



Fatherland

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

Written by Scott Graham
with contributions from the creative team
Compiled by Frantic Assembly

FRANTIC
ASSEMBLY



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ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

How to read this pack

This resource pack has been designed to be interactive using **Adobe Acrobat Reader** and has a number of features built in to enhance your reading experience.

Navigation

You can navigate around the document in a number of ways

- 1 By clicking on the chapter menu bar at the top of each page
- 2 By clicking any entry on the contents and chapter opening pages
- 3 By clicking the arrows at the bottom of each page
- 4 By turning on Page Thumbnails in Acrobat

Hyperlinks

For further information, there are a number of hyperlinks which take you to external resources and are indicated by blue and underlined text or **You Tube**.

Please note: You will need an internet connection to use this facility

When to read this pack

This pack is designed to be read AFTER you have seen the show. It contains some SPOILERS that would be a great shame to divulge before seeing the production.



David Judge (Daniel), Emun Elliott (Scott), Bryan Dick (Karl), Ferdy Roberts (Simon).
Photo: Manuel Harlan

Cover photo: Perou

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INTRODUCTION

Where the idea came from

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*Ferdy Roberts (Simon) in rehearsal
Photo: Scott Graham*

Where the idea came from

(The 243 Bus, The Monkey Thought Translator and Salvador Dali)

A few years ago I became sole artistic director of Frantic Assembly and embraced the freedom and responsibility that gave me to shape the kind of work we could be making. Previously this had been a discussion, a negotiation between myself and my co director but here I was, sitting on the top deck of the 243 bus asking myself the question 'what do I want to do?'

I was stunned at how quickly I was able to answer that question.

I had been talking to collaborator Eddie Kay about making a show about people's relationships with their fathers. We were telling funny and moving stories about our lives and people we knew but I always felt that we would have to reach beyond our immediate experiences to get a better understanding of the range of people's relationships with their fathers.

This thought came back to me as I was sitting on top of the 243 bus. My wife had also told me about a moment in a film she had taken my daughters to see the week before and this was rattling around my head too.

Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs is an animated film about a young inventor who lives with his Dad on an island in the middle of the Atlantic. The whole island is built on the sardine industry. The inventor's dad runs a fishing tackle store and struggles to communicate to his son entirely through fishing metaphors. His wife is dead and he struggles to fill the gap in his son's life. The more he tries to motivate and encourage his son, the more he confuses him. The young man only wants to invent, unleashing spray on shoes, rat birds and a Monkey Thought Translator for his pet upon a world that does



A still from Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

Where the idea came from

not understand or need his creations. Unfortunately, the monkey only thinks 'food' and 'hungry,' rendering the invention useless. When the young man invents a machine that turns cloud moisture into food he initially revitalises the economy before things get out of hand and the food mutates and rises up. The young man must save the day and his dad finally gets to see what a talented and unique person his son is. Just when he thinks he has lost his son he finds that he is still alive and rushes to display his feelings. Facing the young man, he launches into a frustrating series of unsatisfying fishing metaphors. Sensing his frustration, the young man's girlfriend grabs the Monkey Thought Translator off the monkey and puts it on the father's head. Immediately, the father gives the most beautiful and clear declaration of his love and pride, thanks to the Monkey Thought Translator.

It is a beautiful moment but it struck me that what this fledgling project needed was to find the Monkey Thought Translator. It needed to find a way of getting out to the voices that are hidden for whatever reasons. It needed to engage with stories that have sat within people and offer a way of releasing them.

It became clear to me that we needed to target people around the country and find a way of interviewing them about their lives. Those testimonies would, of course, be highly subjective and only offer insight from one perspective. That is where my second, altogether more high-brow reference came into play.

I remembered a painting that had caught my attention years ago. It was Salvador Dali's 'Gala Contemplating The Mediterranean Sea Which At Twenty Meters Becomes The Portrait Of Abraham Lincoln - Homage To Rothko (First Version)'. It is initially an image of Gala looking out of a window. It is made of blocks of colour and as you retreat from it (or squint) it becomes a portrait of Abraham Lincoln! The individual blocks of colour morph into a new image. I thought this is exactly what the interaction with the Monkey Thought Translator should do. It should collect individual testimony and only then, from a distance, would an image of Fatherhood emerge.

I used this mixture of low and high art references to convince Simon Stephens and Karl Hyde to set out with me on this journey.





COLLABORATION

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Ferdie Roberts (Simon), Luke Rigg (Jack), Joseph Alessi (Alan). Photo: Scott Graham

Why These Collaborators?

I thought long and hard about collaborators for this project. I wanted to be ambitious and do something different. As the idea developed (admittedly I was still on the 243 bus at this point!) it was clear that it might be on a larger scale than a normal Frantic Assembly show and it felt absolutely right to aim for this.



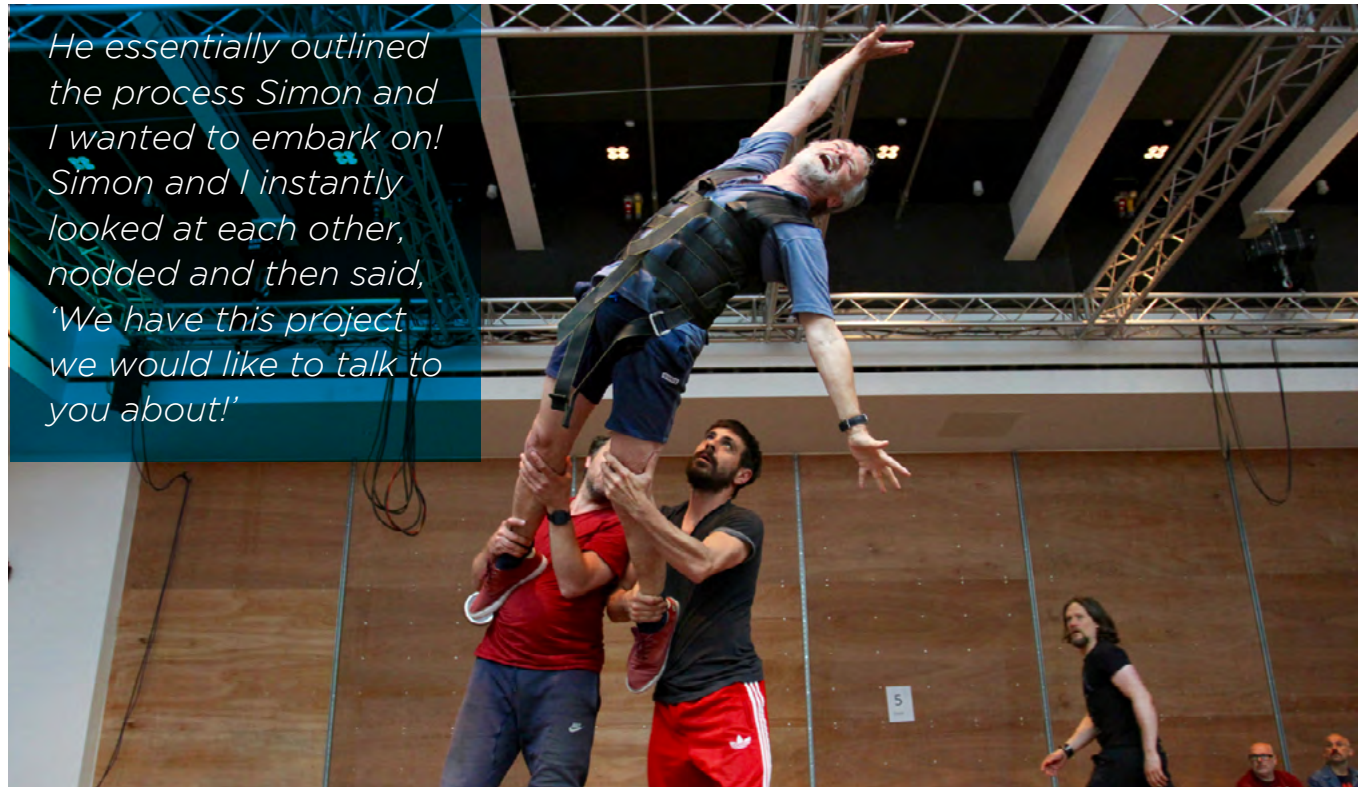
At the time, I was working with Simon Stephens on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, reworking it from its in-the-round format to an end on format for the West End. I believed that a lot of Simon's work explored the resilience of children to deal with the mistakes of their parents. I am not sure if this was a conscious thing on his part but it might have been one of the reasons why he did such a great job on *Curious Incident*!

My instinct was that this was more likely a subconscious preoccupation that might make him a very interesting collaborator on a project about our relationship with fatherhood.

I took him for dinner and wowed him with my Monkey Thought Translator/Salvador Dali combo and from that moment he was on board.

A few weeks later Simon mentioned that he was going to have a meeting with Karl Hyde from Underworld. This was really just a getting to know each other thing. Simon suggested I came along. I have been a huge fan of Underworld and use their music in my rehearsal and workshop rooms constantly. We have also used Underworld for the soundtrack to *Beautiful Burnout* (which took its name from an Underworld track).

He essentially outlined the process Simon and I wanted to embark on! Simon and I instantly looked at each other, nodded and then said, 'We have this project we would like to talk to you about!'



Neil McCaul (Graham), Emun Elliott (Scott), Ferdy Roberts (Simon), Bryan Dick (Karl). Photo: Scott Graham

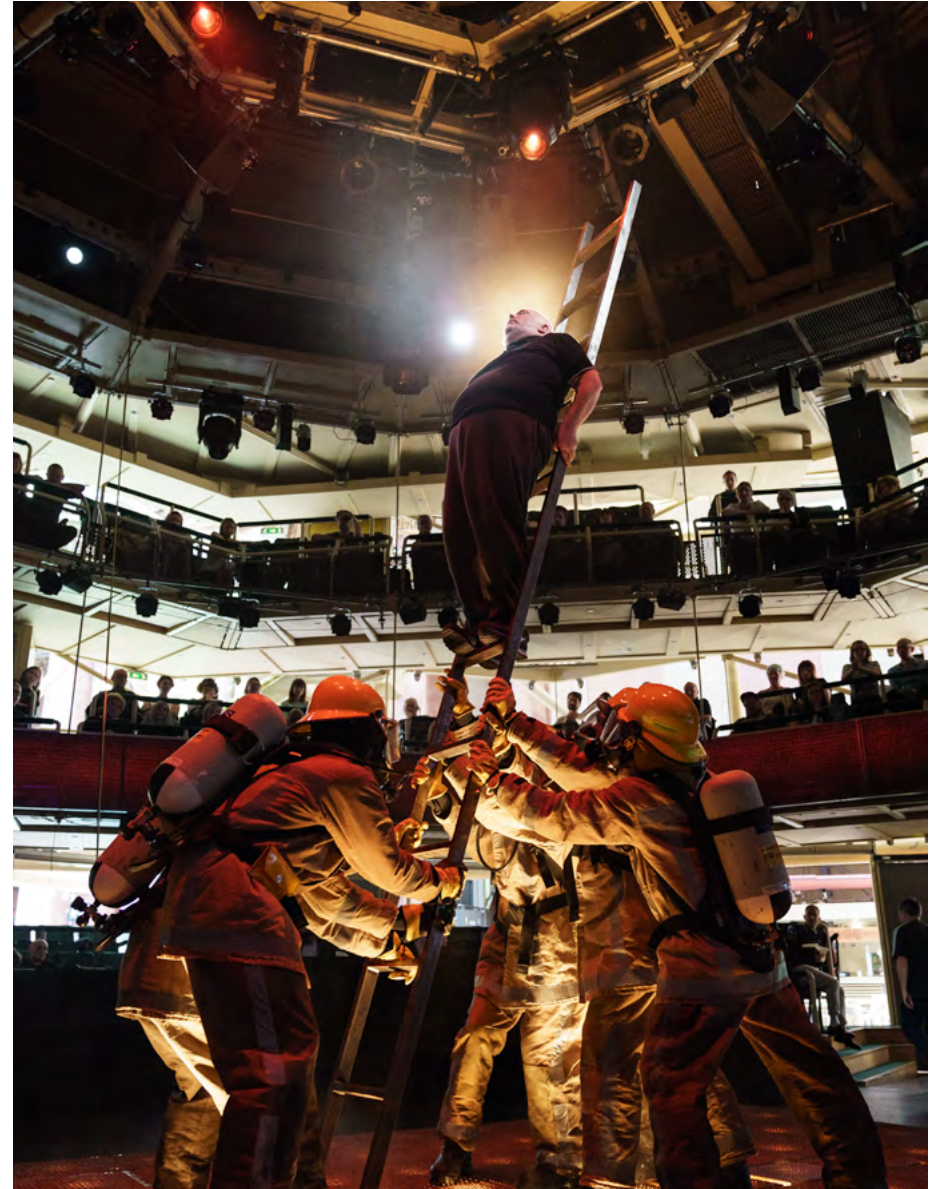
Why These Collaborators?

Both Simon and I felt that we were not necessarily meeting Karl about our project and decided not to mention it. We chatted about how we made work and Karl talked about how he instinctively collected fragments of voices from people who are not normally heard. He then pieces these fragments together to create a greater picture. He essentially outlined the process Simon and I wanted to embark on! Simon and I instantly looked at each other, nodded and then said, 'We have this project we would like to talk to you about!'

I don't know why I had never realised that that was Karl's creative process. Listening to *Born Slippy* and now knowing it is a drunken journey back home to Romford, I could then see Karl hearing and banking these wonderful fragments of conversations, of other people's fascinating lives, and building his poetry from them.

That first conversation was exhilarating. We were all fired up and committed to see where this process might take us. We were all equally committed to the idea that this must be about discovery and something new.

This commitment has informed every meeting and every session we have had together. This has meant that it has never been easy but it has always felt right. It means that this might be the most exciting project I have ever worked on!



Nick Holder (Mel). Photo: Manuel Harlan

Fathers and sons

Scott Graham, Karl Hyde and **Simon Stephens** on the making of *Fatherland*.



If you don't think forgiveness exists, then fatherhood is a horrible, lonely, brittle place. It's all hard edges.

Scott Graham

Beginnings

Scott Graham (SG): It started in a bar in Edinburgh. I was having a drink after a Frantic Assembly show with Eddie Kay, the choreographer, just talking about stories of our dads, and the two of us thought, 'There's a show in this.'

Simon Stephens (SS): Scott asked me to get involved. We'd just made a show together [*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*], and I'd enjoyed working with him hugely. The aftershocks of how we live with our fathers, the legacies of our fathers and how those aftershocks inform or inspire our own fathering, is something I've considered in pretty much all my plays. I think it's healthy for artists to return to obsessions rather than trying to find new ones, and there's something big in that question that obsesses me. All of us are dads who'd had dads or have dads.

SG: I've been massively inspired by Underworld's music: it's always present in our rehearsal rooms and workshops, and a few years ago, we made a show called *Beautiful Burnout* with the National Theatre of Scotland [that] used Underworld tracks to score the show. But I didn't get to meet Karl until I gatecrashed a meeting between him and Simon about something else. I'd

realised that [making this show] was not just about the stories of our childhoods or our relationships with our fathers – it was about accessing others, trying to get to these hidden stories. [And] in the meeting, Karl talked about how he likes to harvest the words from people we don't normally hear, the beautiful poetry that exists in ordinary people. I realised he was so absolutely the right person to help us tell this story, or to find this story.

We thought about the process we [would] put people through to get the truth and these histories to come out in this beautiful, eloquent way. One of us suggested looking at our school photos and interviewing those people, until we realised they'd just be exactly the same age as us. But that led us to focusing on our home towns, going back to them and interviewing the people we found there.



Top - Scott Graham, Simon Stephens.
Bottom - Karl Hyde.
Photos: Scott Graham and Karl Hyde

Fathers and sons

Going home

Karl Hyde (KH): It was more of a convenience, wasn't it? 'Where else are we going to go?'

SS: I think that's right. But as well as that, there was something, for me at least – probably for all of us, but for me quite acutely... I was feeling England was a more cleaved country than it had been in my adult lifetime, and the discrepancy of wealth and cultural expectations between London and the rest of the country seemed more pronounced than they'd ever felt to me. The idea of going to places like Corby and Kidderminster and Stockport [respectively, the hometowns of Scott, Karl and Simon] felt intellectually fascinating as well as convenient. The convenience was probably a driving factor, but I do remember thinking, 'Yes, it would be good not to look at London again'.

SG: What I realised at the very start of this, after the conversation with Eddie, was that as interesting as our stories were on a drunken night, it's a fraction of the whole experience of fatherhood. The process of making the show had to be about getting beyond our own experience. It was always about interviewing people, and enough people to create many pixels so they form a single image that should surprise us.

Expectations

SG: I never clocked the significance of going home. It felt like a functional, practical choice – but it was integral, vital. And fascinating, what it did to us. It made us prodigal sons, until you go back and realise no one gives a shit. I felt like I couldn't put two steps together because I was so self-conscious. Our home towns had a huge impact on the show and eventually dragged us into the work itself.

KH: We went back together. It had to be together. It grabbed me, the idea of the three of us travelling back in time to gather stories from the places we all launched off from, ran away from, escaped from. [Scott, Simon and I] had all pretty much done the same thing by leaving our home towns, satellite towns whose industries had been wrecked for one reason or another, [and now] we were all going to travel in this vessel together, tell each other stories and find something out.

SG: For me, it became an accidental stroke of genius going back home, because it's unfinished business with the town that created you. That town is your father, and you've mythologised that father, good or bad. All of that exists in the stories you tell of it, whether you choose to tell a story of it being a monster or a nurturer.



Your moral compass has shifted, your outlook has shifted and what you expect of yourself shifts. Responsibility changes everything.

Karl Hyde

SS: Did we find what we were expecting? One of the interesting things about this specific experience, this interview, is that it throws up the uncertainty of memory. So I'm really happy for either of these guys to say, 'That's just not true'. But my memory, right now, is that Corby was more fucked than I thought it would be, and that Kidderminster was more beautiful than I thought it would be. But the remarkable possibility of humanity, even in places that appear derelict, is what lived with me, I think. People are remarkable.

KH: Each of us looked at the others' towns and went, 'It's all right here, isn't it?' I remember arriving in Corby and thinking, 'I could spend some time here.' The same with Stockport. Simon would be walking around, putting it down, and we'd look at each other, and he'd go, 'Actually, it's a pretty cool town, isn't it?'

SS: Going with Karl to visit places I'd known in Stockport all my life, I saw it with the clarity of an outsider. I really liked that, and I really liked the town.

Fathers and sons



Photo: Scott Graham

Listening

SG: We found that this show was about the opportunity to be heard. A lot of people [we interviewed] were really ready to speak: [they] found it very emotional, as we did. This is stuff that sits quite deep within their personalities, so when they tell you, it's testament to the idea of them being linked to other men across the UK. They're willing to share it because they think it might be interesting, because they're being asked. They're answering questions that probably no one's ever asked them before.

KH: That's it. The majority of people we spoke to have probably never sat down and spoken in that way. That's part of what makes our position in this whole thing privileged – we've elicited stories from people who don't normally talk like that, aren't normally so candid. We're talking to people who've had to keep up a front, who come from societies where to let your front down is a sign of weakness. Yet all of them opened up to us.

SG: Talking to people, they would often mention forgiveness about their relationships with their dads, whether they were looking for it or offering it. It goes both ways, but the weight of expectation a lot of fathers

carry comes with a fear of failure. If forgiveness exists in the world, then it's manageable: you can take those steps forward. But if you don't think it [exists], then it's a horrible, lonely, brittle place, fatherhood – it's all hard edges.

KH: You're just terrified of making a mistake.

SG: Absolutely. You forget the power of the younger generation to forgive, even though you've done it yourself. As soon as you put on that coat of fatherhood, you're different.

KH: Your moral compass has shifted, your outlook has shifted and what you expect of yourself shifts. Responsibility changes everything.

Fathers and sons

Fathers

KH: My dad is in the play, and... Oh, Jesus – he's so chopsy. He's trying to play it cool, but he's like, 'Yeah, I'm going to be in a play...', which I think is really lovely.

SS: Mine died years ago, when I was 28, and he's a big, big presence in my sense of self. There were about five years of my life when I saw him, like, twice a year. And I'd ring him up or I'd think about him, and thinking about him was a comfort. When it came to watching the World Snooker Championship or watching football, I'd think about my dad. And since he's died, when it comes to watching football or watching the World Snooker Championship, I think about my dad – and the functions of comfort and inspiration and mild irritation, which is what dads are for, still works. What's problematic is that I know how his story ended, and it presents a possible ending for my story. That's my defining anxiety as a human being, I think: that I'll end the same way he did, which is of an early death from alcoholism.

SG: Mine lives in Spain. We're close. I don't know how often we talk, but he's certainly in my thoughts. I was sitting here just now, feeling absolutely knackered, and I realised – I'm sitting like my dad. I can feel the physicality of him and I just want to shake that out a little bit.

SS: You talking about this fatigue manifesting itself in you sitting in the same position reminds me of this Tony Harrison poem, which was one of the first things you talked about to me.

SG: Book Ends. It's about when he comes home – he goes back to his house and he's sitting in his mum and dad's living room, just silent, one end of the sofa from his dad, and they're both adopting that same physicality. His mum comes in and says, 'Look at the pair of you. You're like bookends.' And he goes, 'Yeah, nothing between us but books.' The physicality unites them but the education has driven them apart.



Bryan Dick (Karl), Neil McCaul (Graham), Emun Elliott (Scott), Ferdy Roberts (Simon). Photo Manuel Harlan

Fathers and sons

Verbatim theatre

SS: I've been quite public about my reservations about verbatim theatre as a form, so it made perfect sense to me to have a go at it. One of the things that fascinates me about verbatim theatre, and I think we've found a way of articulating it, is that the precision of grammar and lexicon and punctuation with which people speak is normally diluted in imagined dialogue, because there's less repetition, correction or interruption. In verbatim theatre, all that is offered to you as a series of possibilities. That was just delicious.

SG: I don't think we necessarily wanted to feel like we were working under the rules of verbatim theatre. We appreciated those nuances and all that colour and shade – that's what drew us to it. But as soon as somebody mentioned the rules, we weren't interested.

SS: You've got to be ferocious with your editing. It's the only way that makes sense to me. Too many words deadens drama. So searching for absolute linguistic precision, you need to just carve away massive bodies of material. The printed transcripts of all the interviews must have been about 500 pages. To get a 50-page play out of that, your radar has to be really alert.

Songs

KH: This is folk music. It follows a tradition of folk music – storytelling, carrying the legend of a person, a place, an event. The sounds are derived from objects that evoke memories of our childhoods and our fathers. All the instruments are made from the sounds that these objects make. Matthew and I got into the studio, and he started to assemble rhythmic patterns from a bouncing ball, a bunch of keys, a revving car, which instantly drew me to sections of the script that I was inspired to sing. What came out is a 21st-century version of folk music.

Fatherland in flux

SS: I think that everything anybody ever does is political. Every decision we've made [on *Fatherland*] is charged with a political gesture, in the sense that we're attempting to dramatise the capacity for compassion, humanity, brutality and inarticulacy of masculinity throughout England. We're celebrating the capacity for humanity in English towns that became associated, at the time of the referendum, with a kind of lazy nationalism. How much is it a play of our time? I don't think it's the responsibility of the artists to answer that question.

“

Every decision we've made is charged with a political gesture.

Simon Stephens



Photo: Scott Graham

Fathers and sons

SG: I think there was tension in the air at the time [we were travelling around England]. But the stories themselves are pretty timeless – and I think it was Karl's dad's story that made me see that. Here was a boy whose mum and dad were failing him, and he was too scared, isolated and alone to view the home as a *home*. It was just a dark house full of dark memories: he was much happier sitting on the bank outside, watching Birmingham getting bombed [during World War II]. He was lost. We were told that story by an old man – but if we'd seen the *boy*, we might just go, 'What are you doing hanging around here?' There's something beautiful about that: our perspective changes when we see the people [telling the stories]. It's nice to break through the suggestion that this is a play of the moment.

It's not. These relationships are timeless.

SS: *Fatherland* exists in the tension between Karl's capacity for the mythical and my moment of realising, 'Fuck, England's a little bit more fucked than I thought it was.'

SG: We didn't go in to make a political piece with a capital 'P'. If we were going to do that, we would have carefully chosen who we were going to speak to. But there was a political consistency there, which was: 'Right, you're asking us questions. We're going to talk.' People of all political persuasions were feeling something very similar: 'You don't normally listen to us. But there's an opportunity coming up where you're going to have to.'

What we did find very interesting was that when we talked to people, they would talk in terms of protecting what they had. And that's very timely. We're talking about what fatherhood becomes: we shift our moral compass because we've never had anything to protect. We suddenly see the potential for danger everywhere, and we understand that 'the other' might come and take what's ours. My instinct was that that was what was fuelling the political debate and language at the time. *Fatherland* and fatherhood. Just being a father might shift your moral compass by one degree, but that's all it takes.



Photo: Scott Graham

Collaborators Point of View - Nick Sidi - Dramaturg

Having worked with both Scott Graham and Simon Stephens before I was invited to take part in a reading of an early draft of FATHERLAND - which mainly consisted of Simon's initial edit of the testimonies they had conducted with the interviewees in their home towns. Some of whom were known personally to Scott, Simon and Karl.

At that first reading, I thought the concept was brilliant and a lot of the stuff they had discovered was fascinating but I also felt that the three of them were too close to some of the material to be really objective about how dramatically interesting all of the testimonies were. I offered my services as dramaturg to help edit the interviews but also to be a more critical outside eye on the story they wanted to tell. I also think there is a danger that "verbatim theatre" can suffer from a lack of narrative drive - you have to be really conscious that just because things are "true" that doesn't always mean they stand up to the rigours of dramatic storytelling.

Simon and I worked together on a further edit with us challenging the value of each interview and then starting to look at the themes which kept occurring across the random cross section of people they had been talking too. It became clear even across a small cross-section that *Fatherland* conjured up similar feelings. But despite this the script still felt like a series of stories and I felt there was more to be found.



I also think there is a danger that "verbatim theatre" can suffer from a lack of narrative drive - you have to be really conscious that just because things are "true" that doesn't always mean they stand up to the rigours of dramatic storytelling.

Collaborators Point of View - Nick Sidi - Dramaturg

I was really keen to listen to the interviews that Scott, Simon and Karl had done with each other - even though at this stage there was no intention of including them in the piece. They were done merely to test out the questions they planned to ask other people. On hearing them it struck me that actually what was happening was that by going out to interview people in their home towns, the three of them were revealing much more about themselves than they had realised. By being on the outside of the process I was able to look more objectively and see the value in this. And by including their own testimonies they would be able to create something more dramatically compelling. An idea which took flight further when they questioned the validity of including themselves - which in turn led to the character of Luke turning interrogator on them.

The job of the dramaturg is to assist the writer to help shape the narrative of a play and by coming on board after the process had started I hope I have been able to help develop what I believe is a very unique and illuminating collaboration between three artists - who possibly reveal more about who they are than they originally intended!



*Neil McCaul (Graham), Nick Holder (Mel), Ferdy Roberts (Simon), Dekka Walmsley (Stephen), Joseph Alessi (Alan).
Photo: Manuel Harlan*



PROCESS

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*Luke Rigg (Jack), Emun Elliott (Scott), Ankit Giri (Samir),
Ferdie Roberts (Simon), Tachia Newall (Craig), Bryan Dick (Karl), Luke Brown (Martin), Deka Walmsley (Stephen)*
Photo: Scott Graham

The questionnaire

We knew we wanted to talk to people but we also wanted to make sure that we could keep conversations alive. The obvious way to make sure that our meetings did not flounder or go off piste was to create a questionnaire that all participants would experience. That way we could guarantee that we covered all bases in the short time we would be talking to people.

So we go out and speak to people. But how?

Road trip!

And with what?

Ah...

The questionnaire

Simon suggested using a questionnaire that he has developed to interview his characters. I was immediately fascinated. What a great way to put meat on the bones of the characters you create!

We took this questionnaire and adapted it, adding more fatherhood focussed questions aiming to explore the experiences of having and being a father.

Having done this, we realised we needed to test them. We decided to test them on each other, recording and transcribing the results.

This was quite an emotional, intense and, sometimes liberating experience. It became clear that even the process of interviewing would be draining and difficult as you witness and sometimes provoke these often conflicted and complicated reactions from the interviewee.

This process was invaluable though as it helped us focus our questions. Our original questionnaire was sprawling and took about three hours to get through. We had to stream line this for the next stage.

With us all having hectic diaries we realised we had to do as many interviews in a short amount of time as possible. That meant it was time for a road trip!

We decided to focus on the towns we were brought up in and try to find voices from there. They were voices that were linked to ours but should be different as we had all left those towns at a young age. The towns of Corby, Kidderminster and Stockport were the easy choices. We had to start somewhere so why not there?

That is why we hired a car and headed off to Corby, Kidderminster and Stockport, me driving, Karl in charge of tunes and Simon in the back like our giant man/child. Five days later we have accumulated around 25 hours of interviews and heard some extraordinary stories.

We had no idea of the significance of the choice to start in this way or the impact that it would have on the process of making this show. At that point our own interviews were only a test but the more we delved into this world the more we were implicated, the more the desire to make this show was interrogated and the more our own stories became entwined in the narrative. Our home towns embraced us and challenged us in ways that opened our eyes to a bigger picture.

Finding the interviewees

Once we recognised that we had to look beyond our own experiences we then had to work out how. I had already suggested it should be interviews but how do we access those interviewees?

Our first idea was to look at our school photo from a particular age and search out some of the people from that. Then we realised that this would only give us access to people who were the exact same age as ourselves. This would not give us anything like the diversity of experience we were hoping for.

What this suggestion did offer, however, was a focus. We decided to concentrate on the towns that we were brought up in. All three are fairly unremarkable and this made them all the more interesting. As this project was all about accessing the hidden voices then it would be absolutely right to search for them in towns that no one hears from.

Those towns were Stockport (Simon), Bewdley/Kidderminster (Karl) and Corby (Stockport).

For Corby, I approached a couple of friends that I had not seen for 26 years. This was an odd experience. So much would have happened and changed since we kicked a football around for hours every night. Or would it? What would they look like? What would I look like in their eyes? Would they be suspicious of the process? Would they think I have changed?

I also asked the director of the local theatre to approach some random characters of different ages so that we could guarantee that diversity of experience. This included a man in his fifties who, after a life of violence was finding strength in his poetry and his relationship with his son, and a teenager who felt abused by the complexities of his separated parents' relationship. Another young man failed to turn up. He had recently lost an unborn child.



Nick Holder (Mel). Photo: Manuel Harlan

Finding the interviewees

In Bewdley we interviewed Karl's dad, a fascinating man in his 80s, and his next door neighbour, a life-long friend of Karl's. In Kidderminster we were assisted by the course leader in the local college in accessing interviews with some of his colleagues. There were some extraordinary stories of different kinds of survival, different kinds of adversity.

In Stockport we interviewed Simon's step dad and some of Simon's friends from school. We also advertised some interview slots on Twitter and interviewed some of those that responded.

It felt like a rare privilege to listen to those people talk. At times it was emotional. There were times when we just wanted to turn the equipment off and just hug them. At times they shocked us.

They were nervous, angry, full of questions, full of respect and admiration. They were fascinating.

We made it clear we would be using their words in a production we were going to make.

We could tell them little more than this as we did not know ourselves. Having now created the show we then asked them to create their own character names to protect their anonymity, although this would have been pointless to those identified as Dads/Step Dads of the interviewers!

We interviewed both male and female. 80% of those interviewed were themselves parents. The age range extended from 19 to 80.

We mostly interviewed people in neutral spaces but two of them were in their own homes.

All interviews were recorded and employed the same questionnaire. Not all interviews were used in the production.



Tachia Newall (Craig). Photo: Manuel Harlan

Doubts and voices

I have spoken about the unexpected stresses of going back to our home towns to interview people. As stressful as it was it was not all negative and ultimately led to one of our most significant breakthroughs!

Two of the people we were interviewing in Corby were two old friends of mine that I had not seen for 26 years. It was only when they arrived that my nerves kicked in and the voices started to pipe up in my head.

As one of them arrived I went down to the front of the theatre to meet him. I suddenly felt compelled to tell him that this was cool, that it was legitimate, that 'that guy from Underworld' was involved. (I didn't but the voices were loud!). Why did I feel the need to legitimise it?

While we were doing the interview I became so conscious of the way I was sitting, the way I was talking. What did I sound like? Had I changed? I was obsessing over how I appeared to them. Why? Did I not want them to think less of me? Or think some clichéd nonsense about my line of work?

When I left Corby there was little sign I would end up working in theatre. I was football and sport obsessed and these were the lads I ran around with. That is all we knew of each other.

I felt that they could see through me. That I was a fraud. The voices in my head were certainly saying this! Even when it was not people I knew, when it was people who had never met me and could not judge me, those voices took a different tack. If an interviewee was telling a particularly harrowing story or had broken down a little voice would say, 'you are loving this, aren't you? You are going to take this pain back to London and polish it for your play!'



Emun Elliott (Scott), Joseph Alessi (Alan), Ferdy Roberts (Simon), Tachia Newall (Craig), David Judge (Daniel), Deka Walmsley (Stephen), Ryan Fletcher (Luke). Photo: Manuel Harlan

Doubts and voices

The moral dilemmas and responsibilities of verbatim theatre were apparent but this was also paranoid insecurity!

Simon, Karl and I talked about this and we all had different voices in our heads. Not all were so extreme and not all were negative. What was interesting and useful was getting them out in the open and realising that the questions of why we were making this show and what we wanted from it were vital. This is where Luke was born.

Breaking the conventions of verbatim theatre (and possibly the trust of our audience) we created Luke to articulate this paranoia. He drags Karl, Simon and Scott into the play and, even though he rejects the interview, plays a vital role in bringing the image of Fatherland into focus. It is Luke who turns the need for forgiveness back onto the artists. Until then Simon talks of how he might forgive Stockport but the anxiety of the process might have indicated that it is we (or some/one of us) that needed forgiveness from our home town!



David Judge (Daniel). Photo: Manuel Harlan

When you can't see the woods for the trees – the dramaturg

The interviews generated between 22 and 25 hours of verbatim text. Each interview felt so alive and fascinating but the sheer size of the accumulated words made them cumbersome and inert.

We set about ordering them thematically. As each interviewee had the same interview this was not too difficult. The difficulty came in working out what was genuinely interesting.

Having been present at the interviews we were wrapped up in memories of how it felt in the moment. It was really hard for some of these to talk and for some it felt like a weight had been lifted off their shoulders. We had an emotional connection to each interview that did not help with an objective appraisal of the theatrical potential of each one.

Simon suggested bringing Nick Sidi into the team in a dramaturg role. I had previously worked with Nick as a performer on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and had always found his observations astute and worth listening to. What he displayed here was so much more valuable.

 *I think this is the first time I have worked with a dramaturg and it has been invaluable. I normally trust my own instinct with the dramaturgy within Frantic's work but I simply could not see the wood for the trees and it was brilliant to have that perspective, advice and encouragement from the outside.*

Nick could be brutally honest as he had no emotional connection. His detachment meant that when discussing a scene, he was not partly willing it to work as we were. He also posed some brilliant questions for us. Was this really of interest to anyone other than us? Where do we sit in all this?

Nick wasn't all provocation. He also offered validation to our thoughts and ideas. Nick encouraged the creation of Luke. He could see the images I was talking about and urged me to go for them. He played a vital

role in championing the potential of text, image, movement, music and song. He also chaired the debate around these issues.

I think this is the first time I have worked with a dramaturg and it has been invaluable. I normally trust my own instinct with the dramaturgy within Frantic's work but I simply could not see the wood for the trees and it was brilliant to have that perspective, advice and encouragement from the outside. (see [Collaborators Point of View Nick Sidi - Dramaturg](#))



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*Ferdy Roberts (Simon), Luke Rigg (Jack), Ankit Giri (Samir).
Photo: Scott Graham*

The world, within a world, within a world

A certain mind might dismiss the fear of the other as delusional, as ill informed, as prejudiced. The liberal mind likes to think of itself as inclusive and positive.

I was interested in this fear of the other and the shift of our moral compass that might occur when we perceive threat to what we hold dear. I was also fascinated in how susceptible we might be to having that moral compass nudged in a certain direction.

Much of the debate and noise around the referendum and Brexit concerns this. So much of it was fanning the flames of fear and demonising the 'other' - those 'over there', whether they were going to maraud over here or whether they were going to rule us from afar.

Fatherland touches on this lightly. Our show concerns the shift in values and expectation that might occur through fatherhood, when we put that coat of expectation on and begin to imagine who might come to harm our children.

ALAN I'm quite sort of insular now 'cause, you know, my little one I've got now, right? Woe betide anyone ever touched her or done anything to her. I would quite happily spend the rest of my days in prison. I would execute anybody that touched her.

I thought, is there a way of shifting the moral compass of our audience, even briefly? Not through clear, cogent argument but through something instinctive.

That is when The Manchester Royal Exchange offered the answer.

You walk through the streets of Manchester and you enter a grand, cavernous building. It is strong and impressive. You are already one level removed from the streets of Manchester. You adapt your speaking style, maybe your conversation topic and you adhere to an acceptable behaviour for the venue.

In the middle of that Exchange building is the theatre itself. It is a beautiful thing. A glass pod holding a theatre in the round. When you walk into that room you again adjust your behaviour to suit the agreed values of the theatre.

You are now two levels removed from the streets of Manchester. This is safety within safety.



Joseph Alessi (Alan). Photo: Manuel Harlan

The world, within a world, within a world



Click here to hear one of the songs
from the production

YouTube

What if the outside world were to inquire what was going on within this pod? What if a lad rode his bike across the exchange to take a short cut? What if a group of lads did not quieten down and finish their drinks when the bell for the beginning of the performance rang? What if some of them were to bang on the glass wall of the pod during an intimate speech. What if a couple of them burst in and started singing a football song?

They obviously do not share our audience values. Would we be looking for security to take them away, to just get rid of them so that we can continue with the show? Would we be berating the lack of security? 'This sort of thing shouldn't happen!'

Would we invite them in and talk about values? Would we applaud the bravery of their song?

My instinct tells me that our gut response would be the former.

If so, we are all susceptible to an extreme response when we feel our values are threatened. The world of politics knows this and plays on it. It manipulates us. This is a bit of a leap, I know, and I am only really talking about an almost imperceptible shift in our moral compass but we can be made to take extreme steps to protect our values, our children, the Fatherland, if we can be made to fear the other.



Ryan Fletcher (Luke), Tachia Newall (Craig), Emun Elliott (Scott), Bryan Dick (Karl). Photo Manuel Harlan



I've learnt that doing something you are passionate about is what makes the magic happen as a theatre maker.



Rehearsal and Production Process

My name is Chanje Kunda. I am a poet, playwright and performance artist and a Manchester International Festival Creative Fellow. I was selected by MIF to observe the way Frantic make work in order to inform my own practice.

There is a lot I have learnt about making work by being in the rehearsal room. The company do an hour physical warm up every morning. I thought this was solely to do with improving and or maintaining the fitness, strength and flexibility of the performers. However, when I joined in, I realised it's as much of a mental work out as a physical one. It helps you focus your mind in the present, in the space. It boosts your mood and energy levels and feelings of confidence. It also creates a positive and energetic atmosphere into the space. Dedicating this length of time into a warm up is incredibly useful and important in the creative process.

I was also fascinated by the way the creative team devise the movement sections. The actors are given props or parts of the set, and then asked to play around and explore what they can do with it. One small movement or sequence produced at random can catch Scott or Eddie's eye which can then be developed into something beautiful to watch. A small gesture can turn into set choreography. There is less pre-established choreography, and more ideas for starting points that Scott and Eddie can use to see where it takes them.

I noticed that in rehearsals when a cast member tries something and messes up, the whole room erupts into jovial laughter, and even the person who messes up doubles over laughing. I'm used to hearing self-critical voices in the back of my head when I make mistakes in rehearsals. I think now I will erupt into laughter instead making it a humorous part of the process.

If you do everything perfectly you are not going out of your comfort zone, you are not trying something new, you are not taking risks. Messing up is part of the creative process.

What I learnt most is to try to find joy in the process. Karl Hyde said, 'If it isn't fun, why are you doing it?' He only chooses to work on projects that he's passionate about. Previously I have agonised over work I am making. Now I am going to make a decision to have fun. I've learnt that doing something you are passionate about is what makes the magic happen as a theatre maker. Enjoying who you are collaborating with is also very important as this chemistry leads to great work AND an enjoyable process.

Recurring Images

Below are a few notes on some of the recurring images that popped up through the creation of Fatherland.

Bikes

Early on I could picture lads on bikes. I thought their silent presence was key but I was not completely sure why. They would haunt scenes and images. They would be threatening without ever explaining why. They would look feral and dangerous. I believed this threat was all about how we saw them and projected our prejudice onto them.

This became clear to me when I thought about Graham's testimony of being alone outside the house and sitting on the bank and watching Birmingham getting bombed. While we hear this story from an older man we do not project the same level of threat onto his childhood. He is not a delinquent. He is a lost boy. I wanted to find a way of seeing the threatening lads as lost boys, as versions of Graham moving through streets because they cannot find the warmth and security they need.

I wanted the bikes to suggest the absence of a father figure, to bring danger and potential menace. I also wanted to find a shift that would make us see the bikes as liberating and empowering too.

As ever with previews you have to look at the work with fresh eyes. What works? How can it be tighter? How can it be better? Sometimes for the rhythm of a show you have to sacrifice something. Having seen Fatherland you might be thinking 'What bikes?' Well spotted. Yes, they were cut after the first preview. They were not a bad idea! You just have to be brave and make some very tough decisions for the sake of the production as a whole! For those who have not seen Fatherland, carry on reading and ignore this. The bits with the bikes were brilliant!



Ankit Giri (Samir), Luke Rigg (Jack), Neil McCaul (Graham), Luke Brown (Martin). Photo: Manuel Harlan

Recurring Images

Coats

Initially the coats suggested memories of Dad and Grandad. Putting on the coat, we also became Dad. We explored the weight of that meaning and responsibility. We also played with the idea of the elusive image of that male figure from a child's point of view. The coat was huge and mysterious. Maybe several men passed through that coat in the child's life.

We literally hang onto those coat tails throughout the show. It is a recurring image. We are trying to hold onto something, to bring it back, to stop it leaving, to ask it or tell it something.

Doors

I liked the image of people going through doors. It might be Dad going to or coming home from work. It might be the last time you see that person. There was also a lovely tension in being on one side of the door and preparing to be the person you are expected to be on the other side.

Our set has simple frames imbedded into the floor. They are pulled out to become doors and even mirrors.

The flower

Craig's final scene exists as a coda to our play. Hopefully it pulls everything into focus. It is a beautiful moment of forgiveness. It teaches a father that he could be forgiven, that forgiveness exists in the world and that the generation that comes after us are capable of accepting our fallibility. This information is a gift from a daughter to her father.

I wanted something tangible to represent this gift. Something that Craig would be proud of and keep close to his chest. It would be something that he brings to the interview because he feels it means something special.

We would see it several times in the show. It would also come to represent the daughter herself. She is the gift his wife gives to him

The flower might not make it to the final version of the show. Maybe it is not a flower but some other object. Maybe I scrap it completely but I wanted something tangible to represent that generosity and pride.



Tachia Newall (Craig), Eddie Kay. Photo Helen Maybanks



BIBLIOGRAPHY OF INSPIRATION

Bibliography of Inspirations

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David Judge (Daniel), Emun Elliott (Scott). Photo: Scott Graham

Bibliography of Inspirations

As ever it is my mission to present a bibliography of inspiration that might point to where ideas emerged from. They can be as high or low brow as you need them to be. My ambition is merely to point out that ideas come from both of these places and they are equally valid.

Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs – This is where it all started. It was actually hearing my wife tell me about the Monkey Thought Translator. I think I actually had the idea for the show based on her reaction to it. I then saw the film for myself.



Gala Contemplating The Mediterranean Sea Which At Twenty Meters Becomes The Portrait Of Abraham Lincoln - Homage To Rothko (First Version) – I don't know why this popped into my head but I am so glad it did. It made so much sense and opened up the whole process for making Fatherland. It raised my ambitions and the scale of the project.



Chechen dance – I find this mesmerizing and beautiful. Both this and the film below inspired the movement for the final song.



Caribbean Dandee by JoeyStarr and Nathy – we loved the dynamic of the crowd that surrounds them. It is so simple but so effective.



'Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind' by Professor Yuval Noah Harari – Simon recommended this book and I have not read it all as I have not had the time but we were intrigued by the idea that societies thrive on the ability to tell stories and embrace narratives. The collecting of folk stories (the tales we tell of our fathers, our childhood and of our home towns) was a huge inspiration and aspiration for Fatherland.

