



A Shared Experience & Sherman Cymru production

SHERMAN
CYMRU



SPEECHLESS

by Polly Teale & Linda Brogan

EDUCATION PACK

Compiled by Kate Saxon, Associate Director, Shared Experience



SPEECHLESS



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SPEECHLESS



Shared Experience

At the heart of our work is the **power** and **excitement** of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience – a **Shared Experience**. We are committed to creating theatre that goes beyond our everyday lives, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.

“Shared Experience is one of the most distinctive theatre companies in the land. Those who have seen the company are unlikely to forget its thrilling productions”

Daily Telegraph



Alex Waldmann & Natasha Gordon

Shared Experience and Expressionism

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. We believe there is a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private world. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of suppressed emotion.

During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this bubbling emotional energy to erupt and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, when they allow the inner to erupt onto the surface they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having

allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place. This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place feels like than what it realistically looks like.

In *Jane Eyre* everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In *War and Peace* the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In *The House of Bernarda Alba* the house felt like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

SPEECHLESS



A Promised Land

by Polly Teale

Nearly twenty years ago I watched a documentary about the twins and was, like so many others, fascinated by the story. That two young women so full of hope, aspiration and imagination could end up in Broadmoor for committing violent crimes seemed like a modern tragedy.

It was Linda, my co-writer, who realised that the summer the twins were convicted of arson was the same summer that the race riots were happening all over Britain, and also the summer that Prince Charles married Lady Diana. It became clear that the twins' experience was part of a bigger story: the story of Imperialism and its legacy. Aubrey, the twins' father, was a scholarship boy at a school in the West Indies that was modelled on an English public school. The pupils grew up learning the kings and queens of England. To come to the Mother Country and join the RAF was a lifelong ambition. Growing up in a colony England was seen as a promised land. When he arrived in Britain with his young family he thought that he was coming home. But for all his efforts to belong he remained isolated within the RAF, unable to assimilate into this most British of institutions. His wife Gloria struggled to fit in with the RAF wives, arranging tupperware parties and coffee mornings to little avail.

Our story begins when the twins are fourteen and are being bullied at school and returning home to enact the Queen's Silver Jubilee in their bedroom. Linda and I wanted to investigate the complexity of being placed in thrall to a system that ultimately alienated and rejected them.

The twins' struggle to find a language in a hostile world reminds us all of our human need to be heard and the dramatic consequences if we are denied that right.



Natasha Gordon

SPEECHLESS



Dancing in Words

Excerpt from an article by Marjorie Wallace in the Sunday Times magazine, 3rd July 1994

At first June and Jennifer seemed happy, outgoing toddlers, but when they were just under four they began to ignore their parents, taking what appeared to be vows of silence and turning their backs on the outside world. They would communicate only with each other, speaking in a private, bird-like language. It was not until the twins were 14 and no teacher or fellow pupil had heard them speak to an adult that they became a matter of concern. They were transferred to a special school, but all efforts made to prise the girls apart failed. Clamped together like limpets, they were diagnosed as 'elective mutes'.

When psychologists then tried seriously to separate them, it was too late. June, who was sent away to an institution, was inconsolable, pining for her sister and refusing to eat. Yet, back together, the girls would quarrel violently, tearing at each other's hair or scratching each other's faces. They had become two human beings inextricably trapped in a love-hate relationship, twin stars caught in each other's gravitational field, locked in a fight for individual identity from which neither could escape.

I became involved with the twins while they were on remand awaiting trial following a spree of petty theft and arson. I was alerted to their plight by their educational psychologist, Tim Thomas, and by Aubrey, their father, who showed me some of the poems, stories, and they had written while shutting themselves in their bedroom. I found their writings sensitive and moving. What fascinated me was the intensity of their imagination and the sheer efforts they had made to educate themselves.

“First of all let's get one thing straight: nobody knows us really. All these things you say about us are wrong.”

June

I joined Aubrey on a visit to Pucklechurch remand centre where they were awaiting trial. The twins, now 18, were brought in, eyes downcast, propped like wooden planks against the warders. My challenge was to find the key to wind these mechanical dolls into life. I did not see them as case histories or teenage criminals. In their writings I had found shafts of wit, tenderness and lyricism kept secret so long.



Natasha Gordon & Demi Oyediran

The breakthrough came on that first visit. We were sitting facing one another watched closely by warders. When I commented on their writing talent it was like someone sitting at the bedside of a comatose victim of an accident. I was rewarded with a flicker of a smile and June stuttered: 'Did you like the story? How should it end?' It gradually became clear that they thought I could be a voice for them and on each of my next visits they slipped over the exercise books in which they wrote their diaries.

June and Jennifer, physically rigid, did all their dancing in words. They communicated through thousands of them in minuscule handwriting, stitched four seams to a line. They recorded in startling images their daily anguish, the fierce psychological warfare that they inflicted on each other. Each breath one took would irritate the other; every movement one made could be the trigger for another battle. They starved and binged in turn, one forcing the other to eat two meals while she starved; then the roles would reverse. If one twin broke the elaborate rules, all the artillery they had accumulated to combat the outside world was ranged against the other.

It is through deciphering these diaries, more than a million words of them, that I grew to know the inner torment of their thoughts and began to understand how a relationship that started with something as innocent as a nursery pact could eventually become one of despair and mutual bondage.

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Since no unit or secure hospital would accept these strange silent girls, they were sent to Broadmoor Special Hospital. It was a terrible and unjust sentence which deprived them of eleven years of their young womanhood. Throughout those years they continued to write diaries which they gave to me and encouraged my efforts to write their story in a book and BBC drama.

Day in and day out they dreamed of their release but when their transfer to a unit in Wales became a possibility, their old battles for their birthright re-surfaced. They decided, in order to be truly liberated into the outside world, one twin would have to sacrifice her life for the other.

Nine days before their release, when I visited them, Jennifer told me: *'I am going to die...'*. *'Don't be silly,'* I replied, *'You are so young. There is no reason.'* *'I just know,'* she replied, *'I just know.'*

On March 9, minutes after the twins had climbed into a minibus taking them out of Broadmoor for the last time, Jennifer slumped on her sister's shoulder. By 6.15pm that night she was dead.

The verdict at Jennifer's inquest was accidental death. The pathology reports showed that she died from an inflammation of the heart muscle that can be triggered by a host of causes.

June's reaction was one of deep grief and mourning, mixed with anger and relief. When I visited June a few days after Jennifer's death, she said, *'in some ways it was a sweet release... we were war weary. It had been a long battle. Someone had to break the vicious circle.'* She asked me if I could float a banner across the skies of Haverfordwest. *'What would it say?'* I asked. *'June is alive and well and has at last come into her own'.*

Theirs is a strange story, with an even stranger ending. The price of June's freedom appears to have been Jennifer's death, and June is now left to live for both of them. She is an attractive, maturing woman with flashes of humour, perception and insight. She keeps her life private. It is a tribute to her strong spirit that she has remained intact, not only from her years in Broadmoor, but from a lifetime's battle with the knowledge that someone else identical, but profoundly different, was sharing her soul. It is thanks to the brilliance of the twins and the courage of their family in allowing their story to be told that we have been given such unique insights into the universal dilemma where two human beings become so closely entwined that they can neither live together nor apart.

"I blame the daffodils. Who wants to hear summery sounds while they're in prison? Who wants to hear summery sounds even when they're free. Not me. I hate summer. The same old outings, happy people going on long-planned holidays. Children sucking ice-cream, pregnant women wearing blousey dresses. Why can't it be winter the whole year round. Do we really need summer?"

June

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Interview with Polly Teale Co-Writer (with Linda Brogan) and Director of *Speechless*

Kate Saxon, Associate Director of Shared Experience, interviews Polly Teale on why she chose to tackle this story and how.

Why did you choose to tell this story?

As I researched their lives, it became clear how many people know of them (June and Jennifer Gibbons) – somehow they've stayed in our collective consciousness all these years. Their story is fascinating: some of the key themes and issues about belonging, the fear of rejection and dependency are things we can all relate to. But because of their very specific circumstances, because they were the only black family in an all-white community and because they were identical twins – these facts meant they would have been incredibly conspicuous. So I think many things that we all struggle with became extreme for them as they became locked in a dependent relationship and there was no escape from themselves.

Do you think that their dependency as twins might have exacerbated their behaviour?

Yes, I'm sure. The fact that you can retreat into that twinship as it feels a safe protective place. Of course, ultimately, for them, it's not – it becomes a prison. The other thing about their behaviour is that what you at first see as extreme, becomes more logical the more you understand their circumstances. They were teased for a speech impediment and because they had developed a strange language since they mostly only communicated with each other. So there was a gradual withdrawal. If you're being bullied for speaking and are the victim of racial attacks, why speak? It's a dilemma we can all relate to: do we want to protect ourselves or live in a world that compromises us and involves risk? That these young girls who were so full of hope, imagination and aspiration withdrew to isolation and eventually ended up in Broadmoor for violent crimes, feels like a modern tragedy of Greek proportions.

Yes, regarding their imprisonment, why did you choose to end the story where you did (i.e. not continue through the prison years and Jennifer's death)?

We wanted to write a bigger story. The year that the twins were sentenced for arson, was the same year as the Brixton race riots and also Lady Di marrying Prince Charles. This context makes it a story about a nation and the legacy of colonialism. Aubrey was a scholarship boy at a colonial school modelled on an English public school. We wanted to explore the complexity of being placed in thrall



Polly Teale

to a system that ultimately rejects and alienates you. To explore the consequences of that rejection. We start in prison, so we realise that's where they end up and the play explores how they got there.

On the matter of the Race Riots, were the twins reading and watching the news?

Yes, at first they did go down and watch television with their family, but as they retreated and locked themselves away in their bedroom as the years progressed, they had a radio which they listened to.

For Shared Experience, that they don't externally communicate, but there is a vivid hidden world, seems to be perfect material. How will you theatrically explore that and explore their silence on stage?

When they were inside that bedroom, they were a hive of activity and creativity. Once they were outside of it, they were hidden; they were entirely inexpressive. Behind closed doors, they kept a secret world.

The tensions within that and within their own unit that escalated to such a level that they fought physically, meant there were eruptions where their emotions took over and they became unable to contain it. This has been fascinating to work with and yes, perfect for Shared Experience's exploration of the hidden worlds within us.

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So you said they spoke in a hard to decipher language, are you exploring that?

It's an interesting question as this has been a real challenge in the rehearsals. We need them to sound similar and have the essence of the unique way they spoke, but we don't want the audience to spend the evening trying to work out what they've just said. Also, since they could understand each other, it seems right that we understand them when watching their story.

Can we talk about Kennedy. On paper to me, he felt such a tough character to have any empathy for?

In some ways, there's a mirror in him, to the twins. He was moved all over the world as his father was in the RAF and his mother committed suicide when he was a child. He's very troubled and in pain and wreaking revenge on everybody because of it. The twins are attracted to him because he expresses the rage they can't express, he's like a magnet to them.

So they actually admire his 'spouting' of anger?

I think so, yes. I hope, when we perform this, it will feel dangerous and very specific. It's about his fear that his disciplinarian father will crush him. He ended up in the Eastgate Centre; all his siblings did too. That was a centre for seriously disturbed children.

Is there escape or redemption for the twins? Marjorie Wallace [biographer] said they believed that one of them would be able to live freely only if the other died.

They told Marjorie three weeks before they were due to be freed, that one of them would die. And though there have been medical theories, there is nothing decisive about why Jennifer died. My theory is that when they came to leave prison, Jennifer suffered such a massive fear of abandonment by June, that she couldn't continue. They must have been terrified of being released after being in an institution for so long. Perhaps it was 'better the devil you know' by then, rather than go back to the outside world again.

Why did you decide to co-write this piece?

I'm white and Linda is black and with the piece being about black and white and the twins, it felt correct to co-write this. I think we've been able to bring different things to it and therefore give it a life that's beyond what either of us could have written alone.



Emma Handy

"Please God, let me be bold enough to speak openly. Don't let this disease paralyse me, destroying my abilities, tying up my tongue. Like Firewood"

Jennifer

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Exercises on the Opening Scene

Solitary

June and Jennifer sit on chairs in separate cells in solitary confinement.

Both are completely still, their faces impassive, staring at the wall opposite.

The door to Jennifer's cell opens.

A female psychiatrist enters carrying a large file.

This is a ritual they have both been through before.

Psychiatrist: *I'm here to tell you Jennifer that your time in solitary will be a maximum of four days, assuming there is no further offence. As you know that period may be reduced if you agree to a dialogue that would help you understand and manage your behaviour. There are, as you know, a number of initiatives within Broadmoor to help inmates combat violent tendencies. They are however of no use unless the offender recognises their behaviour and has a desire to change it...*

Pause

Could you tell me Jennifer what triggered your feelings of violence towards your sister?

Silence

Is that a feeling that you recognise?

Silence

Is there a thought or collection of thoughts that you can identify?

Silence

Can you remember when you first felt these feelings?

Silence

Do they remind you of a person or situation?

Silence

Can you describe them to me . . .

Silence

Very well. As you wish. If you should change your mind I will be more than happy to help...

The psychiatrist is getting ready to leave. Jennifer suddenly stands and snatches the psychiatrist's clipboard and pen. June stands at exactly the same moment in her separate cell. Jennifer writes onto the Psychiatrist's questionnaire. Jennifer is writing furiously. She stops. Jennifer gives the clipboard back to the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist reads the clipboard: as June speaks the words.

June: *There was once a wild horse who lived in the woods. If people came near her she would run away. She was so fast that no one ever saw her though they heard the sound of her hooves. The people decided the horse must be tamed. They set off into the woods with a bridle and a saddle and a whip. They searched for many days but never once saw the wild horse though they often saw the tracks she left in the earth. Soon the people began to say that the horse had wings and that was why no one could find her.*

The psychiatrist looks up after reading the story.

Jennifer and June sit at exactly the same time.

Both stare at the wall as before.

The psychiatrist bends down so she is level with Jennifer's eyes, inches from her face..

Psychiatrist: *Why did you stop talking to us?*

The playground bell rings.

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Exercise

Silence is a challenge on stage – how does one convey thought/feeling/emotion without words?

Explore this scene in a number of ways:

1. Play it through once as written, being careful to note and act out the stage directions.
2. Discuss the inner feelings that you believe June and Jennifer could be experiencing.
3. What does the wild horse story express?
4. Play the scene again allowing them their inner voices, i.e. speak their thoughts out loud. Allow the Psychiatrist to respond to this new information offered also.
5. Play the scene as written again, keeping the previously spoken thoughts alive but now only through physically conveying them, not speaking them and consider: how do they affect physical tension and what do the eyes convey?

Discussion

At Shared Experience, early on in rehearsals, scenes are often explored without using the text but rather concentrating on the intentions and feelings hidden beneath the words. Sometimes, you may discover that we use words for 'cover/protection/to hide behind' and the true intentions of the character can be accessed more readily by stripping the words away and focusing on physicalising the intentions and feelings through movement alone.

In the twins' case, they hid behind silence.

From seeing the play and reading the articles in this pack, discuss why you think this happened?



Alex Waldmann & Natasha Gordon

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Welcome Home

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown on the historical context of *Speechless*

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown came to this country in 1972 from Uganda. She is a journalist, broadcaster and author of several books. Her book, No Place Like Home, was an autobiographical account of a twice-removed immigrant. She is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Centre. In June 1999, she received an honorary degree from the Open University for her contributions to social justice.

The story of the silent twins is in many ways a fable, a Biblical parable of the momentous post-war encounter between Caribbean and white Britons, the faithful travellers and faithless hosts. The former believed they would find a place in the ample lap of the Imperial Motherland, who had so long promised, had promised them her protection and much more if they were good. And they, her subjects, were very good, too good perhaps. Like Mr and Mrs Gibbons, parents of June and Jennifer, of whom more later.

On the June 1948 the Empire Windrush sailed into Tilbury bringing the first 492 skilled migrants from Jamaica, their eyes alight with hope, ready to work hard, wearing best and smiling excitedly. Some sang gospels as they docked. The London Evening Standard had a front-page headline: 'Welcome Home'. More ships followed from Trinidad, Barbados, other Caribbean islands and Guyana. Jobs and accommodation were easily found but like the winter they had not yet experienced, the migrants didn't realise what was to come. They found out fast enough. Most were too polite to say so aloud, but two thirds of the natives did not want 'primitive, jungle heathens' on the streets, in pubs, clubs, workplaces or localities. A. G Bennett, a Jamaican poet and journalist wryly observed the covert racism in his novel, *Because They Know Not* (1959, Phoenix): *'Since I came 'ere I never met a single English person who'ad any colour prejudice. Once I walked the whole length of a street looking for a room and everyone told me that he or she'ad no prejudice against coloured people. It was the neighbour who was stupid. If we could find the 'neighbour' we could solve the entire problem. But to find 'im is the trouble! Neighbours are the worst people to live beside in this country'.*

Meanwhile, members of parliament raising their own eloquent objections, gave voice and credence to the institutional hypocrisy underpinning 'coloured immigration'. With audacious plans in place to build an entire welfare state, the nation needed good, cheap, overseas workers. Didn't mean the people wanted them, or had any obligation to restrain racist contempt and worse. And worse, they still felt the country was superhumanly tolerant and the complaining incomers wretched ingrates. (That British tradition carries on and vigorously. Today indispensable migrant labour from the poorest



Anita Reynolds

countries in the globalised world face the same antipathy.) Unlike other groups of immigrants, Caribbeans had reasons to believe they would belong in Britain. They were good Christians, had been educated by missionaries, had imbibed British values, had volunteered to fight for queen and country, particularly in the RAF. Rejection and racism made some go into denial- they carried on behaving and dressing immaculately as if that passive perseverance would, one day, bring its rewards. Some went about with their heads held high, smiles and fake pride hiding hurt. Others disengaged, set up their own shibeens or drank at home with old compatriots, spoke patois to each other, gave up on hopes of integration. For a minority disillusionment led to anger which was either internalised – leading to mental chaos – or externalised, acted out in crimes and acts of destruction. In the Gibbons family, you witness the range from denial to destruction. The father, mother and children incarnate the different reactions, as characters do on stage in the great tragedies.

Just take the scene when, in 1977, the twins get bullied and beaten in school. They get the blame; they are moved to a 'special' school. Mrs Gibbons (not up to the challenge of mothering these complicated girls) first presents to the Head the respectability of her RAF husband and church going family and only towards the end, when there is nothing to lose, brings up the racial isolation her 'twinnies' must have been experiencing in an intimidating, all white school. Later when dressing the cuts and bruises, Gloria Gibbons warns the girls not to tell their dad what happened, not to bother him.

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Alex Waldmann, Demi Oyediran, Emma Handy, Anita Reynolds & Natasha Gordon

Aubrey Gibbons emigrated in 1960, more than a decade after Windrush. By that time, he must have believed, familiarity would have seen off initial nativist hostility and things were bound to have got better, particularly as the country was freeing itself from old social constraints and the old order. Not so. The counter culture did not naturally include black and Asian immigrants. Sure, the flower power folk just loved Motown, Ravi Shankar and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and mixed couples danced sometimes and there were furtive fumblings in bedrooms. Many white women went for black guys – as was beautifully captured in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*. But throughout the sixties notices forbidding entry to 'coloured' people were commonly pasted on windows of homes and workplaces, some clubs and pubs too.

If he was confused by the contradictions Aubrey Gibbons never showed it. The son of a carpenter, he was a scholarship boy at 'an expensive school meticulously modelled on the best English examples' writes Marjorie Wallace in her book on the twins. Trained to be the perfect Edwardian English gentleman, he was polite, distant, discomfited by demonstrative, emotive behaviour. The kids were left to be managed by his wife who knew her place. Though racism must have affected his prospects, he seemed to have believed he was accepted by his peers. The twins felt no sense of place and withdrew into themselves. Experts brought in to deal with them- some well intentioned, others cruelly indifferent- focussed on inadequate parenting and the dynamics of twinning but hardly any of them considered endemic racial prejudice, the toxic milieu.

There are some telling synchronicities that show up as these two lives unravel. On the 11th of April 1981 (the birthday of the twins) the Brixton riots exploded. Black people had had enough under Thatcherism- they were no longer going to be good. Through that summer more such unrest was seen in British cities and the police acted with, by then, practised brutality. 1981 was when June and Jennifer Gibbons began their spate of drugs, crimes and wounding sexual promiscuity which they saw as self-sacrifice. There was method in their madness, had been all along. Theirs, arguably, is a potted black history of those times. Mental illness among British Caribbeans- higher than the national average- in part, arises out of that bad history.

Then there is the Royal family- still loved by most ex-colonials, who are the fairy tale, the dreamy escape from the sea of disappointment and hurt. In 1977, June and Jennifer act out the Golden Jubilee in great detail, using their dolls and broadcast voices. In the July of 1981, the summer when the streets had burned, Diana married Charles. Gloria was glued to the TV, watching the beautiful princess and golden carriage while her daughters were breaking the law and themselves, bit by bit. It is unbearable, the juxtaposition of the white dress on a virgin going to her fate and the black girls, drunk, high, wearing strange Afro wigs and asking to be raped.

Though mute for years, theirs was not only a story of private grief and catastrophic co-dependency. Their personal tragedy flashes a blinding light on the political and social landscape of the time and of post-war migration. We need to have bifocal vision to see both and understand what happened to the babies who arrived on a propitious spring day in 1963.

"Once there was 2 parrots who were brought up to live in a zoo. Every day people would come to the zoo and see the parrots. Sometimes the parrots would mock the talking people and sometimes they would have a conversation between themselves. The parrots often talked how they longed to get back to their native land.

Sometimes they would ask the watchers to open the cage door and let them out. The people would laugh and think the parrots were kidding. Some of the children who were watching asked their parents if they could take the parrots home.

Before the parents had time to answer one parrot would say: 'We're not for sale'. And the other parrot would say the same."

Jennifer

SPEECHLESS



Playing Kennedy

Emotional Memory as cited by Stanislavski, is when an actor calls upon his/her own experiences, similar to those of their characters. Stanislavski believed actors needed to call upon their own emotion and personality in order to empathise with and therefore bring truth to their character on stage.

So how does one achieve this when you are called upon to play a character who perhaps acts in ways you would never do? We asked Alex Waldmann to discuss how he dealt with this challenge when portraying Kennedy:

'In some ways it is tricky for me to empathise with Kennedy, since he's an American teenager and the son of a military man... so, in a lot of ways, it's all very different to my own life experience.

But I think the way in for me was:

- 1. thinking of the importance of a father figure in a young man's life and wanting to please them- which I think is easy for any man to empathise with, regardless of their personal relationship with their own father.*
- 2. connecting with the anger and rage he feels. Maybe I feel angry about different things but there's a rage in me, in us all, that I can draw on and channel into the way Kennedy sees the world. That frustration he feels towards wanting to make an impact and change or challenge the world, when really there's very little he can do.'*



Alex Waldmann, Emma Handy, Demi Oyediran & Natasha Gordon

Exercise

Choose a character from *Speechless* and cite one moment in the play – choose one with conflict and emotional import. If you were to play this character on stage, what emotions would you need to be able to access and what experience from your own life could you draw on in order to bring about similar feelings in yourself? Remember, the actualities don't have to be matched but the emotional response to them does.

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Designing *Speechless*

Naomi Dawson, Designer, on working on *Speechless*

Designing a new play is always tremendously exciting, as it has never been done before. It also comes with its own inherent challenges in that you are never sure which decisions will remain by the time it is presented to an audience. The script for *Speechless* was still being written during the design process; luckily this didn't become a problem, as Polly, the director, was also co-writing and therefore able to talk me through the overarching shape of the piece even without the final script. This presented benefits too, since design decisions could then feed into the script itself.

The piece is set in the late 1970's and early 80's, which allowed us to go to vintage and retro shops for the costumes and look for the props and set pieces in charity shops, ebay and our own attics!

We decided to keep the set very simple, as the script requires bunk-beds, which the twins share both at home and in prison. We felt that they were such a strong metaphor for the twins' relationship and the piece as a whole that we really wanted to focus in on this as a central visual image and therefore decided to pair back on everything else. We also wanted a set that could lead us very quickly, merging from one scene and location to the next.

The other key set piece is a door, which leads us into the twins' bedroom. This is a significant barrier as when we are behind the twins bedroom door the audience are invited into the twins secret, fantasy world and we hear them speaking to one another. Outside the bedroom door we always see them as the rest of the world does – silent. The finish on the bedroom door is not naturalistic: in part it refers to the bedroom door but it also has a burnt effect which references the arson attack at the end of the play, which in turn leads the twins into Broadmoor. We see the burnt effect before the actual crime, just as we start the play from the prison; therefore giving the audience an impending and inevitable sense of the twins' future.

Composing for *Speechless*

Peter Salem, Composer, on scoring for *Speechless*

Owing to the shorter than usual rehearsal period before the Cardiff 'try-out' performances I can't say with absolute confidence that all my current ideas for the sound in this production will have survived by the time the show opens in Edinburgh so this is an impression of how I've approached the music and sound for *Speechless* rather than a description of what to expect! It will be interesting to see what makes it...!

Musically my starting point has been looking at themes and sounds which relate to the extremes of the girls' behaviour.

On the one hand there is their silence and slow synchronised movement, which the girls adopt in public. This seems a protective almost comforting device they use to cushion themselves from the pain of exclusion, but which ironically increases their isolation. On the other, there's a fierce violence, which erupts regularly and seems to be as intrinsic a part of their relationship as their mutual dependency; one twin desperately wanting to rid themselves of the other.

So I am looking at repetitive patterns and a sort of aural blanket to support their quiet synchronised world and reinforce the fact that they are in a 'space' other than the world going on around them. I want to suggest brutal sounds of imprisonment and sounds of breathing and heartbeat to heighten their sense of claustrophobia, of being trapped and of the potential violence that could burst out at any moment.

There are also images of escape and freedom; horse imagery recurs in the play and so I hope to work-in the sound of a galloping horse to represent the possibilities of escape and freedom - and flying imagery, whether of winged horses or the fantasy of their father's flypast in their enactment of a make-believe Silver Jubilee parade.

In addition to the composed music and sound there are also the 'tracks' of the period. The girls often recorded themselves singing songs of the 70s, generally quite sweet tracks which contrast with Kennedy's taste in heavy metal which bursts into their world as the play develops.

They also sing *God Save the Queen* and *Jerusalem*, which, as in so much of the play, show how much the girls buy into and fantasise about a world which in reality seems to exclude them and in which they seem unable to take part.

SPEECHLESS



Exercises from the Rehearsal Room

The Assistant Director, Aled Pedrick, shares some exercises from the rehearsal room of *Speechless*.

These exercises are rehearsal techniques, employed by Polly Teale in order to aid the actors' work on creating the unique relationship between the twins.

Additional 'Notes' by Kate Saxon, Shared Experience's Associate Director, give further information as to how you could explore these exercises. All can be led in a rehearsal room/drama class environment and will require active leadership from the director/teacher.

1. Co-Dependency

Addressing the twins' co-dependency.

Ex. Mirroring one another in pairs. One leads, the other mirrors until a unity is met and a clear leader is no longer visible – just what appears to be spontaneous simultaneous movement.

2. The Struggle

Beginning to address the physical and emotional make-up of the twins' relationship, constantly shifting from a desire for freedom to a dependency and clinging on to one another.

Ex. Trust exercises, allowing another to take your weight on an escalating scale. The exercise is then developed so that the person giving the weight risks more and falls into a 'leap' away from the catcher, but loses courage at the last moment, resulting in a desperate clinging to one another.

3. The Battle

Accessing the constant and often violent relationship that exists between the twins.

Ex 1. Assume a position in the space which represents a time in your life when you experienced loss, shame or abandonment. Next, allow the internal feeling underneath this feeling to be revealed by using a chair to express frustration and rage towards the situation.

(Note. This can start small: sit on the chair, think through the situation to yourself, perhaps what was said to you and what you regret saying or wish you had said. Explore the tensions this creates in your body, allowing the tensions to build and be released physically: this could be through uncomfortably moving, fidgeting, or even needing to get up. If you do stand, ensure you stay connected to your chair again, so that you always have the object with which to

express your physical frustration. This exercise should be led by the teacher/director, who can encourage the build and release – talking you through experiencing the tensions when focused in different parts of the body. It is a good idea to allow the exercise to culminate in a 'release' such as shouting the words you never dared say before. All in the company should be built to that release point at the same time, so that all that is heard in the rehearsal room is noise and each actor's private thoughts are not singled out.)

Ex 2. In pairs, choose a 'victim' and an 'attacker'. Using a chair as weapon, manipulate, manoeuvre and taunt the 'victim' around the space, using the emotion conjured in the previous exercise, but with the addition of another person to blame or vent those emotions on.

(Note. Never allow the chair to make contact with the person being taunted.)

4. Finding a Voice

Addressing the need for the twins not only to move as one another, but also finding a unified vocal quality and tone which June and Jennifer share.

Ex 1. Using a section of text, the actors face each other and deliver the lines- when one speaks, the other repeats and mimics the line.

Ex 2. As one speaks, the other mouths along, copying mouth movements, before repeating the line back.

Ex 3. Delivering the lines in unison, speaking as much as one voice as possible in a shared and newly discovered sound.

Ex 4. Same, but mouthing along without sound.

Ex 5. Same as Ex. 3, but facing away from each other.

Ex 6. Mimicking each other's facial expressions as well as vocal quality. Taking on another person's 'mask'.

Ex 2. As opposed to repeating or echoing the line back, as one speaks, the other picks out words that stand out or strike them as important or which they can pre-empt the other will say, creating the illusion of people thinking in unison and finishing each other's sentences.

SPEECHLESS



Writing a Review

Reviews help to communicate to others what a play is about and how the theatre company has chosen to tell the story. When writing a review you should consider who might be reading it and what will be important to them. You shouldn't spoil the plot for the reader, but make them feel as if they have a sense of the whole production.

When writing a review you should:

- Say what you saw
- Say what you think
- Reflect on your responses
- Write freely from the heart
- Don't worry about given theories
- Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid
- Say why it spoke to you

Consider:

- The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
- The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
- The set, the costumes, the style of the production, the objects
- The Themes
- The Characters
- The Story
- The Ending...

Write a review for a national newspaper. (Your review must be no longer than 500 words)

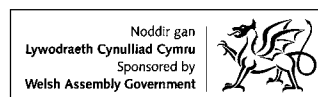
Write a review for a specific online website. (Your review must be no longer than 200 words)

Tweet your review. (Your review must be no longer than 140 characters)

We'd love to read your reviews: please email us at kate@sharedexperience.org.uk or visit us on Facebook.

Please contact **Kate Saxon**, Associate Director, at Shared Experience for further information regarding the company's education work.

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