in the play.

In 3's - 1 person roped and 2 people playing with manipulation and relationships that are shown in the play. Changes of dynamic – side to side, facing downwards and backwards.



Eddie Kay and Scott Graham
Photo by Helen Maybanks

Occurring themes: balance/imbalance – illusion and façade – disappearing and appearing.

We never 'see' Grace or Joyous – importance of this? What is the focus of the text if the children aren't a human manifestation?

- Each scene rehearsed begins with a read-through around the table – company is standing/sitting; the approach is comfortable before the blocking and structuring begins.
- The set and props are integral to the rehearsal process (logistics of where there are and how they are 'dealt' with) from the start so that they become second nature in performance.
- The ever moving set defines the relationships with the play.
- Collaborative and discursive approach, the ideas are then shaped and finalised by Scott.

Scene 2 (pp. 9 – 14)

At the start of the play we meet Marianne and Joff and Maud and Ollie after the main event in the play has happened (the main body of the text is a flashback to that night). They are talking about what happened - what do the students think has happened? This could then be explored through a rehearsed off text improvisation.

Scene 7 (pp. 22 – 26)

Remember why Marianne and Joff are at their neighbour's house – they have been frantically packing to avoid their belongings being ruined in the flood. How do they feel? What are they thinking? Replay of the characters entrances.

Marianne and Joff have committed to staying at the house and can't back out now. There is a feeling of gratitude and safety but this is juxtaposed with a feeling of unease and burden.

How do Maud and Ollie feel about having strangers in the house? Do they regret asking Marianne and Joff to stay?

Lots of play with the timing of the entrances and the impact this has on changing the scenes feel and the character intentions.

The actors are motivated to question themselves as their character, e.g. how much do you feel you are in the way? How much do you want them in your house? Do you want them to leave?

Play with the characters objectives to replay until the feel of the scene is right.

Scott moves the actors to play with the proxemics of the scene – where do they stand and/or move to? Why?

Marianne and Joff's arrival at Ollie and Maud's house could be explored through use of Artaud technique – naturalistically – exaggerated – silently – apply sound (actor generated), which then becomes a meet and greet scene through physical and gestural representation of the couples.

Use of Boal's forum theatre could be great at this point for students to stop the actors when the characterisation isn't how they think it is intended, student(s) to step in and replay the scene as they think it should be played.

Scene 8 & 9 (pp. 26 – 38)

Is the dinner party prayer done in a serious or jokey way?

Lots of play with the vocal tone when delivering the lines and the dramatic irony (Marianne and Joff making fun of the prayer across the table).

When the prayer begins how do you acknowledge your shock and/or amusement of this moment while it is being said?

Rope play of the dinner scene to see how this changes the movement of the cast as they are all connected / just the couples connected.

Silent dinner party to explore the subtext within the scene physically?

Scene 9, the interaction between the couples when they discuss their children. Exploration of the status – who has the upper hand and why? How can Marianne and Maud deliver their lines to show the difference between Grace and Joyous? (pp. 31-34)

Off-text improvisation between parent(s) and child to gain further understanding of the relationship.

What is the effect of the children on their parents and the parental relationship – joy, pressure, stress, disappointment?

Who appear to be the better parents (at this point) and why? This can be reassessed after the reading the conclusion of the play.

Scene 12, 13 & 14 (pp. 45 – 58)

Page 51, transition from Ollie and Marianne to Maud and Joff – coat passed /spliff is passed at the same time (split scene), with exit of Ollie and Marianne covered by a blackout to show time passing.

The transition to the next moment, Maud says *“Take a break from being a parent”* (p. 53), she goes in to a duologue where Maud suggests a cleansing ritual – the set tilts on its side when Joff begins to engage with Maud’s suggestion. The rocking action acts as a comfort to Joff.

There is a lot of debate over Joff’s line *“she isn’t good”* (p.53), could it mean she is unwell / bad / evil? The subtext of this is played with and discussed by the company.

What does the set tilting suggest/represent? Discuss the idea of worlds colliding – Joff’s world is being turned upside down as he is beginning to believe Maud and Ollie’s way is the ‘better way’. When Grace kills the Bantam (pp. 55-57), the actors play with concept of blame - Marianne blames Joff for not watching Grace or checking up on her, Ollie blames Grace and poor parenting, Joff blames himself. How does this impact on the use of proxemics within the scene?

This scene could be performed silently then text layered over the top then play with the subtleties in the scene i.e. where does Maud stand in all this?

What is Marianne’s reaction to Maud’s suggestion to give Grace *“a nice warm bath”* (p. 58)?

This could be explored through a short monologue response.

When Joff agrees to Maud’s suggestion of a bath, what is Marianne’s response and why? There is a sense of loss of control on Marianne’s part.

Scene 17 (pp. 69 – 76)

The cast explore the pressure of faith being imposed on someone/someone’s emerging faith and how this affects Marianne. *Consider movement e.g. the ensemble leaning in and adding this to a key line of text when Marianne feels pressured or outnumbered.*

The party scene (pp. 71 – 73) debates the existence of God with the backdrop of Joff dancing. Again the worlds of the two couples collide.

Scene 18 (pp. 76 – 79) The aftermath;

Marianne and Joff are united by grief and broken by loss – any faith they had has been destroyed.

Maud and Ollie have become isolated from each other; their faith has been challenged to the brink, they hold each other as there is nothing left.

What is the thing that Joyous sees? Ollie says, *“she was copying us”* (p.79).

What has the power to shake your entire belief system?

What drives Joyous to kill? Is this a result of nature or nurture? Is there such a thing as the perfect child?

Using the information about Joyous and Grace show them playing – this could be together or showing a child alone. Can we tell from these representations what will happen (foreshadowing)?

Bibliography of Inspiration

As ever this section illustrates the little references to other works that have helped propel this show forward. In the past I have not expanded on how these references actually helped. They just served to show the varied range of inspirations that help in the creation of a piece of theatre.

I have long believed that your references should be honest and far-reaching. And it is not just because I have a better knowledge of The Simpsons than I have of Chekhov. It is because I think we learn about life from millions of little interactions, some of which only betray their significance years later. This time around I want to say a little about each of the references. Maybe only to dispel the self-perpetuated myth that I only ever watch The Simpsons.

Let's start with a clever one...

Measure for Measure William Shakespeare (Play)

The Believers ends with two sets of parents mourning their children but only one child has died. One set of parents are mourning the destruction of their child's ability to believe. It is the damage done to her soul and the shattering of the mutual bonds belief brought them. That is very hard to express and quantify when faced with parents who have a dead child. I talked about the scene between Isabella and her brother Claudio in Measure For Measure where she talks of how it is better that her brother loses his life than she lose her soul by submitting to Angelo and sleeping with him. We have struggled with this quantification for 400 years. There is good reason it is considered a problem play. I don't imagine The Believers will present that situation with any more clarity but at least they share that same troubling scenario based in the strength of belief.

Heart of Darkness Joseph Conrad (Novella)

Specifically the moment where Marlowe visits Kurtz's 'Intended' and does not destroy her fragile belief system despite his whole body and mind screaming the fallacy of it all. We talked of aiming for a similar tension between Marianne and Maud.

The Secret History Donna Tartt (Novel)

The intensity of ritual and belief, culminating in Bacchanalian excess. The experience of Grace and Joyous out in the rain.

Cloverfield dir. Matt Reeves (Film)

A seven second burst of sound and intense silence as the roof top party scatters while debris rains around them. 1.12 to 1.19.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvNkGm8mxiM>

Equus Peter Shaffer (Play)

In rehearsal I referred to Dysart's dilemma of whether to treat Alan Strang and effectively strip him of his ability for intense spiritual communion. This appears to have happened to Joyous. This is less clear on the final draft of the script.

The Royal Hunt of the Sun Peter Shaffer (Play)

Pizarro's intense need for Atahualpa to rise again after his death. Pizarro is a non-believer but he desperately needs belief in his life. Without it he is lost. Is this Marianne and Maud's relationship?

Orphanage dir. J.A. Bayona (Film)

Somebody mentioned the film Orphanage. I can't remember why.

Family Guy Seth MacFarlane et al. (Animated TV Series)

Quagmire tears a strip off Brian. It is brilliant, brilliant writing. I was interested in a moment of fantasy where one character launches a vehement verbal attack in the face of the other, totally dismantling their beliefs. Unlike Family Guy, this would be a wishful moment that exists trapped in the social niceties around another couple's dining table. It never made the final draft.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdbnssEZ_Xk

Team America dir. Trey Parker (Film)

For general tips and advice on acting.

Mama dir. Andrés Muschietti (Film)

The physical movement in both the original short film version and the movement test for the full-scale film were massively inspirational.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRqS6pBC42w>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ins7QwvAp28>

Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought Pascal Boyer (Book)

A very interesting read. A bit hard. No pictures.

Loscil (Band)

Some spooky music played by Eddie Kay.

<http://www.loscil.ca/>

Echo Valley John Metcalfe (Music)

Some spooky music played by me.

Solaris Cliff Martinez (Soundtrack)

A Good Land, An Excellent Land Tiny Leaves (Album)

The Turn of the Screw Henry James (Novel)

All part of the research.

The Innocents dir. Jack Clayton (Film)

The film adaptation of the above.