

A Frantic Assembly Production with Theatre Royal Plymouth,  
Co-Produced by Curve.

**FRANTIC  
ASSEMBLY**

**TRP** Theatre  
Royal  
Plymouth

**CURVE**



# I THINK WE ARE ALONE

WRITTEN BY SALLY ABBOTT  
CO-DIRECTED BY KATHY BURKE  
AND SCOTT GRAHAM

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

Written by Scott Graham and  
the creative team

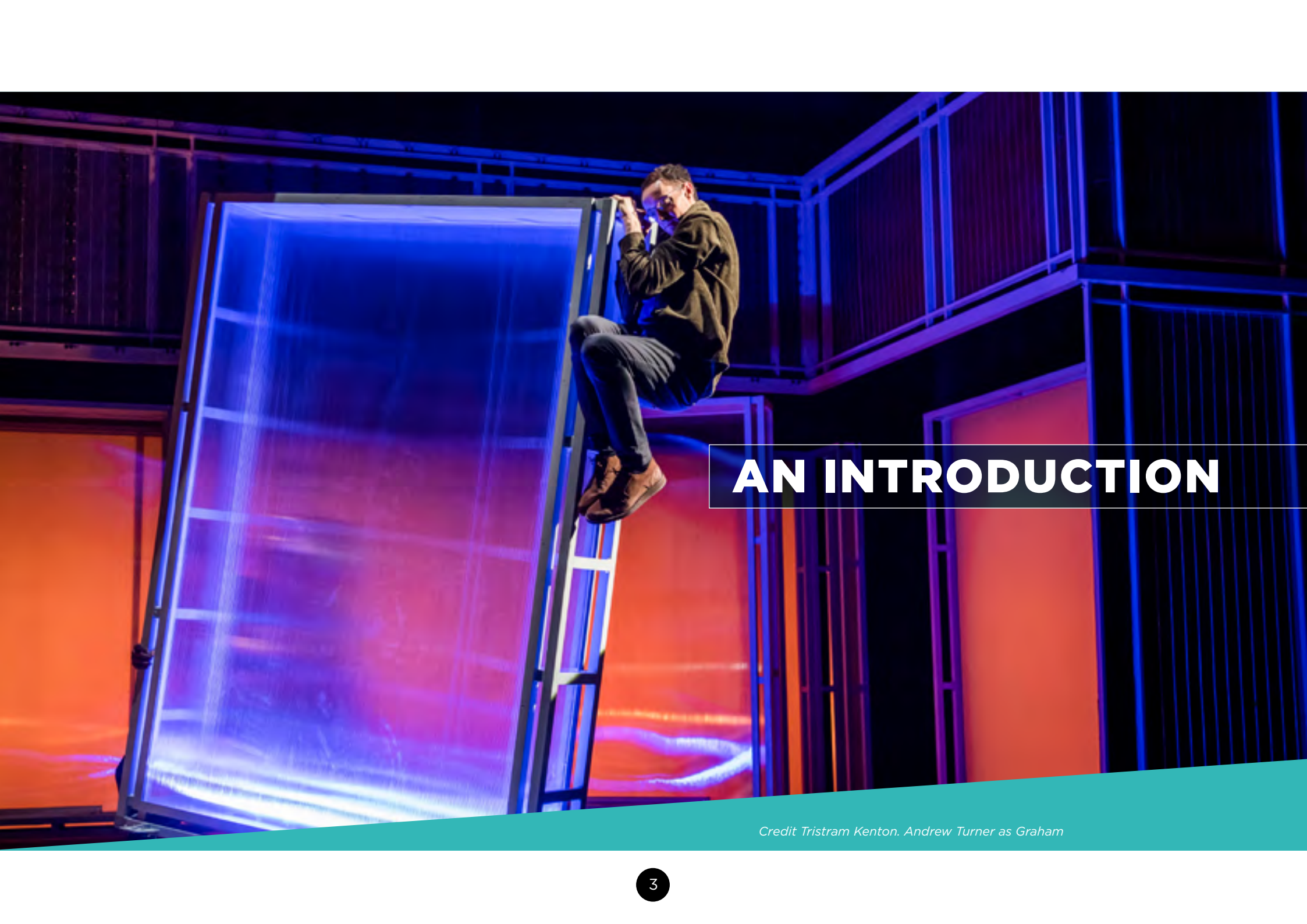


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# Contents

<b>AN INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>THE CREATIVE TEAM</b>	<b>19</b>
Welcome	4	Co-directors. How and Why?	20
<b>DEVELOPMENT STAGES</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>DESIGN ELEMENTS</b>	<b>21</b>
The journey of an idea	6	Morgan Large, set and costume designer	22
Early explorations - development workshops	7	Ella Wahlstrom, sound designer	25
<b>DIRECTORS NOTES</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>PERFORMERS PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>28</b>
Why 'I Think We Are Alone?'	10	Charlotte Bate 'Ange'	29
Loneliness and Connection	10	<b>PRODUCING <i>I THINK WE ARE ALONE</i></b>	<b>31</b>
Hauntings	11	Peter Holland, Producer at Frantic Assembly	32
<b>THE REHEARSAL PROCESS</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT GRAHAM</b>	<b>34</b>
Early days in the rehearsal room	13	Interview with Scott Graham	35
Rehearsals and tech	15	<b>BIBLIOGRAGHY AND INSPIRATION</b>	<b>38</b>
The Importance of Listening - You have two of these and one of these for a reason	16	Bibliography of Inspiration	39
The walls	17		
The Bed (and other props)	18		



# AN INTRODUCTION

*Credit Tristram Kenton. Andrew Turner as Graham*

# Welcome

I write these resource packs to give an insight into the creative process behind the production. They are often partly written as I am making the show and can reflect the frustration or elation of the room at that moment. Some sections might be written later as a moment of reflection for me on how something came together.

Most of all I want them to be honest. I don't want these resource packs to be full of cut and paste. I want to bring the reader closer to the mess of the creative process. This is very important as all you may have experienced is the polished slickness of the show (fingers crossed!) and it might be easy to presume that the creation of a show is just as smooth. It never is. I want the aspiring creative, teacher or student to recognise the moments of doubt and confusion, the wrong turns and bad ideas as necessary stages and something all theatre makers share.

Hopefully you are reading this after you have seen the show. If not, be warned, this pack may contain spoilers!

I would also like to thank the creative, performing and producing team who have generously contributed to this pack. I believe their honest insight will be as invaluable to the reader as it was to this collaborator. Their words show how their perspective has shaped the project and illustrates the variety of skills that come together to make a show.



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Polly Frame and Charlotte Bate*



# DEVELOPMENT STAGES

*Credit Tristram Kenton. Simone Saunders, Andrew Turner and Caleb Roberts in rehearsals*

# The journey of an idea

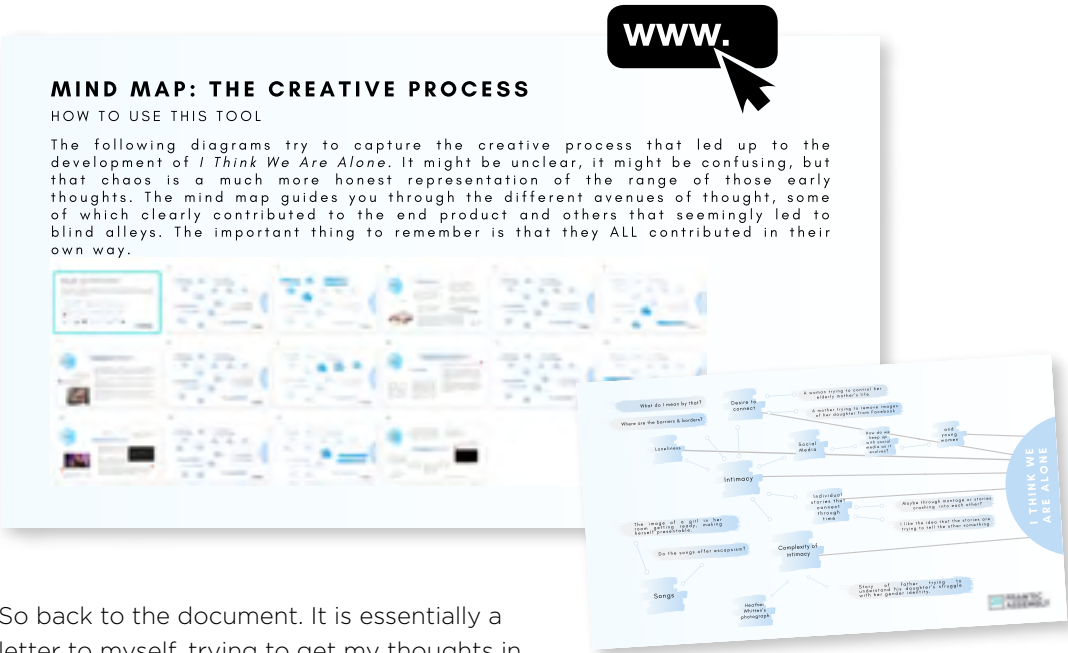
A Frantic Assembly show goes on a huge journey. It starts as a nagging thought, gets tested and then others are invited to collaborate. It mutates, dissolves, transforms and emerges in what might be a totally different form.

*I Think We Are Alone* (often abbreviated as ITWAA) has certainly been on a trek. I am referring you to this [document](#) that charts how the project developed because I think it is important to show the moments of electric inspiration with the depressing blind alleys. They are all part of the creative process and anyone looking to make theatre should prepare themselves to meet both.

Many of these ideas went nowhere, even though I was fascinated by them at the time. I thought I was really onto something but I could not get them to come to life. It took getting Sally Abbott and Kathy Burke on board for things to leap forward and in doing so we left behind many of the elements.

That is not to say they died in the dirt. Many of the thoughts I was having made their way into a project called *Into The Light*. It is entirely natural that, because I make work based on what is on my mind and not by pulling plays from the shelf, that there will be some crossover. Ideas will find their place. Knowing this helps to stop me cramming an idea I feel excited about into what might be the wrong show.

This is another important point about making a show. You have to approach it with the mentality that it will not be the only one you create. That helps you focus on making the right decisions for the show.



So back to the document. It is essentially a letter to myself, trying to get my thoughts in order. It then becomes a way of sharing those ideas with potential collaborators. You will also notice that the document refers to *Intimacy*. This was the original working title of *I Think We Are Alone*. It was the word, Intimacy, that initially caught my attention but as thoughts became more focussed, the title changed to something more specific.

## Early explorations – development workshops

I started with the ideas I had sketched out in the document above but I could not take them very far. I made some work using sheets that I was pretty intrigued by and thought might be central to the project going forward.

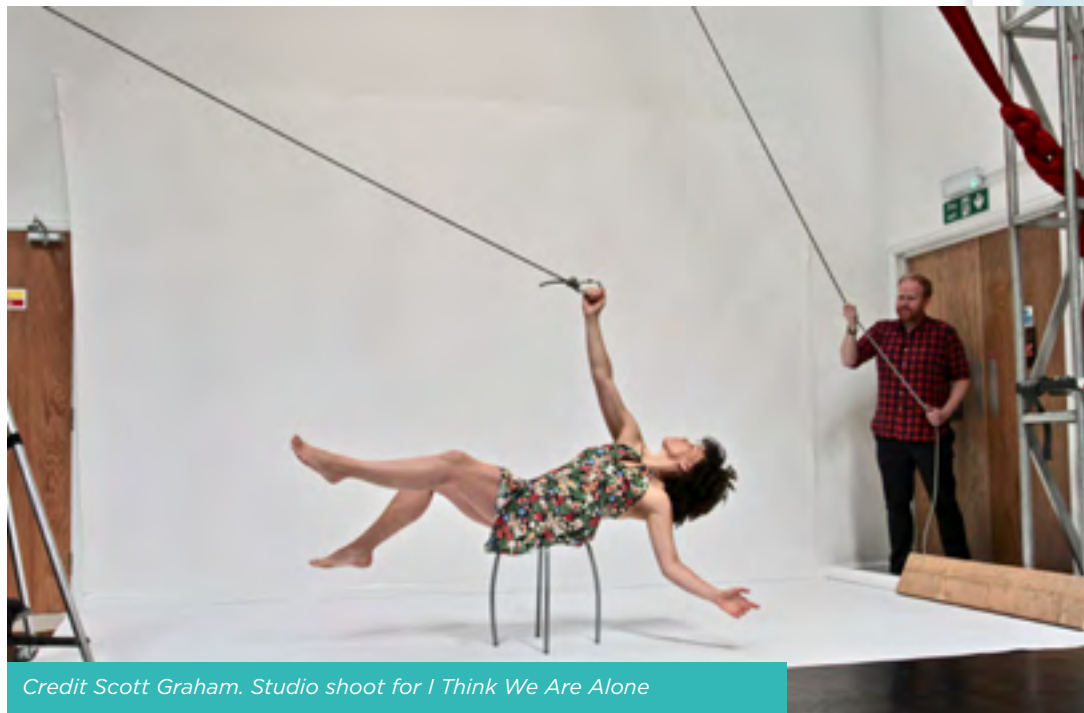
I had asked for something like silk but all we could find was quite a cheap and rough look-a-like that we renamed Zilk. In one exercise a performer would drag another around like they were bringing a statue with them. It looked like their curated self. The one they wanted the world to see. In other Zilk exercises we had beds that would expand to make the occupants seem tiny and have people glide towards each other without moving their feet. There was so much to be found with the Zilk. The question would always be whether it made it into the show and that question still has not been fully answered but it was so much fun finding these moments.

Once Sally and Kathy were on board, we started to push things forward and Sally began to write what she calls a Riot Draft. (This is a version of the play, written at a furious pace. I can't tell you much more about this as one of the things about a Riot Draft and Sally's process is that NO ONE gets to see the Riot Draft except Sally. I find this makes the Riot Draft all the more intriguing!)



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Chizzy Akudolu*

We then gathered some brilliant performers together and explored how movement might tell parts of the story and provide access to characters. Again, Zilk played a huge part, not just in dragging people around but in creating a partition between characters. This partition was very important as I wanted to play with the idea that the gap between us could be thousands of miles or it could be a couple of millimetres. Even if the reality was thousands of miles, the way we think about the other might make it the thickness of a sheet of Zilk. And is there a way of breaching the isolation and reaching through to that other person? (This was the concept behind the poster image. There is more on the creation of this image in our photo book *Always Forward, Never Back*).



Credit Scott Graham. Studio shoot for *I Think We Are Alone*







# DIRECTORS NOTES

*Credit Tristram Kenton. Caleb Roberts and Chizzy Akudolu*

## Why 'I Think We Are Alone?'

The title was suggested to me by a brilliant poet I was working with at the time. Her name is Abigail Parry and she was referring to the song, *I Think We're Alone Now*.



(the song is also covered by 80s teenage pop star Tiffany)

I adjusted the title slightly and loved its double-edged statement. Within the song it is all about the frisson of lovers alone for the first time but I also liked the adjusted title's potentially negative statement about contemporary living. It captured the positive and the negative sides of our intimate lives.

I was also keen to escape the theatre cliché of one-word titles! In doing so I created a title that I have constantly mixed up with a previous show, *Things I Know To Be True*. It has also been mangled by others in interviews and wilfully misunderstood to be a Tiffany musical!

I still like it though. It alludes to a huge issue in our lives and one we all address in different ways. Loneliness.

## Loneliness and Connection

At a time when we are offered more opportunities to connect than ever, loneliness has been identified as a growing problem in our society. Why, at a time when we are shown all these ways to bring us closer, do we feel further apart?

Is it that we curate versions of ourselves and promote them on social media? Does our social media use encourage a way of speaking, of presenting, but not listening?

I felt that many of us desire connection and that manifests in many forms. It can be with a distant loved one or someone we have lost. Maybe it is validation and affirmation that we desire.

That space between us can be full of unresolved tension. The more we try to close the gap the more we might push the other away. And from the other side we might not look like we desire to connect.

This fraught relationship became very interesting to us and certainly began to fuel the Clare and Ange relationship.

For support around the issues raised in this show please go to

WWW.

# Hauntings

The concept of haunting runs through *I Think We Are Alone*. Our take on that goes beyond the simply supernatural to the unresolved issues and thoughts of others that invade our brains.

Everybody in ITWAA is haunted in some way. As I elaborate on that, I will remind you that sections of this resource pack will have spoilers! Look away now!

Both Ange and Clare are haunted by the memory of Uncle Billy. For Clare it manifests as what she believes is a supernatural haunting. She carries an intense guilt around what happened to her and Ange at the hands of Uncle Billy.

Ange is trying to block out intrusive thoughts and, despite therapy, is relying on alcohol and drugs to silence them.

The unresolved tension around these events haunts them to the point where it becomes impossible not to confront it and each other.

Josie's memories of her Father's coldness is preventing her from mourning his loss. She is a domineering mother, suffocating her son with her love. He can sense that all is not well with her and that she must address those demons.

Graham is lost and grieving for his wife. He feels totally alone and must learn how to communicate with his dead wife. He needs to find out how to allow himself to be haunted by the memories of her.

It all comes back to connection and how we manage our desire and ache for it.



Credit Tristram Kenton. Simone Sanders, Andrew Turner and Caleb Roberts

# THE REHEARSAL PROCESS



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Polly Frame*

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## Early days in the rehearsal room

(I write this section from the first week of rehearsal)

Play is a very important aspect of rehearsal. By that I mean, exploring potential, free of the text.

I like to get the performers on their feet, straight away. Get them moving each other, exploring lifts and contact. This explores a potential palate for movement but it also serves to get your performers comfortable with each other. The reason I do this and deliberately encourage the performers not to think about scenes is that they can now explore movement without thinking about what might be right or wrong. This is merely about working out what the team is capable of and what movement language might be right for the show.

During this I am always thinking about the text but I do not want to encumber my cast with worries about where this might sit in the show. It is purely time for play and because of this we tend to be surprised and inspired by the outcomes.



*Credit Tristram Kenton. The Company in rehearsals*

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*It is important that people do not become defined by their perceived limitations and only do what they think they can do.*

It is equally important for the cast to get their hands on the set for, in our production, it will feel like additional characters. It will also be manipulated beautifully by the cast but to get to that point we need to help the cast master it.

Initial trials will have the cast grunting and sweating as they heave huge walls around. Over time they gain confidence and technique to make it seamless but this takes patience from all corners! It is a marathon, not a sprint!

Performers, like most people, like to master things straight away and not fail. It is just that performers then have to show these new skills to a demanding public. It is important that people do not become defined by their perceived limitations and only do what they think they can do. The Frantic Method always aims to take people past those limitations and help people demonstrate they can do more than they thought they could. I am always on the lookout for that performer who says they can't do something. With a lot of guidance and even more patience, I know they can.



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Simone Saunders, Chizzy Akudolu and Polly Fame in rehearsals*

## Rehearsals and tech



*It is a time to be brave  
and make big decisions.*

Several contributing factors meant that rehearsals were only three weeks long. I would normally do five. As it takes a week to read through the play with writer Sally Abbott and create edits and adjustments, that left only two weeks to actually get the show made!

That means that many of the most exciting discoveries are still waiting to emerge as we go into technical rehearsals with the brilliant team at Theatre Royal Plymouth.

On one level, that is more than terrifying but it depends on your feelings about technical rehearsals. Luckily, both Kathy and I love this stage and feel this is where you really get to know the work you have made. It is also the point where the collaboration with the greater creative team really takes off.

I have been involved in several shows that have really been made in the tech. Yes, it is scary but both Kathy and I thrive off that. It is a time not just to light the work that you have made. It is a time to be brave and make big decisions. You will see the work and a world of possibilities in a different way.



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Andrew Turner and Scott Graham in rehearsals*

# The Importance of Listening - You have two of these and one of these for a reason

We always knew that this show would be about people who ache to connect. There is a presumption that that is about talking more, about expressing what you are holding in. Many of the characters are holding on to information or unresolved issues and are aching to let them go.

And then a line in the text between Manny and Josie pinged out for me.

Manny: You have two of these (*indicates ears*) and one of this (*indicates mouth*) for a reason.

*I Think We Are Alone, p48*

That simple wisdom changed everything for me. The characters did not need to speak more, they needed to listen.

That is what Manny needs to teach Josie to save her. She is becoming cut off from others and is fixating on his life. While he finds that suffocating he also understands that it is vital that his mother opens up to the voices of others, both living and dead.

Both Ange and Clare have lived with a perception of each other that is warped by years of not communicating. They have feared the others negative view of each other. They have let the voices in their heads poison them.

Graham needs to find a way of reading the signs that his Bex is always with him. That way he will always be able to share time with her. She will be with him when he walks by the river and will be with him between fares in his cab. He only has to listen. She has been sending signs all along.

Signs are all about interpretation. Whether a sudden power cut distracting him in a potentially suicidal moment or a burning smell in a cab are supernatural interventions or pure coincidences it is all about interpretation. If that interpretation helps him deal with the grief of losing his love and help him connect with her then it is not to be challenged.



*Many of the characters are holding on to information or unresolved issues and are aching to let them go.*



# The walls

The set consists of four walls on casters, set within a metal frame backed with BP (back projection) screen. These walls can take the colour thrown on them from lights placed behind.

I wanted to use the walls to create rooms and divisions between people. They had to be more than scenery, though. They were always at their most interesting when connected to the emotional state of a character. Poor Clare gets stalked, penned and squashed by the walls!

Initially I was a little scared of how see through the walls were but then I embraced that. I wanted them to be able to suggest someone on the other side, someone a character might want to connect with or escape from. Through the walls people look beautifully blurred at one angle and then strangely disappear at another angle as the light gets refracted.

The performers also tip the wall flat and it becomes an ominous bed. The plastic used as a screen in the wall was never going to



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Simone Saunders, Chizzy Akudolu and Polly Fame in rehearsals*

be able to take someone's weight and that might seem problematic for a romantic bed scene but this actually helped us find the sexual tension and awkwardness of the scene between Ange and Manny. It meant they could only use the outside frame of the bed. It really helped us find the comedy and absurdity of this one night stand.

I made a bit of a mistake when directing/choreographing all this movement of the walls. I presumed that our lighting designer

Paul Keogan would allow for darkness for actors to move walls discreetly and then escape but I had forgotten about the back projection walls. Once we got to the technical rehearsals in Plymouth it was clear that Paul wanted them lit for nearly the whole show. That meant that the performers would always be visible as silhouettes! I had to quickly rethink every move, every entrance and exit.

That kind of pressure keeps things exciting!

## The Bed (and other props)

With every aspect of setting and location created by the frames we felt that there was room for a few pieces of naturalistic representation.

### SPOILER ALERT!

Graham's story is different from the rest in that there is a huge detail he is leaving out. When he does address it, he uses his language very carefully.

Graham: *My wife left me three months ago*

*I Think We Are Alone, p24*

He cannot use the words 'died' or 'passed away' at this stage. He is clearly struggling, coming to terms with the death of his wife. This made us realise that the image of her passing must also have a profound effect on him and this is where we could present something differently. To get an understanding of this effect, we wanted the hospital bed to create a vivid impression. That is why it stands out as one of the few 'real' things in the play and not created from blocks or screens.

The others are the plant pot containing Queenie's remains and Grandad's stereo. Each had a strong emotional connection to Josie and Manny. The other items are phones, which always contain the promise of connection, and a wine bottle, which for Clare, offers escape.

It felt important to us to strip the setting of its naturalistic detail to get to the emotional heart of the play. Of course, this is just our take on it. Subsequent productions are free to take a much more naturalistic approach to location and setting.



Credit Tristram Kenton. Andrew Turner

# THE CREATIVE TEAM



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Andrew Turner*

## Co-directors. How and Why?

I wanted to collaborate with strong female artists. Peter Holland and I compiled a list of such and at the bottom he had added Kathy Burke. My eyes lit up. I am a huge admirer of Kathy and think she is such an important voice. It seemed a long shot but Peter said we should just ask for a meeting and, thrillingly, Kathy said yes! We met to chat at her place and on the way back Peter, Executive Director Kerry Whelan and I talked about how great it would be to co-direct with her. We asked and she said yes! That was it.

It was a huge leap of faith from both parties but I think we were attracted by our differences and have since found our similarities.

I think that difference is important. That is what I found exciting about the collaboration. How would that different voice challenge and inspire me, and vice versa? The collaboration would challenge the working process and hopefully create a fresh style of show.

Kathy and I have had to find how to pitch our voices, to work out how we can bring the best out of each other. She has an incredibly keen eye on the text and a wonderful feeling for dialogue. I have been keen to engage that eye on the physical potential for story telling too because text and movement must be connected and inspire each other.

Our short rehearsal period has meant working and making decisions at breakneck speed. It would have been lovely to have explored moments and discussed their potential but we have both had to keep running.

This is undeniably exhilarating but I think everyone involved in making this show will be lying down in dark rooms for a while after!



*Credit Cornershop PR. Scott Graham and Kathy Burke*



# DESIGN ELEMENTS

*Credit Tristram Kenton. Andrew Turner and Charlotte Bate*

## Morgan Large, set and costume designer

Reading Sally's play for the first time was quite a daunting task. The first thing I was aware of was the complexity of how it shifted instantly between different time periods, and a huge variety of locations.

It was unusual on this play for me to get involved really early on. I had meetings with Kathy, Scott and Peter (Producer) before it was even written; in these meetings we discussed very 'pie in the sky' early ideas - images and moments that they both wanted to explore. It is also pretty unusual to work with two directors! I've never worked with either Scott, or Kathy before, so this time was pretty useful to understand more about their taste, and style of working...I knew I'd have to slot into the team, working around both of their needs.

I then attended a very early reading of the first draft, where a group of actors sat around a table and for the first time lifted the words off the page. I prefer listening to, rather than reading scripts, so to hear the words out loud was incredibly useful to me. I scribbled down notes from moments in the script that jumped out to me, but also from the in-depth, sometimes very personal, conversations that were had by



*Credit Morgan Large. Model box by Morgan Large*

the actors and Sally. One of these scribbles I made was from something Scott said about how we who live in big cities can be so incredibly alone, yet constantly surrounded by millions of people...this stuck with me, and actually became the basis of my research on the show.

I usually start designing a show by asking myself a thousand questions. These can include... What do I need to say? What the hell is this going to look like? How can we see all these locations, and move between them so quickly? How's it going to move around the country easily? What does a student wear?

Starting a show can be daunting, and I don't think people really understand how much of a personal response a design can be for a show. I've always found a real through-line in my work that reflects my life, and where I am personally. I can absolutely remember where I was when I saw a particular picture which ended up being a huge inspiration for a show. Therefore, it can sometimes feel really exposing to go 'ta da' here's the design for the show with a group of people that you don't know, so to eliminate this fear a little, I like to take everyone on the team on a journey with me and try to be open enough to invite everyone's thoughts - but also to curate which direction we end up going in. It sounds quite manipulative when saying it out loud. Haha!

On *I Think We Are Alone* I started to design the show by collecting images of what I think the show could visually feel like. I trawl the internet and Pinterest for images I like, collect them together in a mood board, and use these as a way of expressing to Scott and Kathy about which direction I'm thinking of going in with the design of the piece - see what they latch onto, and use this as a springboard.

I find any script like a puzzle that sets out problems that need to be solved.

Sally is a great TV writer, where the camera is able to cut from scene to scene in an instant - but she applied the same writing



Credit Tristram Kenton. Simone Saunders

technique to the play, which could have easily left us in a muddle if we couldn't change our look very quickly. Early on I realised that representing a realistic location isn't necessarily important. The dialogue, costume, props and light can instantly tell us where we are, so we can allow an audience to use their imagination to fill in the rest. This is a play about people, and their relationship with themselves, and each other, and with some really simple signposts along the way, I'll be able to support the piece, without getting in the way of it.

Another early conversation we all had was about making people appear and disappear, to blur silhouettes, and give a distorted view of these people around us - and again to feel alone, but aware of a constant presence around us. This is why we went with the perspex box idea. Not only were we able to create rooms and corridors, but we found we were able to make people appear to be ghostly by simply hiding them behind two pieces of twin-wall and by controlling how they're lit and positioned. We had a small sample made for us by our set builders to test

how it could look, and with Paul's brilliant lighting, it all came together onstage and looked really effective.

Finally, it's actually rare to get given a show that's set 'now', so I wanted the show to look fresh, and one way to do this is by using light. I love to work with light, and to see how light can tell a story as much as anything physical can. I was keen to create some form of light-scape above our playing space - though totally expected

it to get cut as it'd be expensive. I felt it important as it could allow us to see what's happening inside a character's head at any particular point, instead of showing anything naturalistic. I've done similar things on shows before, but the brilliant lighting designer Paul Keogan found the work of a light artist call Jim Campbell, and we both knew the look was what we were looking for. We then had to go about trying to make it happen! We went on a long journey to find a product that we

could afford, could get shipped to us in time, and would be ok to pack in the back of a truck every week on the road. The LED product we found is brand new, and allows us to control every bulb individually, and it's positioned on the set, facing upstage, so we can create purposefully blurred moving images that support the story happening below.



*Credit Tristram Kenton. The Company*

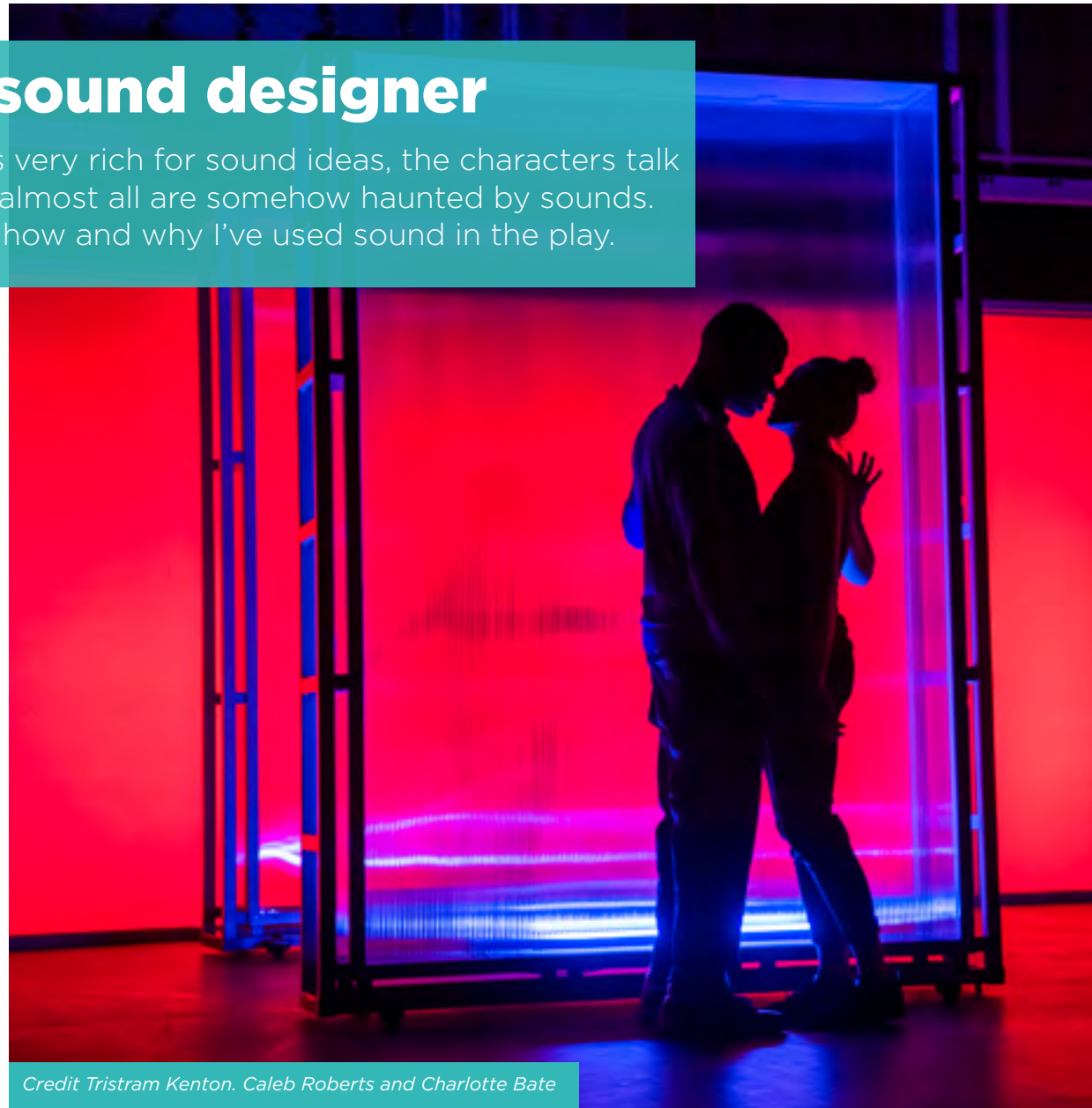


## Ella Wahlstrom, sound designer

The script of *I Think We Are Alone* is very rich for sound ideas, the characters talk a lot about sounds and silence, and almost all are somehow haunted by sounds. I've chosen a couple of examples of how and why I've used sound in the play.

### Breathing

The central ghost story is Clare's experience of being haunted by the breathing in her bedroom, and so breathing became the main theme of the sound design. Breathing is a very versatile tool, and as it's recognisably human, it's very evocative. Just like speech has intonation so does breathing and we can sense a lot of underlying information from the sound of a breath. I used various recordings of breathing, both men and women, and the main breathing sound that is heard in the scenes where Clare is haunted by the memory is a lo-fi recording of my daughter sleeping when she was about 9 months old. I used it because you can hear from the recording that it's not performed. I needed a sound of breathing that would just exist without trying to say or do anything. This way the neutral sound can be given a meaning by the character. The fact that the recording is not a professional recording and the sound quality isn't high was less important and in fact I embraced it and treated it even further to reflect the themes of recorded voice tapes as a way of preserving a memory and electricity as a shared design element with lighting and set design.



Credit Tristram Kenton. Caleb Roberts and Charlotte Bate

Breathing serves the story in more ways than just as the ghost. As Clare says in the play: "... eight years ago, I stopped breathing. I haven't breathed since. I just pretend to." Most of the scene changes have breathing sounds and these are much more dramatically sculpted. Humans respond very strongly to rhythms: our walking, heartbeat and breathing all create rhythms. It's comforting to hear an even and continuous rhythm: an inhale, followed by an exhale, followed by an inhale and so on and so on, reassuring us of vital signs. In the scene changes I used continuous breathing very sparingly, it's usually there to tell a specific story. Like in Clare's running scene, we also hear her heartbeat monitor reminding her that she's alive and healthy, but towards the end of the scene as the music speeds up the heartrate slows down to emphasize the disconnect between the intent of being healthy and the outcome of the efforts. Often the scenes finish with specifically in an inhale or an exhale reflecting the character's emotional and psychological state. And mostly I've used uneven breathing, for example sequences that begin and end with an inhale, matching a male inhale with a female exhale and I've added a lot of elongated pauses between breaths to create the feeling of holding your breath and to emphasise the effort that it takes to breath with underlying anxiety. This makes the breathing feel unnatural and makes the listener slightly uneasy.



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Simone Saunders*

### **Background soundscapes and silence**

Silence is talked about a lot in the play, but I intentionally use silence only once in the play, for the two scenes where Ange and Clare tell their story from their childhood. This grounds the moment, when the noise floor drops the audience leans in to listen to the story. To achieve this effect there's continuous background soundscapes in all other scenes. Every location has its own background soundscape. We recorded Kings Cross station and the birdsong in the hospice scenes is from Regent's Park where we rehearsed the play. I used a lot of birdsong in the production, birds are often seen as very spiritual animals, messengers between earth and heaven

above, but they also remind us of the ever-continuing life around us. There's a line in the play commenting on the noise of London saying "You can never be alone in London. Got the living and the dead". You can hear a black bird singing going into Ange's flat after a late night at a nightclub and a robin after the power cut. There's a continuous birdsong in the background of the hospice scenes to help creating the beautiful and calm environment. It's also a way of creating a type of quiet environment: you hear that kind of a detail in your surroundings when there's a relatively low noise floor, so having these elements audible is a way of creating the feeling of quiet and calm environment, a classic example of this is hearing a ticking clock in a scene.

## **Bex**

Graham takes the power cut to be a sign and so we chose the sound of electricity to use for the language of introducing Bex's scenes. These scenes are also the only scenes that have a musical underscore that's not part of the world of the scene. Always when Bex enters the scene the naturalistic background drops out a little bit and this musical drone comes in to lift the scene out of the naturalistic storytelling. The bed scene is an even further escalation of this as it's Graham's memory and we wanted to give it a special feel. It's the only time a microphone is used in the play. It lifts the voices out of the stage and blend in with the sound scape using reverb and very gentle reinforcement. The birdsong in this scene is the same as it has been in the previous hospice scenes, but now it's heightened, there's no other environmental sounds and the musical underscore is more noticeable.

## **Clare's anxiety attacks**

There are two big sequences staging Clare's anxiety attacks, for these we used the song "I Will" by Billy Fury which was specified in the script early on. In the last scene of part one Clare hears the song from a car radio in a taxi which triggers her trauma. She asks the taxi driver to turn the radio off, but instead of getting a relief from the song her anxiety takes over which I've emphasized with a chaos of breaths, a heartbeat, a high pitch tinnitus-like tone, various noises from her surroundings, the song and a descending Shepard tone. Shepard tone is an auditory illusion of a sound that eternally descends in pitch yet never ultimately changes. I've used it in these sequences to give the feeling of hopelessness with no end in sight. In this scene I used a low descending tone to mirror the movement which finishes with Clare on the floor and when the soundscape is repeated in part two I've used an ascending tone to support the movement later on ending up in the air.



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Andrew Turner*

A young boy in a blue astronaut suit stands in a doorway, with his arms outstretched. The background is a wooden wall. The text 'PERFORMERS PERSPECTIVE' is overlaid on a dark green rectangular background in the upper right corner.

# PERFORMERS PERSPECTIVE

*Credit Tristram Kenton. Charlotte Bate*

## Charlotte Bate 'Ange'

I am a long-time admirer of Frantic Assembly, Scott Graham and Kathy Burke, so I was and continue to be thrilled and slightly baffled to be part of this production.

The audition process was unusual (in my experience) for theatre – beginning with a self-tape, ending with a movement workshop, and then stood in Lush at Waterloo an hour later jumping around on the phone to my agent, holding up the queue with bad signal shouting, 'Yes! Tell them yes please!' – got a free bath bomb though.

Before rehearsals kicked off I started to think about the things I needed to learn more about. Everyone in this show has a storyline which is at times difficult. It seemed important to have at least a small understanding of Clare and Ange's childhood experience, and of the world of palliative care that we find Ange in at the start of the play. I read a lot, watched a lot, listened to music and podcasts, art and images, children's books, poems, anything that sparked any kind of imagination before day one.

First days are always exciting and terrifying. For me the first read through is fairly horrifying and the model box, where you all sit on the floor and look at the designers' vision of the show, is always a highlight. It's a play with many locations and I had wondered how we were going to transition from one location to another and here it was; Four (pretty hefty) walls on wheels that light up and are manipulated by the six actors. Easy.

Work began straight away. We only had three weeks – a short amount of time for any play, let alone for a piece of new writing



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Charlotte Bate*

and to discover a physical language within it. However, if I ever felt anxious about time slipping away, one look at Scott or Kath or Jess with all their cogs whirring, and all their jokes flying you knew it was going to be alright. They created a room of sweat, focus, laughter, dancing, openness, kindness, unity, a space all about offering ideas, however silly and somehow time to explore them.

Physically we started with various exercises, learning about taking each other's weight, lifts, touch, creating sequences, exploring certain moments of the text physically, and starting to try and feel comfortable moving the walls; using them to reveal or mask, tilt, climb on or create a space, or a feeling.

Alongside this we started delving into the text work. I've been fortunate enough to do a couple of new plays and really love the process of discovery and distillation that happens in the room. Sally, our writer has poured her heart into this play, and she



*With each preview, as the wall movements started to become less urgent in my mind I felt like I started to understand the journey of play a little more.*

was incredibly generous with her time, and her knowledge and her adaptability as ideas formed and morphed and shifted. We realised for this production that we needed an economy in our storytelling, both verbally and physically.

I think one of the most daunting things to grapple with at the start of rehearsals was the series of monologues. Both in terms of finding a physical language for them and that there is nothing quite so exposing as standing in a rehearsal room trying to do good acting all by yourself. You do have to sort of get over yourself quite quickly; it's a solid exercise in letting go.

Despite the monologues this is the most ensemble piece of theatre I've been involved in and that's just joy. We were all called in the rehearsal room all the time and I think that has been instrumental to the feeling of unity. I found it inspiring to watch the other actors work, exciting when you finally get to jump into a scene together, and when the group succeeds in a difficult wall shift without whacking anyone, even now, little smug nods and fist bumps pass round between us. No monologue can exist without the five other actors supporting it, no scene can change without us all taking care of each other.

We teched and previewed in Plymouth. I love tech! Genuinely. All creatives are in the same room and you get to see how brilliant everyone is, lighting, sound, costume, stage management all shine and I'm always awed by it.

By the time the six of us got to tech I think none of us really had a sense of the arc of the show yet, or the arc of our own journey

through it, being mostly preoccupied trying to remember which wall went where when. I wish someone could have captured the utter hysteria backstage in our first dress run. Six utterly bewildered actors clutched diagrams, whilst staring at the stage trying to work out how in the hell that wall had made it over there, and what the hell was coming up next. It must have been concerning to watch, but it was also very, very funny... (I felt)... And it all came together in the end!

Plymouth for me became a real learning experience; an exercise in faith that I had done the work, and clarity would come. With each preview, as the wall movements started to become less urgent in my mind I felt like I started to understand the journey of play a little more. These stories are important and I just hoped that eventually I could settle in and help to tell them. It's a show and a process that requires you to trust your instincts and give it some heart, and as my head became less involved the more it made sense. I find it hard to relinquish control as an actor and this was a real lesson in that. From an actor's perspective each half feels like a tumble from one scene into the next and you have to hop on board at the top of each act or risk playing catch up.

We've opened now. It's a relief to have met the audience, in a show about connection with so many monologues I'm delighted they're there every night.

The entire thing was and continues to be a joy, a laugh every minute and incredibly rewarding, I'm so grateful for it. It's a show with a big heart, made by huge hearted people and I'm beyond chuffed and still amazed to be involved.

A woman with short reddish-brown hair, wearing a blue blazer and matching trousers over a patterned top and sneakers, stands on a stage. She is smiling and looking to her left. Behind her are large glass panels reflecting the silhouettes of several people with their arms outstretched. The scene is lit with a cool, blueish-purple light. In the top right corner, there is a white text box with a black border containing the text 'PRODUCING / I THINK WE ARE ALONE'.

**PRODUCING / I THINK  
WE ARE ALONE**

*Credit Tristram Kenton. Polly Fame*

## Peter Holland, Producer at Frantic Assembly

*I Think We Are Alone* is two years in the making. More than that if you include all the time the initial idea existed within Artistic Director Scott Graham's head. My job was to extract that information and build a team to not only deliver the play that you see on stage today but support the entire development process of this piece of new writing. Added to this, I also wanted to ensure that this particular production would help Frantic Assembly celebrate our 25th Anniversary as the play would sit as part of a whole year of work. I wanted us to be brave, ambitious with this piece both on and off stage.

Before we spoke to anyone, I presented a list of names, Playwrights, Set Designers, Lighting and Sound Designers. The list spanned several pages of people I'd worked with, people I'd met, people I hadn't. I showed them to Scott, and we added to the list, took some people off the list and began to look at who could bring what to the table. It's important to understand that the list I presented was made up of countless meetings, trips to the theatre, scouring websites to always have a wider understanding of who was out there making new and exciting work. For example, I met the brilliant set designer Morgan Large at a press night in a previous job over five years ago. I have always wanted to work with him (check out his website [www.morganlarge.com](http://www.morganlarge.com) to see why) but for whatever reason, date clashes, project type etc we were unable to make it work.



Credit Tristram Kenton. Peter Holland

I was delighted when we got this project over the line. When creating work and bringing people together, it's important to have relationships with the industry as a whole. If you don't know what other people are making, how do you know what is possible or who you might want to create work with? Meeting people and having blue-sky thinking conversations is one of the good parts of the job.

First of all we wanted to recruit the writer. In total *I Think We Are Alone* had five research and development weeks, not to mention numerous sessions around a kitchen table. We felt there needed to be a strong female voice within the piece. I had penned Kathy Burkes name on the list as an exciting collaborator, and before I knew it, we were standing outside her house waiting to meet to

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*When creating work and bringing people together, it's important to have relationships with the industry as a whole.*”





*... writer Sally Abbott presented the creative team with a beautiful play full of heart, honesty and characters who are truly relatable to the audience.*

talk through our ideas. It sounds simple, and perhaps it was! We asked and she said 'come round', but it's worth noting that my relationship with her agent, James Penford spans since the days of going to Youth Theatre in Nottingham and ensured that my initial email was read in the first place. You never know who you might come back to as you develop your own career.

Our meeting with Kathy concluded that she wouldn't be able to write for us on the time scale we had, but Scott suggested we should bring her on board to co-direct and having never done this before, Kathy was up for the challenge. From there, and several meetings later, we brought in writer Sally Abbott, Morgan to design, Paul Keogan to light and Ella Wahlstrom to create the sound design. It's worth saying, excluding Scott, Ella was the only person who had worked with the company before, but all wanted to be a part of such an important production for the company.

From this point, we had a year to bring all this together. To be clear, now we had the team in place we had just a year to create the play. One year to design it, build it, cast it and scarily... write it. Being the producer, you sit in the driving seat of the production in which you have to communicate with all departments to ensure the development of the show keeps moving forward. We, however, didn't have the play. Pen hadn't touched paper. A creative said to me in the early stages of learning the timeline of the production, 'Pete what if the play is terrible' - this thought had obviously crossed my mind on a daily basis, but it's my job to keep the room positive and enable everyone to have everything they need to ensure that doesn't happen.

Fortunately, I'm relieved to say, writer Sally Abbott presented the creative team with a beautiful play

full of heart, honesty and characters who are truly relatable to the audience. We were fortunate under the circumstances that Sally's prolific experience in Television writing rooms, means she writes at such a pace. She turned around drafts of the script in weeks rather than months and her enthusiasm for writing this play saw her deliver the rehearsal script by October, way ahead of our schedule.

From this point we were able to cast our brilliant actors through a series of auditions and workshops, and the design team were able to present their responses to the play so that our Production Manager Hugh Borthwick could go on to have the design built and delivered to the rehearsal room, allowing our directors to create straight away.

In order to have created this work I needed to always pre-empt what we needed and be able to set strict deadlines to ensure we could start making the play from day one in the rehearsal room. Building a strong relationship with your team helps. It allows you to have difficult and honest conversations, particularly when talking about the budget, and also helps unite everyone in sharing the common end goal. My role is key in bringing everyone together.

Once all that has been achieved I can focus on booking the tour, selling the tickets, arranging press opportunities, inviting guests and investors, sorting out travel and accommodation, contracting all the actors, promoting the show, liaising with co-producers, managing the budget, hiring truckers, looking at future life opportunities, reporting back to the Executive team.... whilst starting all over again for the next new production by Frantic Assembly.

A man in a tan jacket and glasses stands on a metal structure in a dark room with blue lighting. The background features a wall with a grid of glowing points.

# INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT GRAHAM

*Credit Tristram Kenton. Andrew Turner*

# Interview with Scott Graham

Edited from The List interview, February 13th 2020



**Q** How did the collaboration with Kathy Burke come about, and what kind of process, and challenges, come about when you are co-directing?

I wanted to do something different with this show and in doing so I have probably had a few abortive attempts. I wanted to collaborate with a strong female voice and with my producer, Peter Holland, we came up with a list of such people. Sally Abbott was on the list and I was intrigued by her as she primarily works in TV and that would bring a new angle. At the bottom of the list Peter had put Kathy Burke. I am a huge fan of hers and thought it would be great to meet her and just talk about ideas. We went to her house, had a chat with her, and on the way home I suggested that she might be a very interesting co-director on this project. We asked her and she said yes! As simple as that.

Once Sally was on board the three of us met a few times and talked about the themes that I had been fascinated by and the others responded. It was sharing events from our lives, really. Interestingly, both Sally and Kathy were carrying events, fascinations and ideas that could only be validated as theatrical possibilities by each other.

We tried out a few ideas with some wonderful actors. I was keen to explore a more poetically physical vocabulary and to see how Kathy and Sally responded to this. All went well and this added nuance, character and tension to the evolving script.

As for the directing relationship in the rehearsal room, who knows? Well, we will, very quickly! I wanted to learn from others on this project and that is exactly what I will do.



Credit Tristram Kenton. Scott Graham

**Q There is a strong theme that might be called universal in the plot - it is about isolation - but also a contemporary edge, mentioning the use of texting as a way of communicating. What makes it important to you to combine both the immediate and more timeless elements in a production?**

For me this was more about our desire for intimacy and connection with others and how, in so much of our contemporary living, we are offered greater opportunity to connect. I wondered how much social media was actually delivering on this, given that we tend to curate and present an image of ourselves. I wondered if that image might actually hinder proper connection. We give people an impression of our lives and that might actually get in the way.

We are equally interested in communication beyond the contemporary. We all might speak to our ancestors or lost love ones occasionally. We might ache to have conversations with people who are the other side of the world or just the other side of the door. This, of course, is nothing new and this show is not an assault on social media but it is partly inspired by its promise of greater connection.

If anything, I think social media has given us a platform to speak but what we might have to get better at is listening. That is certainly the situation within *I Think We Are Alone*.

What I love about the human predicament is that, no matter where you place it, it remains timeless. We are still mostly driven by that need to connect.

**Q In developing a work like this, what is the relationship between the script, the scenography and the dramaturgical process? Having set out a manifesto - or, at least, a template of sorts - in your book on devising, do you still hold to those practices, or have you developed them in a new direction?**

I think the practices set out in the book have mostly been how a moment was explored on a past production rather than how I might explore the next production. That said, the point is that they might still be useful for your exploration and should be applied where the reader sees fit. When I was invited to write about the creative process, I was terrified of writing a manifesto as I thought it would be full of ideas that would become redundant. Putting something in stone seemed to go against the exploratory nature of the rehearsal room. It seemed like a huge pronouncement of an eternal truth. I had to address that within the books straight away and admit that ideas fade.

That said, I try to hold a few simple practices close. I test my presumptions. I always ask what I might be presuming about any one scene. Does it have to be presented in this way? Have I presumed that these characters can touch? That the audience's eye would be better seeing them from above. That it might be better if we only hear them. Or if there are no words and the tension between them can tell the whole story.

This necessitates very active and lithe collaborators as it could become clear that any element might come to the fore in this moment.

I am wary of having a set way of doing things. Any processes I employ are usually designed to throw up new ways of seeing. I don't want them to confirm my initial thoughts. I want them to surprise me.

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*Theatre is a social event and it can explore society's concerns, but I think it must always be aware of becoming didactic.*

Working with Kathy and a whole new creative team gives me the option to shake things up a bit but that will only happen if I am open to those voices. If that takes me down a particular route and then I ache to make work in a different way, I am lucky enough to be able to make that choice on the next project.

**Q In terms of the subject, is it possible for theatre to maintain a presence and power in the modern world, both against other media which are increasingly dominating, but also in terms of how a production is capable of responding to contemporary concerns without being dragged away by the weight of theatrical history, which has set up expectations about 'how theatre ought to be'?**

I think theatre is an extremely broad church and the variety available might negate the phrase 'how theatre ought to be.' That said, we have to be progressive and open to new challenges while always being mindful to retaining what makes theatre distinct and special. Going back to those early days we identified that communion, that time spent together, exchanging energy. I think that is what is still special about theatre. Good theatre inspires an active audience. By that I mean, their minds are rushing, creating connections and seeing beyond the veneer of a situation. Theatre is a social event and it can explore society's concerns, but I think it must always be aware of becoming didactic. I, certainly, am not interested in that.

The financial squeeze is a huge problem and theatre has not cracked how to express its own value to those that challenge it. Too often, theatre only speaks to the already converted in a language only understood by the already converted. We need to break this.

Essentially theatre is a communion of people and the telling of stories. Civilizations were built on this ability to imagine and suspend disbelief. I think we just need to make sure we find ways of presenting it that are relevant. We need to understand that when we subsidise arts we are subsidising the experience of that audience and investing in the imaginations of that audience. It is more than a night out and the opportunity to see someone from the telly in the flesh. We must make sure it does not become this.



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Kathy Burke*

# BIBLIOGRAGHY AND INSPIRATION



*Credit Tristram Kenton. Polly Fame*

# Bibliography of Inspiration

This section tries to show the references and connections that have all fed into the creation of the show. They are not compiled after the event to show how clever everyone is. If this section does anything it should convince you that inspiration and reference come in all shapes and sizes and are equally valid.

Some of these were talked about in the room. Others were just in my head. Some were merely gateways to other thoughts but without them the show would be very different.

The document outlining initial thoughts around this project points to many of the references. Below are a few more or links that might illustrate how those ideas informed the creative process.

## **Daniel Brandt** **Eternal Something** Album

I embraced the challenge that this show would have no music\* other than the Billy Fury track, I Will, but there was something about Daniel Brandt's work that was calling out to me. I created a playlist of various artists to share with the creative team and the first track I put in there was Turn Over by Danial Brandt. On our final day of tech rehearsals when it became apparent that we needed some music for the ending, panic set in. I turned to the first piece of music I suggested more than 7 months ago and found that it was perfect. Sometimes you find the answer was staring you in the face!

\*Ella Wahlström has also composed music for a couple of sections.

## **BoJack Horseman** **Fish Out Of Water (Season 3, Ep.4)** Netflix

This animated series is all about alienation and loneliness (and other things). This episode aches with the need for connection and resolution. It is also a brave and beautiful piece of work.

## **Dark** **Past and Present (Season 1, Ep. 3. Around 33:10)** Netflix

I talk about this in the initial ideas document. The split screen montage fascinated me. I was sure that the ache to make contact across time was important for *I Think We Are Alone*.

## **Slow Disco (from album Masseducation)** **St. Vincent** Song

This is a beautiful track that feels like it is about letting go as much as it is about making contact. I am still not quite sure what it is and why it connects to me and tells me that it is important!

## **Double Life** sketch from *Big Train*

I always thought this sketch nailed the complexities around going to university for me. This informed the tensions Manny feels on returning home.

### **Arterial, from the collection *Jinx***

**Abigail Parry Poetry**

I adore this poem thought she caught that ache of the heart and how it craves to connect. This was an early inspiration and I initially wanted to explore a poetic spine to the show. It would have been like a narrator but one that uses poetry rather than exposition or explanation. Some other show, maybe.

### **The Pavilion of Dreams**

**Harold Budd Album**

I listened to this album constantly on the way home from rehearsal. It is beautiful and ethereal. I was thinking that this captured the calm that Clare was trying to find to keep her anxiety at bay but I also think it was maybe my medicine after the stresses of a very intense rehearsal period! It never found its way into the show, so what does that tell you?

I think it is important to understand that music can inform the work without ever appearing in the finished show. This applies to any of your references and inspirations. Every wrong turn might actually help you find the way a little stronger and wiser. I know that sounds like one of those inspirational quotes posted by that person you should never have friended on Facebook but what I mean is, it all helps. Even saying 'it is not this, but...' is a helpful guide for your collaborators. It is how the conversation begins.

Here is a link to the ITWAA thoughts playlist, compiled by myself, Ella Whalstron and Associate Director Jess Williams. We contributed and shared tracks to this without commenting on those tracks. They were just a flavour or colour that we thought might contribute.



*The path to a finished show is a crooked one. It is full of doubt and moments of inspiration. Be prepared to find those moments of inspiration anywhere.*



Credit Tristram Kenton. Polly Fame



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*Credit Perou*