



# THE UNRETURNING

BY

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

Written by The Creative Team

**FRANTIC  
ASSEMBLY**

**TRP** Theatre  
Royal  
Plymouth



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Cover image: Creative Partnership



# AN INTRODUCTION

By Scott Graham

*Credit Tristram Kenton*



What this pack is for,  
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## What this pack is for, when to read it, etc.

This resource pack is designed to give access to the rehearsal process of *The Unreturning* and is aimed at anyone with an interest in how shows are proposed, developed and created. I feel it is important to open up and demystify the creative process otherwise theatre making can seem an elusive and exclusive engagement. For the sake of the current theatre industry and for future theatre makers it is vital that we seek to open closed doors that we might not have been aware of.

While the intention is to offer a thorough insight it would be impossible for us to answer all your questions before they emerge. At Frantic Assembly we pride ourselves on our ongoing dialogue with our audience and this pack and *The Unreturning* should just be the start of it. We will continually open up access, to inform and inspire. Throughout the tour there will be opportunities for post-show discussions but we will also offer online opportunities to get to know the team behind *The Unreturning*.

Simply this pack is not about us saying look how clever we were in making the show. It is about sharing the process with the hope that it offers insight, builds confidence and empowerment. So, I guess that means the rest is up to you!

### When To Read This Resource Pack

**This pack may contain spoilers.** It might be best to read it after you have seen the show. I would not want it to impact on your experience of watching *The Unreturning* but I appreciate that this is not always possible.



Credit Scott Graham. Jared Garfield and Joe Layton in rehearsals



A man in military camouflage gear, including a cap and boots, is sitting on a metal structure. He is positioned in front of a wall made of vertical corrugated metal sheets. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows. The overall tone is somber and gritty.

# THE UNRETURNING - WHY THIS PROJECT?

*Credit Tristram Kenton. Joe Layton as Frankie.*



# The Unreturning – why this project?

By Scott Graham



*I remember telling some of the early groups that we worked with that this was not an altruistic exercise. It was essentially selfish as I would want to come calling on them one day to be in our shows.*

This project comes from a slightly different place than other Frantic Assembly shows. 10 years ago, I created **Ignition** in the belief that there were young men out there who possessed the skills and application, drive and attitude to work well within physical theatre and the greater theatre industry. I was also aware that our work in schools was engaging and stimulating lots of boys. The problem was that they were not making that leap to consider it a vocation. **Ignition** set out to find those young men who, like me, possessed the skills that could cross over and be of value to companies like Frantic, but did not necessarily know that they were of value or that the theatre world could invite them in. I got lucky and quickly found I could apply the energy and balance I used in sport within this exhilarating, new found world of physical theatre. **Ignition** set out in the belief that there must be similar young men out there in youth clubs, sports clubs, street dance, parkour, anywhere, who, with a little bit of encouragement and support, could be shown that our world of theatre could be for them.

I remember telling some of the early groups that we worked with that this was not an altruistic exercise. It was essentially selfish as I would want to come calling on them one day to be in our shows.

The success of **Ignition** has far outstripped this ambitious statement and has found graduates making successful careers in theatre, TV and film. Some of those graduates have performed

in or worked on Frantic shows but it became clear to us that we needed to shout loud about this and commit to making a show that was cast entirely from **Ignition** graduates. We wanted to give them that intense experience of creating a show and touring it to new audiences across the country. We also wanted to show these new audiences that the success of **Ignition** is real and that our invitation into this world is genuine and making a difference.

As part of our **Ignition** program we offer what we call Back Up. This is ongoing training and wider access to the possibilities of working or development within theatre. Through this ongoing relationship with the graduates each year it became clear to us that the intensity of the training with Frantic, of the week working and living with the rest of the cohort in London, was quickly followed by a brutal return to home. Some talked of depression, of feeling lost. Some talked of returning exhilarated and seeking out friends to make work with. Some talked about how friends could not understand the intensity and importance of their **Ignition** week.

All of them talked about being changed and how their relationship with home had changed slightly. Maybe they saw limited opportunity. Maybe their friends quickly tired of hearing about this week away in London. Maybe they simply missed the camaraderie born of working so intensely with all of these new friends from across the country. Whatever the reason, for many of them, their relationship with home changed fundamentally.

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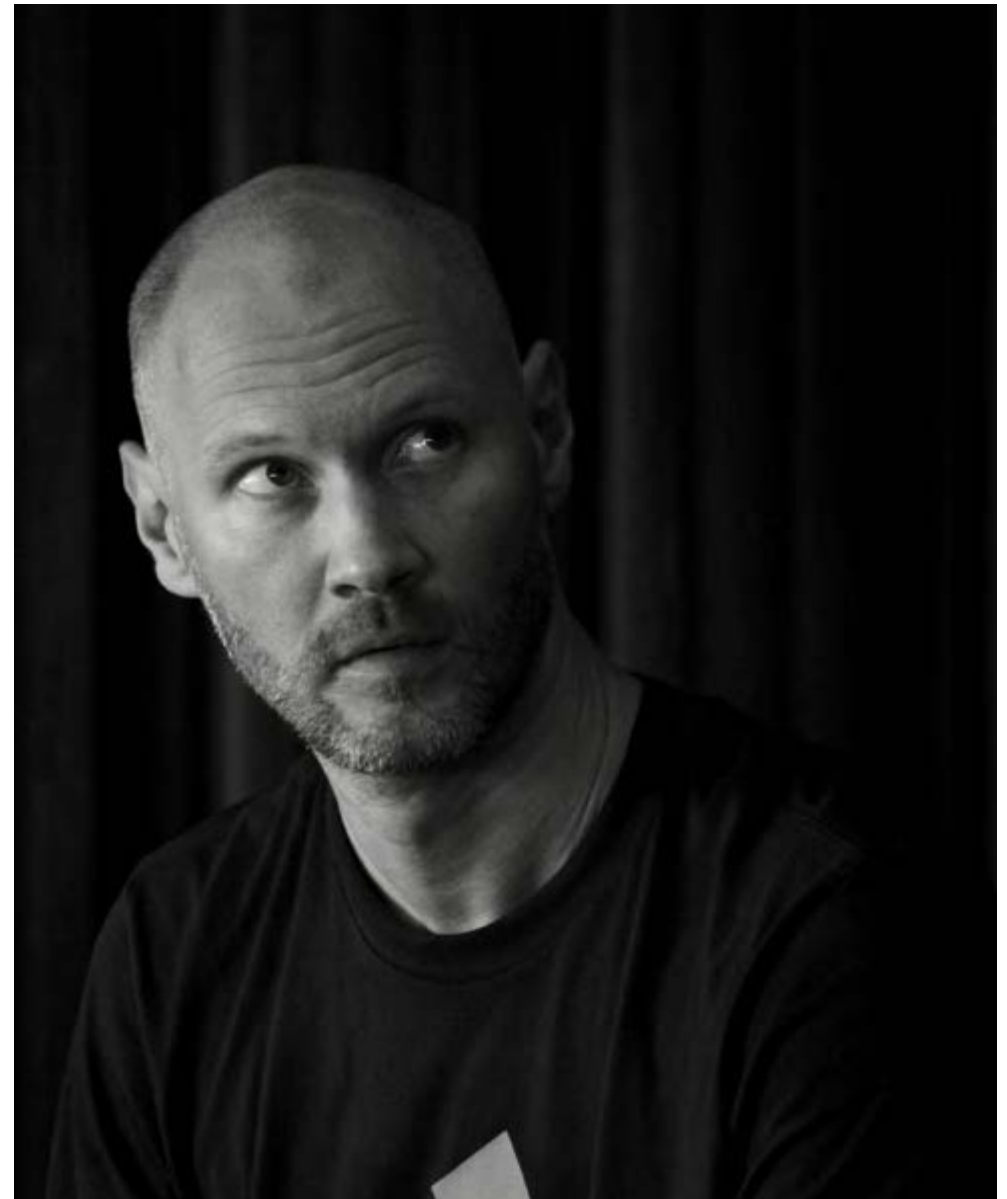
This made us think about the effect of war on those that go and then return to find society has moved on, or that they themselves have become used to a different social norm. As we approached the centenary of the end of World War 1 this subject became more and more fascinating.

We took these ingredients into a workshop session with writer Anna Jordan and some **Ignition** graduates, but more on that later. The other blindingly different aspect of this show is that I am not directing it. That task falls to Neil Bettles.

### Neil Bettles

I brought Neil into the company to observe and assist on a production called Dirty Wonderland. We are both from Corby and I know all too well that feeling of coming from a small town and thinking the world is not for you. I have been guilty of that more than most and wanted to make sure that Neil could make connections, develop, and get to see work being made. He has been with us ever since and has been with **Ignition** all the way. I think it has been a huge part in his development as he has been a huge part in the development of young men across the country. It was only right that this project should be Neil's and be a further opportunity to grow within the company. It is really exciting watching him create the work. It is also a very odd position to find myself in, standing on the outside working out how I can be of use. Having worked that out I can say that Neil likes his tea strong, with milk and one sugar.

Back to the resource pack. Our resource packs come straight from the horse's mouth, that horse, this time, being Neil Bettles. He won't mind. He has been called worse. It is only right that Neil and his team take things from here.



Credit Scott Graham. Neil Bettles in the rehearsal room for *The Unreturning*.



A man in a white t-shirt and dark trousers stands on a stage. He is looking directly at the camera. To his left is a large pile of tangled wires. The stage is lit with blue light, and the background is a dark blue curtain. The text 'THE DEVELOPMENT STAGES' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# THE DEVELOPMENT STAGES

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*Credit Tristram Kenton. Jared Garfield as George.*





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# The Development Stages

By Neil Bettles

We went into the first R&D with nothing more than the idea of what it means to return home after a life changing experience. We had four days with 5 Ignition graduates where we threw some ideas around. Some of the time was spent working physically and improvising tasks to see what emerged or informed our thinking and the rest of the time we had structured discussions led by Anna Jordan where she would either ask questions or propose a discussion topic the we would respond to.

## The Circle

Physically we had been looking at the idea of leaving and coming back changed. Or the place you return to not recognising you. We created a long physical sequence that was basically about walking in a large circle where each time you passed the starting point you were physically different. This became about adding costume and prop elements to the walking person at various points around the circle. We mainly used bags and jackets and chairs and general stuff we had in the room. Once we had created the sequence we reversed every action so that the walking person walked backwards and could retrace their steps back to the beginning. The idea of jumping forwards and backwards in time became something that interested us. To look at who you were and who you are now, like a before and after photo.

## The Hotel Room

Before we landed on the idea of returning from war we had talked a lot about what we think 'home' is or stands for. What things we associate with home and all the places that home can be. There was a point where we were excited about the idea of a hotel room. A place that you may call home for a short amount of time or that is a passing through place. Not really home but a holding pen. We thought about stories or characters that could all exist in the same space at the same time, maybe before heading home or maybe they have to be there because home no longer exists.

## The Bag

The image that kept coming to mind when we spoke about home, or having to leave or return to it, was a bag. It became an interesting jumping off point to think of all the things that one bag can represent. Full of hope and new beginnings or scattered random memories of a place you had to leave quickly. It also threw up a lot of ideas for devising. You have 10 minutes to gather some things what things do you take? As with the hotel room idea we played with one bag belonging to more than one person and the idea of dropping a bag meaning you are home. There were numerous physical possibilities within this idea. How to swap a bag from one person to another. Bags have become an important element in the final version of the show. They are used as actual bags and to represent bodies and simply to be a crash mat for someone to fall on safely.

## The Dining Table

Through the discussions about what represents home we talked about family and pivotal or life changing moments. We talked about family meals and Christmas dinners. Family dynamics and fallouts. We set up a standard dining table and chairs and asked our actors to write some text about the people who would be sitting around the table. What their relationships were and what was happening at that moment in time for them. They had to move around the table and deliver the text which gave them a physical journey. Then we layered them together, all moving around the same table but telling different stories. This again focused on moments of time being played out in the same space much like the final script does using Scarborough as the shared space over different time periods.

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## The script development

The script has been developed over the last 18 months and there has been a lot of structural changes along the way. Some of the longer scenes have been split up so the action jumps back and forth between them. One of the main changes has been with the future story of Nat finding his brother Finn. In an earlier draft we had the brothers find each other and there was a longer dialogue scene where they reconnected. The writing was beautiful but something about it always felt unsatisfying. I spoke with Anna about the potential of Nat travelling all that way and his final meeting of his brother ending in tragedy. Finn mistakes Nat for an intruder and stabs him in the back. At first Anna was worried that story might be too bleak but I'm really glad we pushed forward with it. It gives us a real opportunity to hear Finn's story in an exciting way. The time it takes to pull the knife out of his brothers side includes flashbacks through the last two years of Finn's life. Dramatically it gives us three very different endings to the stories.

## Casting

To cast the show we knew we were looking at our pool of male Ignition graduates so they should be familiar with our methods. We auditioned in groups of about 8 - 10 and the session started with some physical tasks led by Jess Williams and myself. It was clear that the guys had a short hand physically for the way that we work jumping straight back as if it was an Ignition rehearsal. We did a short warm up and then a physical task where they had to find various ways of carrying each other from one point to another in the room. We built on this to include 3 or 4 swaps between who was carrying who, and then started to build a sequence of them which they showed to the rest of the group.

After the physical exercises each person returned to read Frankie's monologue from the beginning of the show. It was amazing how many different interpretations of the same speech we heard. After all the casting sessions were finished we looked at everyone who had been through it and put the final team together. I was looking for a company who would work well together and bring something to the devising process, and also for great actors who would go to the emotional levels that the play needs.



Credit Scott Graham. Joe Layton filming with the green screen for the scene of Frankie's assault





A photograph of Neil Bettles, a man with a beard and a shaved head, sitting on a stage. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and blue jeans. He is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is dark with two bright stage lights visible on the left. A teal banner is at the bottom of the image.

# DIRECTOR'S THOUGHTS

*Credit Scott Graham. Neil Bettles on The Unreturning stage*



# Director's thoughts

By Neil Bettles



*Without people it's just  
bricks and rocks*

There are times we all feel lost and our need to anchor ourselves to a place we can call home is a driving force for most of us. *The Unreturning* focuses on many aspects of this need. The need to return to fix things or clean things or make things better. The need to shut yourself away and hide and feel safe. With the world as turbulent as it is, I think this play is reflective of the repetitive nature of history. War happens and fundamentally changes those involved and then they have to pick up the pieces and rebuild something that can never be put back together.

I first heard of Anna Jordan because of her play 'Yen' but I first saw her work when I watched 'A Serious Case Of The F\*\*kits' at Central School of Speech and Drama performed by the MA Acting Contemporary students there at the time. I remember thinking how clever and accessible her work was to those young performers but it also dealt with a heavy subject matter in a really interesting way. When we talked about potential writers for *The Unreturning* Anna was at the top of the list. As soon as we had our first meeting I knew she was perfect for this project. Anna's writing is poetic and full of images. She allowed us space to fill the gaps and to work physically. In the end she created a play that by its very nature has to move, jumping restlessly through each of the stories and allowing us to delve in to the heads of our characters.

Going inside someone's head means we can present the world in the way they see it. That means for me as a director I can create non-naturalistic moments and images that represent what someone is seeing or feeling. In the doctors scene we see George being plagued by the voices of his mother and father. Voices in his head but for us visually it became doors slamming open and light and sound flooding out. George is physically trying to keep the voices out by shutting the doors.

Anna's script is actually like a giant 3d puzzle to make. We always had to be thinking a few scenes ahead so that we could plan where everything needed to be. If we went back and changed something it could unravel all of our container shifts. Plotting through the show has been a painstaking process but also really rewarding.

It is worth noting that we couldn't have made the play as it is now without having a version of the set in the rehearsal room. Our set has been instrumental in how the play was built. We relied on it and used it to devise on and around. We were often heard saying 'What else can it do?' and then discovering something crucial to the scene we were working on.

The most exciting thing about the whole process has been the collaboration with the other members of the creative team. Everyone's work is clear and present and justified.





## A NOTE ABOUT ENGLAND'S FUTURE WAR IN NAT'S STORY

*Credit Tristram Kenton - Jonnie Riordan as Nat, with  
Jared Garfield as Kim and Joe Layton as Trafficker*





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# A note about England's Future War in Nat's story

By Anna Jordan

Imagining a future War in England was one of the most challenging parts of writing this play. My main inspiration for Nat's story is what has happened in the city of Aleppo in Syria. This one bustling, middle-class city became the focus for a lot of the fierce fighting in Syria. It's beautiful architecture is now dust and ruins. The scale of the destruction is really quite epic, but what shocked and affected me most was that when the majority of areas in Aleppo were said to be "back in government control" (meaning most of the fierce fighting had stopped) people began to return to their homes. In many cases their homes no longer existed, or were shells of what they used to be, or had no electricity or water. Their yearning for home was so great that they were willing to live with those levels of discomfort and sometimes danger. This had a big impact on me; the power of Home. So I tried to recreate that sort of scenario - but in a Northern Coastal town in England. Although of course, it's hard to imagine the level of bloodshed and destruction that's occurred in Syria happening here.

I looked at the idea of civil unrest and how quickly that could escalate into war. In the last decade we have seen the Arab Spring - a series of protests across the Arab world in response to oppressive regimes and a low standard of living - which have led to war in some countries including Syria. I tried to think about

*continued* ➤



*Almost one in three children live in poverty, with use of food banks rising all the time, and homelessness doubling since 2010*



Credit Scott Graham. Jonnie Riordan as Nat



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what might cause mass civil unrest here. Of course, we do not have a dictator government in the UK! But we do have a very high level of inequality for a developed country - more than a fifth of the population live below the poverty line after housing costs are considered, and most of these households are in work. Almost one in three children live in poverty, with use of food banks rising all the time, and homelessness doubling since 2010. I imagined what would happen if this level of inequality grew and grew until the majority of the population could not live a safe or fulfilling life, unless they were born into great privilege.

What might happen to cause these mass protests? Well, lack of food, fuel, proper housing, access to medicines - the loss of these things make life untenable. We are already seeing elements of this after ten years of austerity. Austerity was the Conservative government's response to the financial crash of 2008. Another financial crash caused by greedy bankers who care only about their bonuses could cause these shortages. Or possibly leaving the EU without a deal (although this is in no way a play about Brexit. We can't open the paper, check our timelines newsfeeds the TV on without hearing the dreaded B word. I didn't want to write a play about it, however indirectly - although it will massively impact us for generations to come). Mass protests can turn violent -into riots and worse. And if this sounds farfetched, we only have to look at Grenfell to know what a catastrophic effect the lack of regard for the lives of vulnerable communities causes, and the rage this generates.

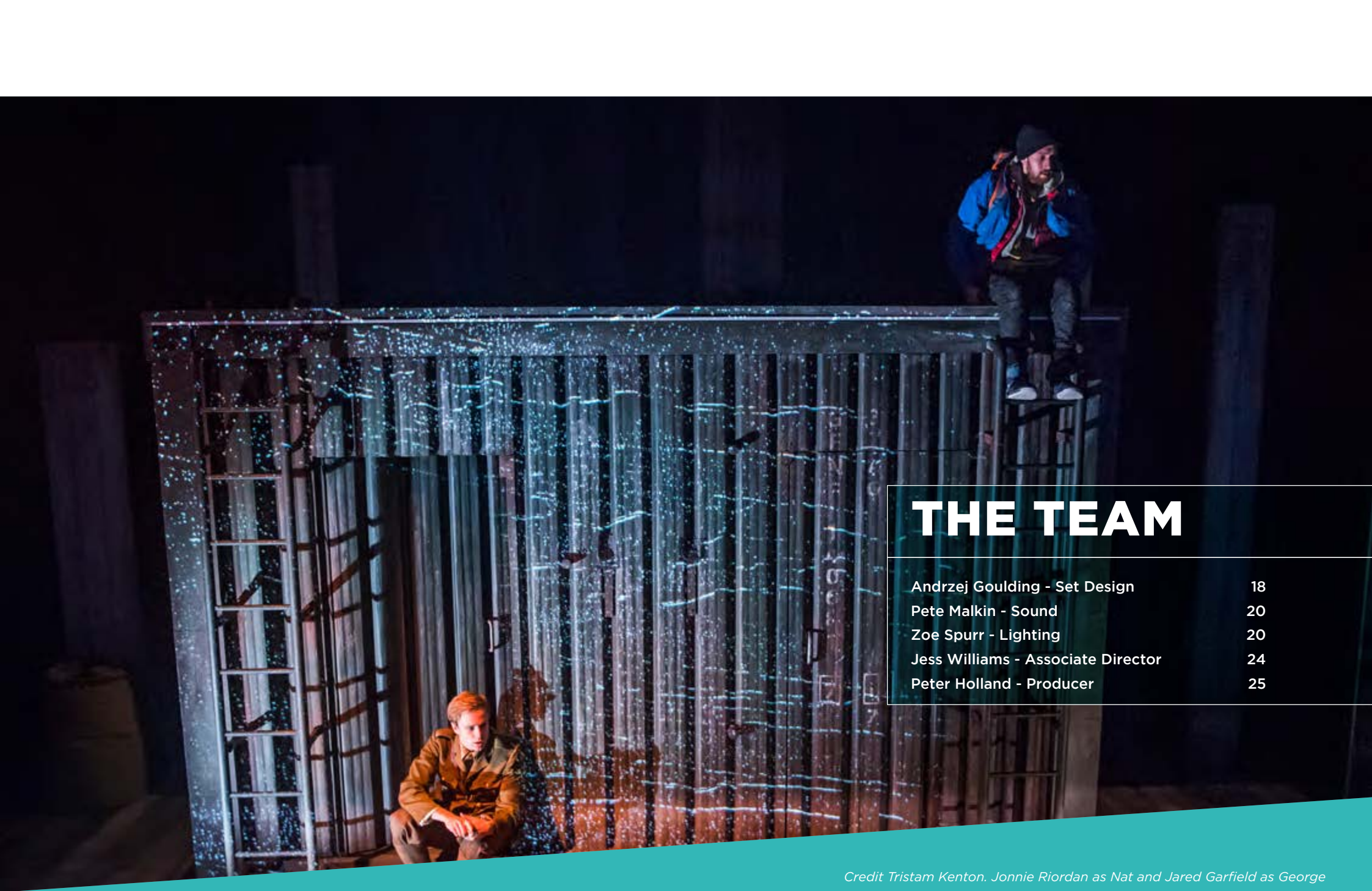
I imagined the UK in a state of emergency - curfews, rationing of food, restriction of movement around towns and cities. Because during times of chaos and destabilisation (protests, riots, terrorism, industrial action) a government is empowered to perform actions that it would normally not be permitted, sometimes suspending citizens' rights and freedoms. As well as huge inequality in the UK but also there is huge difference in belief and opinion - with a rise of nationalism, populism and the far right which could well lead to protests and violent acts.

With these as the sort of seeds or starting points for the idea of war I let the cast and director add the specifics - and furnish Nat's story as much as they felt was needed. I wanted to add the idea of a general feeling within the country that the further away you live from Westminster the less the government are concerned about you. There is already an element of this north and north-east of the country and people cited this as a reason for voting for Brexit; they did not feel listened to by Westminster and wanted change. We talked about the spark of the war - what is it that sets it off? The First World War was sparked by the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. We imagined that the war could be set off by a series of bombings at high profile government buildings; in protest at the way the poor and vulnerable in this country are being treated.

We also discussed how war could escalate to involve foreign involvement, for example Russia, Iran, the United States and the United Kingdom are all involved in Syria - along with other countries. Our military forces and police force, have already been massively affected by austerity with numbers plummeting-in a war situation a government may well need to look outside its own forces for support, thus creating an international war rather than civil one.

Linked to the above is the idea of national service or conscription. This is where people are required to fight for their country by law, unlike Frankie who volunteered to join the army and fight in Afghanistan. In George's story he volunteered to fight, but later in the First World War Young men were called up and had to by law. In Nat's story we discover that he escapes from England around the time he would've been conscripted, and Finn who was left behind joined the rebels fighting against Government forces. I wanted this included as this is the situation in Syria. Young men are faced with this dilemma when they reach the age of 18; fight for their countries, join rebel forces or flee. In the scene where Nat is crossing the ocean he tells Aldo: "I can't kill. For anyone. Government or rebels."





## THE TEAM

Andrzej Goulding - Set Design	18
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*Credit Tristam Kenton. Jonnie Riordan as Nat and Jared Garfield as George*





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# The Team

From the first reading of the script I knew I had to find a team of people who would be willing to be very close collaborators in the process. We all had to bring something equally unique to the table. The way the play is written and the way it moves means that locations and time periods had to appear and disappear in the blink of an eye. They also had to be very distinct. I had known Pete Malkin for a while and I knew he would be the person to bring the cinematic quality that the show needed. I don't think there is a moment in the show where we are not being surrounded by his amazing sound design. I had also worked Andrzej before and I knew that his imagination would be perfect to create the vehicle for the show to sit in. We had a lot of early talks about set where I kept asking for a revolve but was told there was not enough budget for that. When we landed on the container idea the first thing I said was 'Can it spin round?', to which Andrzej replied: 'yes, if we push it', so that was where we kicked off. I had seen Zoe's work before too and she was instrumental in giving us the three distinct worlds we were looking for, as well as a mind blowing lighting design. Lily and I had early chats about costume, which mostly involved talking about how we could change costume really quickly and still make all of the characters look and feel different. I think she has done an amazing job of making multiple worlds look real.

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*Credit Scott Graham. Set Designer for The Unreturning, Andrzej Goulding*



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## Andrzej Goulding - Set Design

The set for the show is basically a shipping container that can rotate. There are lots of tricks hidden within this container, from sliding walls to flap doors that can be independently re-orientated to create different shapes and a variety of ladders, hand holds, hooks and doors. It's a playground of sorts that gave Neil as much variation as possible to tell what are essentially journey stories. These are always the trickiest to design for, as they rarely go back to the same location twice, so I needed a design that could potentially be made into any sort of space through lighting, sound and video and minimal props. The script moves so quickly, that the design had to match that pace and fluidity.

The design process actually started from the first workshop week for the script. We were lucky enough to have this time to try out some ideas for the set and some of those initial ideas made the final design albeit in different guises.

The design had started as something that would be made of a series of sliders, which actually worked really well, but after the first draft of the script it became clear that we would need more variation than sliders alone could give us. We started to talk about a structure of some kind that could rotate that would also give us a split-level playing space. This immediately gave Neil lots more options for playing scenes and also meant we could create jumps from time periods simply with lighting, video and sound changes. We didn't have time onstage to create vastly different spaces every time we needed to change time periods, so I needed a set that could potentially sit within all three without too much.

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Photos: Andrzej Goulding

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Model box showing of *The Unreturning* set

The idea of the container actually came from many discussions I had with Neil about objects and items that we use to pack away homes or to take our homes with us. That led us to talking about what we would actually use to transport our home to another place or to store our home while we are away. During the workshops we were looking a lot at bags. But in order to create a large space for the cast to move around in I needed to think about something much bigger than bags, trunks and crates.

My research led me to shipping containers. A container can be many things; from a refugee camp, a lorry trailer, boat or a tunnel in Nat's story, to airbase hanger doors, a pub and a promenade meeting place for Frankie, to a stark hospital room, a WW1 dugout and battlefield or a train carriage for George.

The uprights surrounding the container was an image I had even when the set was to be mainly slider-based and was an aesthetic I was keen to

keep. For George they represent the burnt trees of no-mans land, for Frankie and Nat they are pieces of Scarborough, the tallest of which was a hint to the pillar of Oliver's Mount.

Because lighting was to be such a key part of the visual aesthetic of the show I integrated the LED and fluorescent lighting as a visual element into the set from an early stage. When Zoe came on board she added in more integrated lighting specifically to light the cast as opposed to mine, which was more of a visual element, including the lovely coulis light central to the container interior. Together they help to shift the landscape visually; from tungsten for George, to modern cool lighting for Frankie, to the stark LED strip for Nat and Finn.

My design process always involves 3D modelling the set in order to be able to see it from any angle, but also to check sight lines for audience and lighting. Because the set has a roof to it, making sure there are angles to get light inside

is really important, the 3D model helps me to do that. It's also where the idea for creating a mesh roof came from which again helps us to get light inside the container.

Another fun (but also practical) thing I did was to create VR images and movies of the set that we could view using a VR headset. It's a really useful tool as it gives you a good sense of scale when you're onstage and there were a few bits of the design that changed as a result of being able to see this.

Add to this the physical model of the set, which is more useful to the workshop and particularly the scenic artists, and you have all the elements together for realising the design into an actual set. Then the fun begins as the rest of the creative team add in their own skillsets, combined with the fantastic cast onstage and the team backstage to create an awesome show.



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**“** *Having spoken about ideas for so long, it's an amazing feeling to arrive at day one of rehearsals and share the vision with the whole team.*

## Pete Malkin - Sound

This was a bit of a dream working process for me, being in the rehearsal room from day one (for 3 out of 4 weeks of rehearsals) and being part of the creation process even before that with Neil, Andrzej, Zoe, and Lily and the rest of the team. It's exactly how I love to work.

There was a lot of content to create for the show, we recorded the excellent actors for some parts of the Sound Design, and worked with a bunch of different music tracks. It was a great example of how to integrate Spotify into the process, it can be such a useful way of collaborating and evolving a musical palette. Our playlist started with Anna Jordan, who added some tracks as she wrote the piece, which allowed us into her world and how she was feeling about the play. Then Neil added as he read the script and I joined, threw in my own thoughts and we all continued to add to the playlist even up to the final days of previews, it was part of my job to then expand on this and integrate some of the musical palette into the show.

I like to be part of the rehearsal process early on as I enjoy working with everyone in the rehearsal room and allowing the whole team to influence parts of my Sound Design. I hope the Sound Design can influence decisions in other departments too; it's not always possible to be around full time, but it's always super interesting to see what inspiring ideas come out of that collaboration.

## Zoe Spurr - Lighting

Every production I work on presents a new set of challenges, ideas, people and also is an exciting opportunity to build my craft as a lighting designer. Creating the lighting design for 'The Unreturning' with Frantic Assembly has been a truly collaborative experience from start to finish (well, I say finish, I doubt this is the last we will see of this incredible piece of work). The process of a lighting designer for each production is similar- meetings, a white card model meeting, more meetings, a final model box meeting, countless emails/research hours/phone calls, then finally into rehearsals. Having spoken about ideas for so long, it's an amazing feeling to arrive at day one of rehearsals and share the vision with the whole team. Yet as a lighting designer I have to wait even longer to share my vision as I don't have the lights or theatre until the technical rehearsals!

'The Unreturning' began in much of a similar way. Andrzej Goulding (set and video designer) and I worked very closely together to create the design for the production, discussing at length different ways we could create the three worlds 1918, 2013, and 2026. At this point on a devised piece, the script is still being worked on, every day there are new chapters/scenes, plot twists being added in and changed, so it's very important for the creative team to have big ideas which can be adapted as the production grows, while still retaining their artistic integrity and holding strong with the dialogue.

The director, Neil Bettles, has also played a key role in shaping the set and design, and together we built lighting into the set to be a further tool to aid establishing each time period. From the early drafts, we knew we had three clear worlds colliding and weaving through, so wanted a design that could quickly and seamlessly take us from one world to another. Light can change in an instant, and as a team we knew the show would be heavily reliant on lighting to help tell the story, and draw the eye to each moment we wished to capture. I started to build ideas for colour palettes and the directions of light, and this then informed the set practicals.

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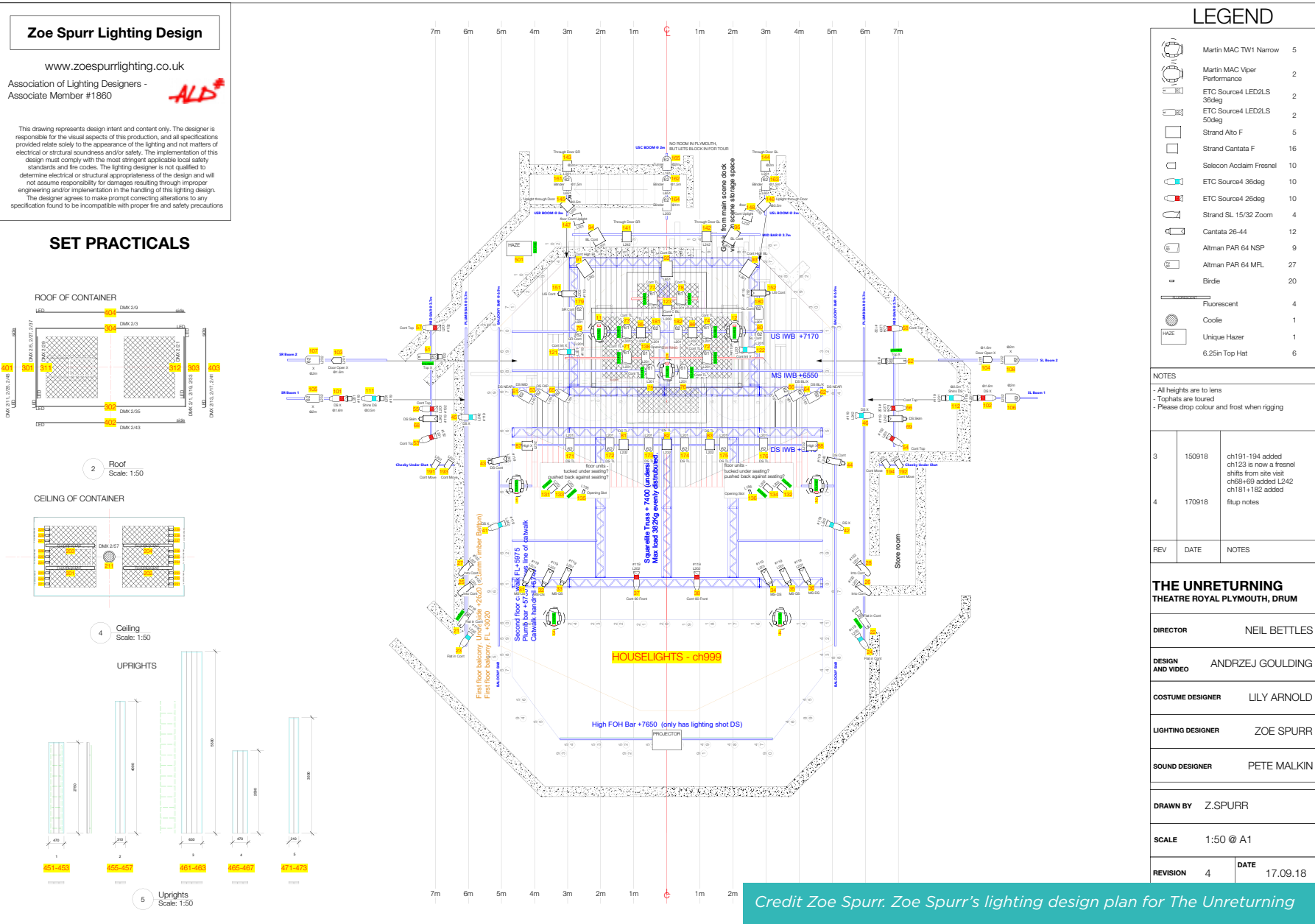
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Nat and Finn in 2026 became a world of sharp, LED lines of light in the set, hidden into the design, so appear out of nowhere when they light up. Cool white LED has a futuristic feel about it, and using it in sharp lines in contrast to the natural materials like wood/metal on the set made it stand out even more and transform the set from one time period to another in a flash. In terms of the lighting rig, I wanted to use cool colours, pale blues and cold whites in single strong sources. The aim was to keep the look clean and directional to support the LED. We also built LED uplights into the top of the container that light faces when up there. It felt right to have a lot of Nat/Finn on top of the container, so we focused a lot of the LED around the roof of the set to close Nat into his world up there. I knew we would have a lot of video elements in Nat's world, as he has his tablet, which he regularly uses, references and searches on, we projected these images onto the container, so very importantly I had to light around the container, making sure no light interfered with the projection surface. I did this with high side lights, steep toplight, and some very clever cueing.

Frankie, 2013, the most recognisable time period to the year we are currently in. Frankie has fought in Afghanistan, and returns to Scarborough, and I wanted to support his world with 'naturalistic' lighting. In contrast to Nat/Finn with their single light sources, I used multiple light sources which open up the space more, bringing more light in for scenes/locations like the pub and the sea front. I also wanted a strong key colour to distinguish his world from the cool tones of Nat's colour palette, so decided on a soft green which evokes the colour of army we see so much in his costume, and also in the container, tying all of the elements together. Andrzej and I built fluorescent strip lights into the ceiling of the container, these were not only important as a light source inside the container (it's hard to get light inside a container box!), but were able to land an exterior, alternate location to 'home', and these were a useful tool for all characters.

George, 1918, we think of sepia images, black and white photos, and the bright oranges and reds of fires, bombs, and explosions from World War 1. I used a warm, tungsten feel for George's world with lots of deep oranges and browns for George and Rose, all of which was a strong contrast to the cool tones of Nat, and the greens of Frankie. I also softened and structured the look with a lot of wide sidelight to give it a 'vignette' feel, and to also bring the eye down to stage level, and into the container, separating this world from Nat's on top of the container. We built a 'coolie' shade into the ceiling of the container, it's an early 20th Century replica fitting which contains a single lightbulb and a cage around it. This light gives an interior, warm feeling, as well as a period touch for George. Practicals are a great tool to use when trying to land a time period, the 'coolie' is something that can be switched on/off when needed and can transform the feel of the space around it, supported by theatrical lighting.

So that's each world established- next though, the biggest challenge. How do we make all three exist together? To make a space in which they can all exist yet can feel comfortable in. Watching the play grow in rehearsals, the stage continuously changed form, using the container abilities to its full advantage, so I knew I'd need a lighting state to take over the entire space, and pull it all together for these moments. A lot of the play uses light to draw the eye from one area to the other, and keeping areas contained while backstage magic is happening elsewhere, so to contrast this I came up with the idea of lighting through the grates on top of the container, so one person on top, and inside of the container can be lit in the same single light source, tying them together whilst creating two different spaces for the characters to exist in. I also used neutral tones of cool colours, and lots of sidelight and wide beams of light from above to paint a full stage picture.

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We established each time period in the prologue movement sequence, so each character was immediately set up with their design around them, both sound, light and video, and as all the actors played many characters the light was a clear indication of which world we were travelling to next. Opening out the stage with light for the parts of the play where characters overlapped and spoke together worked really well as the text was able to shine through and tell the story through words and movement, all framed with the shape created by light and sound.

Whilst building the lighting design for the play, as well as creating a location for scenes eg the pub, the boat, we also focused on creating atmospheres. I worked very closely with Pete Malkin, sound designer, responding to sound and music for timings, and movement within the lighting, using effects and 'snaps' of lighting Q changes to swiftly move the action along. We heightened each scene with light and sound, showing an emotional journey. The transitions between scenes are as much a part of the play as the text, we can tell a story through light, sound, and movement, and when all of these work together it can either hold the story in anticipation of what's to come, or impart crucial information to the audience in a vision without words. 'A picture paints a thousand words'...and it's true, so much can be captured in a moment on stage, and it's our job to ensure that moment is absorbed and allowed to breathe before moving the play forward.

Creating this piece of theatre has been an incredible experience, each member of the company has brought something new to the table, and all areas of theatre craft have overlapped, everyone willing to try, devise, offer ideas, all with the aim of making a breathtaking, and innovative production. Theatre is at its strongest when the entire company has an input on the work, and the beauty of a Frantic Assembly show is exactly that, everyone has ownership over the work created, and is immensely proud of the finished product.



*Credit Scott Graham – Neil Bettles and Jess Williams in the rehearsal room*

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## Jess Williams - Associate Director

Working with Frantic over the last 6 or so years has been a really transformative experience. It's given me the opportunity to be involved in a huge range of things. Teaching, making, performing and loads of travelling. I feel as though I've continually developed through opportunities and challenges that Frantic has thrown my way.

I was so excited when Neil asked me to work with him on this show, I knew it would be a real highlight.

I've never been directly involved in Ignition but I've watched the shows each year and been really inspired by the boys' energy and commitment to the work.

The auditions brought us a huge range of boys who had been through the programme and it was great to meet them and experience their enthusiasm for Frantic's work first hand. Some are now relatively experienced actors from the earlier years whilst for other boys it was their first professional audition. What struck me most was the incredible atmosphere of fun and support in the room even in an audition environment.

This productive atmosphere has definitely carried through to rehearsals. Neil manages to set up a beautifully calm and welcoming space where people feel valued and so the process of making this show has been truly collaborative.

Staging such a complex show initially seemed like such a daunting task, it's like a constantly shifting puzzle, the team that Neil assembled were really up for the task of solving it.

Neil and I have worked alongside each other on a number of projects before which meant we already had a short hand that allowed us to jump straight into making the work and I felt comfortable supporting him and contributing. It may sound like an obvious thing to say but having the other collaborators in the room so much has really made the show what it is. Having

people like sound designer, Pete Malkin, watching what we're doing, reacting and building the soundtrack alongside us and having Andrzej on hand so we can ask what's possible and he can offer solutions or suggestions of how we could use the set or the projection in any given moment. The cast also constantly offer ideas and solutions to things as we're working.

A big part of my job is the on going maintenance of the show. I will see the show into each venue on tour and try to make sure everything runs smoothly; keeping the actors on track and trouble shooting as we go. Each tour venue we visit has a different layout so we'll adapt the show slightly in each place to fit the needs of the venue.

The show will grow and develop as it tours, our 4 week rehearsal process felt like a relatively short one so I will continue to note and work with the actors in finding new things in it. There is so much going on throughout the show, the cast are very busy on and off stage making everything happen. I'll try and keep an eye on all aspects of the piece and will look out for ways to make the actin more efficient and slick.

I'm really excited to watch the show in different spaces and to see how it is received by audiences around the country. It's such a pleasure to be part of this incredibly generous and collaborative team.



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## Peter Holland - Producer

As the producer I have to be a problem solver as I'm the central point of contact for the production with all personnel reporting into to my role. I manage the budget for the production and ensure each and every department works within the budget to deliver the show. I work closely with the Director to be able to physically realise the ideas of the creative team whilst ensuring everything is achieved and delivered on time, safely and within budget. I constantly update my work on the budget in order to meet the demands of the creation process.

*“Communication is key within producing and my job doesn't stop after the curtain rises on press night.”*

I recruit and contract the creative team including the Director, Designer, Lighting Designer, Sound Designer and Stage Management team. I also have an active role in managing the audition process and negotiate contract terms with all the actors within the production. For touring productions I have to book each venue, negotiating everything from the amount of performances the company will perform to the cost of commission on merchandise sales. I work alongside the Production Manager who tours with the show to recruit a trucking company to get the set to each and every venue and ensure that we have enough staff at each theatre to help build the set when we arrive.

Whilst working on *The Unreturning* the big challenge has been working to ensure the ambitious ideas of the creative team could be realised. For example, the evolution of the set from an initial idea of three sliding screens to the rotating box of tricks we have today saw a reforecast of the entire budget in order to make this

work. We received and studied three quotes from several builders and electricians before we were able to commit to the design and all creatives worked tirelessly to bring their quotes under budget in order to create what we have today. It's tricky a role to have within a production as sometimes you have to say no. Fortunately the creative team on *The Unreturning* are fantastic and would find a solution or a cost effective way of enabling us to continue with the design without too much compromise to the overall aesthetic to the show.

Communication is key within producing and my job doesn't stop after the curtain rises on press night. The conversation continues with press and marketing agencies to ensure that the show is represented in the best possible way and that all images and marketing tools in print and online reflect the show we have created. We scour and chase reviews from publications across the country to use quotes and references to *The Unreturning* to maximise ticket sales. We also work to secure TV and radio interviews with the company to drum up enough interest in the show at each city it tours to. I network with promoters and industry contacts to create new opportunities for future life for the production, whether that be an extension of the tour or possibilities at international venues.

Throughout the life of the production I receive a detailed report from the Company Stage Manager after each performance highlighting any problems that might be occurring in the set, wardrobe or acting performances. I will then liaise with members of the stage management team and creatives in order to iron out issues or ideally catch them before they even materialise. You'll often find me glued to my laptop frantically sending emails, working on many spreadsheets and drinking lots and lots of coffee.





## THE ACTORS

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*Credit Helen Maybanks - Jonnie Riordan, Jared Garfield, Joe Layton and Keiton Saunders-Browne receiving notes in the rehearsal room*



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# The Actors

“Working out how the play works on its feet has been a really brilliant puzzle for the whole team

## Jonnie Riordan

Ignition was a huge game-changing experience for me. I was hobbling through a gap year with no idea how I was ever going to work in theatre. The process of applying for the project and attending the taster sessions and trials alone was the most exhilarating thing I'd ever experienced. But the week long intensive was the biggest adrenaline rush I've ever felt, and the biggest catalyst for me wanting to create and perform in work with and like Frantic Assembly.

Ten years has passed since then. I have been lucky to have a close relationship with the company, working as a Practitioner, an Associate Director of *Things I Know to Be True* and I even co-directed three Ignition shows which were huge full circle moments.

Making *The Unreturning* has been a really interesting experience. For the most part of the last 10 years since my Ignition performance I've been working more as a creative than an actor. Before the audition process for the show, I had perhaps thought I might not ever get my chance to perform in a full scale Frantic touring production and let go of that dream.

Working out how the play works on its feet has been a really brilliant puzzle for the whole team and we've all worked in an incredibly collaborative way to bring Anna Jordan's beautiful and poetic words to life. It's been physical, emotional and my god we've had to learn a lot of lines. A brand new challenge for me!



continued ▶

Credit Tristam Kenton – Jonnie Riordan as Nat





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Actors often turn their nose up when asked how do you learn your lines? But after this process I will never do that again. It's taken hours of time outside of rehearsals, as well as every lunch break and tea break to get these words in my head. For dialogue the best way of doing it is with the person you're acting against, but in the absence of them I've been using an app called Line Learner that fills in the gaps. Perhaps the greatest discovery for me that I've converted the boys to in the cast, is writing the first letter of every word in a speech on a piece of paper and then reading your monologue from it. It's a miracle, your brain fills in the gaps and it means your pick up the speech in lightning speed.

My main character in the play is Nat, a British refugee returning to the UK in an imagined future (2026) where civil war splits the UK in half. The character's journey is based on what we've seen unfolding in Syria over the last few years and we first meet him in a refugee camp, reminiscent of the Calais Jungle. He's driven massively by guilt, and a need to reconnect and find his younger brother who was left in the UK and was embroiled in the fighting form a young age.

The greatest challenge for all of us is the speed at which we jump in and out of our characters. Sometimes we walk through a door and appear, a split second later as a completely new character with a new costume and attitude. We literally never stop, even when unseen. Which as well as being a challenge, makes this the most fun show to perform in.

2 of the other cast members Jared Garfield and Joe Layton are Ignition graduates from the same year as me, so it's been really special to reconnect with them and getting to play and perform on stage with them again. The other cast member Kieton Saunders-Brown was a graduate from one of the shows that I directed so that too has been really special to work in a very different way with him.

I can't wait for audiences to see what we have been working on over the last few weeks. But also in many ways for them to see what Frantic have been building up to for the last 10 years.



Credit Scott Graham – Keiton Saunders-Browne as Finn and Jonnie Riordan as Nat



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## Keiton Saunders-Browne

I did Ignition in 2016 when I had just come out of Sixth Form. It was a very interesting experience because I didn't know what exactly to expect and the main thing I remember was the times when we were waiting to start working for the day and we were all doing crazy physical things that each of us knew how to do from our own active style of backgrounds.

Since then I've taken part in courses at places like the Young Vic or Almeida on their young people programmes, a Foundation Course in Acting at YATI and spent most of my time working on my own production company; Wooden Arrow. I had a shot at writing, directing and stretched my acting muscles performing in shows here and there.

Being cast in *The Unreturning* was very surreal when I was told I would be playing Finn (and other characters). The process was very professional, structured and intense learning the style of it and working physically over our 4 week rehearsals. For me, the most important thing about the process so far was working with some of the best of the best in their fields and learning how everything runs. To have trust in everyone was the most exciting and scary thing at the same time, but I always felt safe knowing, at the end of the day, everyone is putting their best to make the show amazing.

Finn has been one of my favourite characters to dive into. He is a young boy at 16 who has experienced a few years before his mother passing, his brother leaving him alone in a time of war and his only option was to essentially grow up and go to war at 14 years old. It is such a rich character to explore that I still haven't figured out everything about and won't till at least the last stages of the tour.

The highlight of the whole experience is small, but seeing the student's writing their notes in their notebooks during the show. It was only 2 odd years ago that I was doing the exact same thing. I know that the most exciting thing on the tour for me will be bringing the show to London for all of the people I have met on my journey so far to see. Luckily, I have a lot of support from fellow peers and can't wait to share what we have worked on with them.



Credit Helen Maybanks – Keiton Saunders-Browne in the rehearsal room



A photograph of actor Jared Garfield as George, wearing a white t-shirt and light-colored pants, is caught in a dark, tangled net. He has a determined and slightly strained expression, with his mouth open as if shouting or exerting effort. The background is dark and indistinct.

# THOUGHTS ON CHARACTERS

Anna Jordan

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*Credit Tristram Kenton - Jared Garfield as George*





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# Thoughts on characters

By Anna Jordan

**1918** - George is a thoughtful romantic. A middle child who is quiet and reflective – did alright at school and is considered a kind and loyal friend. For as long as George can remember his thoughts have been consumed with Rose – the girl he used to see when she would holiday in Scarborough with her family as a child. George thinks he fell in love with her before he even knew what love was. Much to his amazement they go from holiday pals to childhood sweethearts and when George proposes to Rose she moves to Scarborough to live with him. They are married. Just as they are about to commence on their plan to start a family - war breaks out. At first George feels removed from war, his whole life is just beginning; his family. But as the first few months of the war play out pressure on him becomes heavy. He fears the white feather – afraid of being branded a coward. But when the Germans attack Scarborough in 1914 they kill many and put his family and his Rose in danger. His protective, patriotic instinct kicks in... And George signs up to Kitchener's New Army. Now in his early twenties – George has been demobbed and is coming home.

**2013** - Frankie has always been a bit of a dreamer. Growing up he longed to explore the world but his mum couldn't afford holidays to exotic climes. He didn't do well at school and found it difficult to a job when he left. He began experimenting with drink and drugs and getting involved in crime with his group of mates. Encouraged by his family Frankie joins the army in his late teens as a means of escape. He thrives on the structure and loves the camaraderie, the travel and the adventure. And he's good at it. Everyone is very proud, especially his mum and his nan. Frankie is confident and up for a laugh; a bit naughty but definitely his

mum's favourite - hence his nickname "Golden Balls Frankie". Now in his mid-twenties, he has to deal with the fallout of what happened on his last tour to Afghanistan.

**2026** - Nat is a deep thinker and a hard worker. At school he was considered naturally bright and had a promising future. Even his mother's illness and subsequent death in his teenage years didn't stop him it excelling; learning was an escape, a distraction. Nat has always had a strong sense of responsibility and threw himself into the role of caring for his younger brother Finn after losing his mother, their only caregiver. But then war came to England – and war changes paths. The idea of physically fighting - for any cause - terrifies Nat. Violence sickens him. A series of events led to Nat escaping the UK without Finn. Now he is completely lost; having been away from home for two years, languishing in a refugee camp. He misses everything he knows and carries enormous guilt about leaving without Finn. He goes over and over in his mind how things could have been different. Now in his early twenties he has plucked up the courage to make the treacherous journey back.

**2026** - Finn is Nat's younger brother. He is old for his years, and tough – he's had to be. Finn's personality has been defined by loss and absence; by his mother dying and his brother leaving. He is defensive, aggressive - and he will never let his guard down although he longs for the freedom and ease of childhood. Now aged 16 - he has had to become a man very quickly.





# THE DEVELOPMENT OF PIVOTAL SCENES

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*Credit Helen Maybanks - The cast rehearsing*





# The development of pivotal scenes

By Neil Bettles

There were quite a few moments in rehearsal where we made significant breakthroughs in how certain scenes would be presented.

## Rose/George - Frankie/Tony

When we came to make the Frankie/Tony scenes that intersperse with the Rose/George scenes we had first presented them in quite static way with quick jumps between them. Something was unsatisfying and I was worried that the container had moved too much up to this point and it might be overkill to have large shifts between each scene. Jess Williams convinced me that we should try the container moving for the whole time when Rose and George are speaking and be still for when Tony and Frankie are speaking. This made the energy of the two different locations very different and helped to create distinct styles for each of the scenes. Rose and George constantly moving through a spinning house emphasising George's need to run away and hide. It gave their scenes a very cinematic quality as if a camera were following them through their home. Tony and Frankie were static looking out to sea from the sea front. It's a point in the show when you think Frankie may have found someone who understands him only to be let down again. I see it as the calm before the storm for Frankie.

## Chair drop

Quite early on in the development of the show we had been looking at the way soldiers were being treated for shell shock after WW1. Doctors would make a loud noise to see how the patient reacted. The men would have a huge physical reaction. Running away or hiding under beds. I was fascinated about the images in their heads at these times of high stress. When the doctor lifts the chair in George's story and drops it I thought it would be a good opportunity to go inside George's head at that point. The 'Chair Drop' sequence was built by creating individual moments and images based on saving someone from a dangerous situation or looking at what bodies do when they are hit with a violent impact. Once we had a series of those we threaded them together and timed them to the container turning so that we catch glimpses of some moments and feel the full force of others.

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### A walk around the old town

This was a scene that I had been really stressing about. All three characters making separate journeys around the same town in different time periods. I really didn't want them to stand still, or walk on the spot or to have to make a weird journey in and around the set. We had already done that. A lot! So I asked the guys to take each of their lines and create a physical action or gesture for each one. They could be abstract or a representation of what the line was saying or a mixture of both. Once they had found those we got the others to learn all of the physical actions so that potentially the physical action could accompany the text. It was while trying to perfect this sequence that we realised it didn't quite work but elements of it were quite nice. We then landed on the idea of placing the actors on top of the container and have it spin throughout the scene so effectively the actors were being moved without having to move much themselves. With minor shifts and steps we could create these journeys without having to move very far at all. This started to work well so we added back in a few of the physical gestures that were attached to certain lines. Not all of them made it but a few.



*When I realised that Rose and Tibbs could be played by the same person it opened up a new way of presenting the scenes.*

### Rose

Because the show is a celebration of 10 years of Ignition and we knew it would be cast with Ignition graduates that meant it would be an all male company. We thought it was important that it didn't stop us from creating a show that also had female characters. For me it presented some interesting challenges and opportunities.

We had played with an idea in an early workshop where George's wife Rose asks him to dance and during this he has a flashback to the war and carrying his injured friend Tibbs. This sequence made it into the final script as a stage direction and it had also sparked an idea of how we would present Rose as a character. At first the easiest option seemed to be that Rose and Tibbs would be played by two people so we could have them both present in any of the scenes. When I realised that Rose and Tibbs could be played by the same person it opened up a new way of presenting the scenes. It meant going for the braver option of using Joe Layton to play Rose. With Joe being the tallest and more stocky member of the company; it was really exciting to me that he would have to jump from his main character Frankie to Rose and to a dead soldier without leaving the stage.

We create the image of Rose using a dress and a hat to give the idea of her height and shape and this image quickly shifts to the image of a soldier haunting George. We only need a suggestion of the image of Rose for her to be successfully played by Joe. In early rehearsals we spoke about how to play her and Joe was allowed to go big. He played the most feminine version of her and then we worked on distilling it down to the smallest way of moving or a simple change of posture. Vocally he shifts between a softer Rose and the harder tones of Frankie. It has been beautiful to watch and to see that audiences really go with it and understand it.



**Fact:** The humming that Rose and George dance to is actually the voice of Jess Williams, our Associate Director who volunteered to record it in rehearsal. The music she is humming is also the music that is used later in the show when Tony leaves Frankie and he screams with anger.



# THE WARM UPS



*Credit Tristram Kenton – Jared Garfield as George*





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# The Warm Ups

During rehearsals our warm-ups last for around an hour, they are generally at the beginning of the day. We do this for a number of reasons:

**Fitness and strength building** - This show is pretty physical so we use various fitness training techniques to prepare the actors for the demands of doing the show every night. This process is as much about maintenance and injury prevention as it is about getting fitter and stronger.

In this particular process we used Yoga as a way to build strength and mobility followed by 'High Intensity Interval Training' as a fast and efficient way to increase all round fitness. Our HIIT consists of: 4 exercises, 20 seconds of work with 10 seconds rest between each one. Four rounds.

For example:

**burpees / Sit ups / High knees / press ups**

or:

**mountain climbers / Squats / tricep dips / Sprints**

or:

**Lunges / Crawling / Star jumps / up down plank.**

We keep it quite varied to give good all round training but also to make it interesting and challenging. It's important with HIIT that you really push yourself for those 20 seconds then rest for 10.

*continued* ▶



*Credit Tristram Kenton – Keiton Saunders-Browne, Jonnie Riordan and Jared Garfield lifting Joe Layton as Frankie*





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**Skills building** - Everyday our warm up will include something that focuses on the other skills the actors may need for the show; for example co-ordination, efficiency of movement, lifting techniques or counting. We have a series of various exercises and routines that we use to train to; usually set to particular tracks where we build up the choreography over the weeks.

**Team work** - It was really important for us that the cast could move well as a team of four and create material with each other as well as individually. Negotiating with each other and problem solving to contribute to everything being made is essential.

We often set tasks at the end of warm ups to lead us into the physicality of the show. Some of that material has made it into the show whilst some of it served as way for the cast to get to know each others way of working.

Music is very important to us during warm-ups, the whole thing is underscored.

Some tracks are tailored to the exercise that we are doing, others support the action.

We see it as a great way to start the day together. We invite anyone else in the room from the creative or stage management team to join us for it and often they take us up on the offer. Sound Designer Pete Malkin has been our most regular participant this time.

Our pre show warm-ups for around 30 mins will continue throughout the tour.



LISTEN TO OUR PLAYLIST HERE





## RECURRING IMAGERY

*Credit Tristram Kenton - Joe Layton as Frankie with Jonnie Riordan, Jared Garfield and Keiton Saunders-Browne as Ryan, Ket and Luke*



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# Recurring Imagery

The sea is something that is mentioned a lot in the play, the coast line being a constant throughout all of the stories. The idea that it has remained unchanged for over 100 years. The need to be cleansed or to find forgiveness or to reset the past and erase everything is present in all of the characters. For me it was also the idea of being haunted by the past and trying to find closure in order to continue moving forward.

George is haunted by the ghosts of his war friends and is never alone in any of his scenes. He describes the moment his team are blown up during the war and he wakes to find his dead friend on top of him. Most likely saved by the body of his friend he is constantly haunted by the memory of this. He finds it hard to touch Rose without having violent flashbacks and as his PTSD gets worse he loses all sense of control. I wanted to see George go through a complete breakdown up to the point where he is led into a hospital room and his wife hands him his baby. This should feel like a moment of release for us and as George says - 'A beginning'. Up to this point the sound under pinning George's scenes has been turbulent and jarring with a lot of glitches and shuddering. George talks about a bird trapped in his chest trying to escape so sound designer Pete Malkin created a mixture of low irregular heartbeats and the sound of flapping bird wings to create the audible effect.

Frankie will never be able to escape the actions of his past. In his opening monologue he says he wants to 'sleep for a hundred years'. Not just because he is exhausted but he hopes that if he leaves that long to wake all the guilt and shame will have been forgotten. Frankie compares walking down the sea front in Scarborough to being on patrol in Afghanistan and not know where the next IED might be. He can't escape the feeling. He dreams of the times before the event when he was still a hero untainted by his actions. The final moments as he walks out to sea feel like he is trying to be cleansed. To wash away everything he is and start fresh.

Nat is plagued by the guilt of leaving his brother, Finn, behind in the UK when the war started. The need to return is fueled by him losing contact with Finn and wanting to know what has happened to him. Nat knows that returning will be dangerous. He is the one character who knows that what he is returning to will physically not be the same place that it was when he left. When he first sees Scarborough, the descriptions are of somewhere completely demolished. A once thriving seaside town now in ruins much like the recent images we have seen of places like Aleppo.

**i**  
**Fact:** The bird wings sound is actually leather gloves being shaken near a microphone!

**i**  
**Fact:** The baby crying sound effect when George is handed the baby at the end is actually Anna Jordan's baby, Gryff, who was two weeks old at the time of recording.







## THE LAST MINUTE DISCOVERIES

*Credit Tristram Kenton – Jared Garfield as George providing his papers  
to Keiton Saunders-Browne's Officer*





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# The last minute discoveries

Through the tech and previews in Plymouth a few things came to light and changed. I had been excited by a final sequence after the last words of the play that would almost be a continuation of the stories. The box would turn and we would see images of Nat dead and his brother fleeing, George walking away with his new baby and Frankie suspended upside down in the container. The final spin would reveal an empty container and then we would black out. Our first preview ran at nearly two hours so we knew we had to cut something and this sequence although still there in a shortened form was one of them.

In rehearsal we created a sequence of lifts that moved in and out of the centre of the space, each person being carried as if they were being washed away by a wave.

We loved the sequence and spent a while on it in rehearsal but it never found it's place in the show, not even in earlier versions of it. It just kind of disappeared but I think it heavily influenced the 'chair drop lifts' that are now in the show. Even the stuff that isn't used is never a waste of time.

We also cut down the moment when Frankie sees the video of himself beating the innocent boy in Afghanistan. Originally it had been a repeat of the first sequence we see in the pub. Lots of movement and shifts of the container. We realised that this moment should be short and shocking leading to another violent act that comes out of nowhere. The head butting of his friend, Ket.

The net for George's nightmare was a last minute addition where one of our ideas had not quite worked and we needed a different way to show his dreamlike state. The night before our final run in the studio we created the net sequence. Which has become one of my favourite images in the show. It is also one of the hardest transitions to achieve backstage with only 20 seconds to do a full change.

Another earlier transition was also cut had an image of a pile of washed up life jackets inside the container which turned to reveal them and then turned again and they had vanished to leave George alone in the box. It was a visual image I had held on to until the last minute and then cut after the first preview. To save on time but also to keep the story pushing forward.

We had a saying in rehearsal which was 'We'll sort it when we get to Plymouth'

For Nat's tunnel sequence we struggled for ages to make something with multiple Nats appearing and disappearing as he walks through a dark tunnel on his journey. Despite the best efforts of all departments the affect was never quite as good in reality as it was in our heads! We decided to try something simpler - spinning the container as fast as we could with Jonnie staying central and turning at the right time to always face the front. It really gives you the feeling of speed without the actor having to run anywhere at all.

We also cut a whole character called The Rebel who Nat meets in the back of the lorry. We still retained the lorry image but it became just another stop on Nat's journey rather than a place for dialogue.

Most of the discoveries were about keeping the pace of the show. After preview two we had the show down to 100 minutes which is where it has stayed.



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*Credit Tristram Kenton. Jared Garfield as George*



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# Devising tasks

## The Lion

In The Lion we see Frankie's return to his local pub. He is in a familiar place, comfortable and surrounded by his oldest friends. He describes the events of a whole evening in just 30 seconds and we created a physical sequence that supported the text.

We used a familiar task we call **Connect / Affect / Disconnect** (described below).

### Step 1

This can be done in groups of 4 or 5

Choose one person from the group to be a central figure (called A - in our case Frankie). They must stay facing the same way. They could also be seated if you choose.

The rest of the group will be the ones connecting to (A).

### Step 2

One person (B) moves towards (A) and connects to them.

Eg: (B) places a hand onto (A)'s left shoulder.

### Step 3

Person (A) then affects that connection.

Eg: (A) rolls their left shoulder to slide (B)'s hand from their left shoulder to the back of their left hand

### Step 4

Person (A) then finds an action to disconnect the connection.

Eg: Flicks the left wrist  
 So, the order is:  
 Make a **connection**  
**Affect** the connection  
**Disconnect** it

The disconnect should send (B) out of the space. The next person in the group (C) will now move towards (A) and create their own sequence. This can continue for as many actors as you have (D, E etc) and all of the actors can return for a second round with a different sequence.

### Develop this task:

**Overlap the sequences** Person C makes their connection as A is disconnecting B. D then makes their connection as C is being disconnected and so on...

**More connections** Can B and C create a new sequence where they connect at the same time, A then Affects and disconnects BOTH of these at once. B and C must not connect in the same way, it cannot be symmetrical and A must Affect and disconnect them differently.

**A's Solo** After creating the sequence take away all the other players (B, C, D...) but A must exactly recreate their movements as before. Affecting and disconnecting the imagined connections.

This was the starting point for George's reoccurring memories it was the imprint left by his friends from his section.

It is important to note that we created the movement section first AND THEN added the text on top. We weren't demonstrating exactly what the text said, we were focusing on the closeness of the boys as a unit.



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inspiration**Chair Drop**

We wanted the movement to focus on the camaraderie within George's section. How close these men became and how they supported each other. We took this stimulus, support, and showed it physically using the skills the actors had developed in their initial Ignition training.

This one was based on rules.

**The Rules:**

- 1) Person A must travel across the space from a starting point to a finishing point.
- 2) Person A cannot stand or walk unaided. Their partner (person B) must move them from the starting point to the finishing point.
- 3) Person B must use lots of different tactics for the journey. They cannot simply pick person A up and carry them to the finishing point. Person B should think about: lifting, carrying, assisting, dragging, supporting them using the things around them, the set, the props, other people.

Although person B is leading the journey, the sequence is a collaboration between A and B. B is weight bearing but A must do everything they can to make sure they reach the finishing point. Pushing down into lifts, supporting their core while maintaining the impression that they are incapable of movement.

**Develop this task:**

**Rewind** Start at the finishing point and move back to the starting point recreating the movements exactly only in reverse. You can use the whole sequence or chose a short section with a clear start and finish. Is this sequence more interesting in reverse?

**Vary the Speed** Pick moments from within the sequence to do at a slower pace, pick other moments to do faster. We find it useful to imagine it as a film, when would you use slow motion to highlight action.

**The Set** How does this sequence change when you put it on your set. The big thing for us was that our set was constantly moving, changing shape and rotating. How can your sequence benefit from the coincidences of how it interacts with your set.

**Explosions** Can you 'explode' some of your moves. Can you add moments of explosion that blow you apart then find a way back together.





# BIBLIOGRAPHY OF INSPIRATION

*Credit Tristram Kenton - Joe Layton as Frankie with Jonnie Riordan, Jared Garfield and Keiton Saunders-Browne as Ryan, Ket and Luke*



# Bibliography of Inspiration

The bibliography of inspiration is where we share all of the references that have popped up in the rehearsal room that have played a part in making this show. This is not a list indicating how much homework we have done or how clever we are. These references might have lasted a couple of seconds but they have helped create a shared understanding and have clarified the ambitions of the project. These moments of inspiration can come from anywhere and at any time and you should give voice to and celebrate the low-brow just as much as the high-brow. They all help!

## Music

[Playlist link to the Spotify tracks we used as inspiration.](#)

## Podcasts

[Voices of the First World War - Imperial War Museum](#)

[The Documentary Podcast - Return to Aleppo](#)

## TV Programmes

[Generation Kill Miniseries](#)

[A House Through Time](#)

[Children on the Front Line](#)

[The Refugee Diaries](#)

[Greece with Simon Reeve, Episode 1:](#) via @bbciplayer

[Dark](#) - Netflix

## Books

[Trench Talk by Peter Doyle](#)

[Aftershock by Matthew Green](#)

[Where Poppies Blow by John Lewis-Stempel](#)

[World War One - Rupert Colley](#)

[The Yellow Birds - Kevin Powers](#)

[L'Etranger by Albert Camus](#)

## Films

[The Diary of a Disgraced Soldier](#)

[Home by Daniel Mulloy](#)

## Other

[Save the Children a Second a Day campaign](#)

## Plays

[A Brave Face by Vamos Theatre](#)

[Journey's End by RC Sherriff](#)