

Lisa's Sex Strike

A new version of Aristophanes' classic comedy *Lysistrata*

By Blake Morrison

Directed by Conrad Nelson



Northern Broadsides Education Pack Autumn 2007

Contents

Introduction	3
<i>Lysistrata</i> and <i>Lisa's Sex Strike</i>	3
<i>Lisa's Sex Strike</i>: Synopsis	4
Greek Theatre	6
Comedy and Aristophanes	6
Adaptations and Translations	8
From <i>Lysistrata</i> to <i>Lisa's Sex Strike</i>	8
Themes	8
Gender	8
Sex Strikes	9
War	9
Style and Structure	10
Interview with Blake Morrison	11
The Design	14
Barrie Rutter Rehearsal Diary	16
Madeleine's Rehearsal Diary	18
Bibliography & Further Reading	23

Introduction

This pack is designed as an aid to Key Stages 5 and higher education studies in Classics and Drama. It accompanies the Northern Broadsides' workshops and gives an insight into the 2007 touring production of *Lisa's Sex Strike* by Blake Morrison and directed by Conrad Nelson. The purpose of the workshop is to provide some useful suggestions for studying the play. Whilst this workshop will not help to answer AS or A level Classics or Drama questions directly, it is intended to provide ways of making the text and the show more interesting and accessible.

Lisa's Sex Strike is a new adaptation of Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata*, written specially for Northern Broadsides Theatre Company by Blake Morrison. The play premiered on 6th September 2007 and was co-produced by the Bolton Octagon Theatre and opened their fortieth anniversary season. The play adapts the ancient Greek Comedy as a topical comedy set in a modern northern town. This adaptation is the fifth collaboration between Blake Morrison and Northern Broadsides.

Lysistrata* and *Lisa's Sex Strike

Lysistrata was written in 411BC and loosely translates as "releaser of war." *Lysistrata* is an anti-war play. Athens, where the play was originally set, had been at war with Sparta since 431BC. It was produced at the Lenaea festival after Athens' failed attack on Sicily. This play differs from a number of Aristophanes' comedies: It divides the chorus into two sections, the protagonist is female, no gods are ridiculed, no political figure is directly mocked, there is no direct parabasis, and the emphasis of the play is on uniting communities as opposed to direct criticism of any Athenian or Athenian system .

The reception of the play would have been very different from its modern counterpart. The audiences at the festivals of Dionysia and Lenaea were exclusively male, as were the actors playing female rôles. Dr Jon Hesk, classics lecturer at St Andrews University, states that the central theme of the play, namely that women could seize power by having a sex strike, would be completely fantastical for the male audience.¹ The play is viewed differently now. Since the emancipation of women in the twentieth century, the play offers opportunities to explore relationships and gender politics.

¹ Hesk, Dr Jon "The Lysistrata" in Theatre Odyssey Education Pack 22nd April, 2002

Lisa's Sex Strike: Synopsis

Act 1

The men emerge from the factory at the end of the day. A football appears suddenly, and the men start playing. Tensions between the racial groups emerge immediately and lead to a fight. The men are distracted when Lysistrata (Lisa) enters. Carol enters, and Lisa complains that there is too much fighting in their community. She suggests that the women need to take drastic action. The remaining girls arrive: Meryl, Loretta, Rukmini and Noor. Lisa questions the group about the problems with their men, and proposes to end their troubles by having a sex strike. All the women agree eventually, and swear a pact on Heat magazine. Meryl expresses her concern that to stop the fighting they will have to do more than have a sex strike, but what?

Mama Pax, the old Greek Goddess of Peace, arrives in a motorised wheelchair. She suggests that the women occupy the factory just as the ancient Greeks occupied the Acropolis, and withhold both sex and money to bring the men to their knees.

Enter Grandpa Mars, sent by Mr Prutt to end the seizure of the factory. He is a soldier who has been in all the wars throughout history. He is armed with a bomb, but Mama Pax confronts him and disarms him.

Meanwhile inside the factory the women discover that the factory does not just make replacement parts, but in reality produces components for the arms trade. Enter some policemen sent by Mr Prutt to end the women's occupation of the factory. The women overpower them, and threaten them with knitting needles and piss pots.

Mr Prutt enters. He is angry that his business has been halted by women. He tries to negotiate with Lisa and defend the arms trade. Lisa and Noor confront him with the implications of what he is doing and humiliate him. He leaves, vowing to return. The male workers attempt to reclaim the factory from the women by asserting macho bravado, but end up half naked and laughed at by the women.

Act Two

During the occupation of the factory the women's resolve starts to weaken. They all try to sneak home to their men in different ways. Loretta sings the celibacy blues. Lisa sympathises, but rallies the troops with her horoscope. The women are further fortified by the sight of Rukmini's husband Armit with a large erection. Lisa sets Rukmini to tease him erotically about his Bollywood fantasy, and to make him swear to persuade the other men to make peace.

Meanwhile, the other men are suffering the effects of the sex strike. They all sympathise with each other and decide that they must make peace. Dick, one of the workers, is suspicious, so the Phalli sing a song to reassure him. The men agree to make peace. In the factory Mama Pax cajoles Grandpa Mars into making peace with her. She removes a fly from his eye, and they resolve to be friends.

The men all gather around the peace treaty table. Lisa and the other women have turned the factory into an erotic cabaret. The men are just about to sign the treaties and make love with their wives when Prutt enters. He has reclaimed the factory and confronts Lisa. She is disheartened: How can you make peace or love with a man who has no humanity? The men and women rally together and work with Lisa to teach Prutt the error of his ways by literally putting him in the shoes of those his actions affect. After seeing through the eyes of a soldier, a prisoner, a grieving woman and contemplating his own grave, Prutt seeks redemption and peace. Everyone celebrates the end of the conflict and the end of the sex strike.

Greek Theatre

Greek Theatre developed through religious festivals celebrating the god Dionysus around Athens. The religious celebrations were eventually organised into a festival and competitions attended by the majority of Athenian citizens. The competitions and festival included contributions of tragedy, comedy, satire and choral pieces. The single festival eventually became two: one based in the City of Dionysia and the other in the City of Lenaea. These festivals were subsidised by sponsors elected by the City and were highly regarded in ancient Greek society. Great tragedians such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides and great comedians such as Aristophanes and Menander emerged. The festivals took place over several days. They began with a great procession into the amphitheatre on the first day, comprising all the various productions. Then followed two days of choral competitions. Five selected comedies were presented the following day. Then for three days tragedians such as Sophocles and Euripides presented plays like *Oedipus Rex* and *Electra*. The festival concluded with the announcement of two winners, one for comedy and the other for tragedy. The selection of writers for the following year was also announced.

Comedy and Aristophanes

Comedy

The ancient Greek comedy written by Aristophanes originated in festivities and revelry celebrated in Greek towns and villages. Young men would often parade and run riot through the streets singing songs. These songs and parades, which came to be known as komos, were eventually organised to be included in the festivals of Dionysia and Lenaea, but they were cruder than the tragedies and satire. The male choruses often couldn't afford masks so stained their faces with wine instead. The inclusion of comedy in the festival and the competitive nature of the festivals in particular, meant that the bawdy displays and songs had to be developed and refined. Elements of Greek tragedy such as choral dancing, masked actors, scenery, stage mechanisms and poetry were incorporated into comedy. It became a comedy of caricature, lampooning and slapstick. Masks displayed ugly and exaggerated facial flaws such as snub noses and wrinkles. The only references to possible appearance are found on vase paintings. This period of comedy was approximately from 510BC to 404BC. Political figures were mocked and portrayed as warmongers and cowards.



Are there any examples today? Can you think where and how political figures are lampooned?

As the political situation worsened in Athens due to its defeat in the Peloponnesian War at the beginning of the third century BC, comedy shifted into a new period known as Middle comedy. Middle comedy differed from old comedy in that public figures ceased to be personally mocked and the emphasis shifted to general politics and the attitudes of Athenian society. The chorus was also removed from the plays. This period lasted for about fifty years, until a new type of comedy emerged under the playwright Menander. The new comedy that evolved shows similar traits to our ideas of commedia dell'arte and modern comedy. The situation ceased to question the political or social situation but featured stories based on thwarted love and character types such as the miserly father. These romance-based comedies were adapted and developed by Roman playwrights.

Aristophanes

Aristophanes wrote over 40 plays, but only 11 have survived to the present day. He was born about 444 BC and is believed to have died in 380 BC. His plays are the only remaining plays of the Old Greek Comedy. He was born in Athens; his first play is dated at 427BC when he was seventeen years old. Little is known about his personal life except that he had three sons: Philippus, Araros and Nicostratus. His works demonstrate a love of nostalgia for the older ideas of a democratic Athens. He opposed the Peloponnesian war between

Aristophanes 11 known plays
427 BC Banqueteers 2nd prize (5th year of war)
426 BC Babylonians (satirised Cleon)
425 BC Archanians – 1st prize at Lenaea
424 BC Knights – 1st prize Lenaea
423 BC Clouds –
422 BC Wasps – 2nd prize Lenaea
419 BC Peace – 2nd prize
414 BC Amphiarus 2nd prize Lenaea
Birds 2nd prize
411 BC Lysistrata
411 BC Thesmophoriazusae
408 BC Plutus
405 BC Frogs – 1st prize Lenaea
388 BC 2nd version Plutus.
From ancient library online

Sparta and Athens. His plays demonstrate his criticisms of the attitudes of leading figures of Athenian society, either for their support of the war or for their sophist philosophies. His protagonists were often society's underdogs, the ones who lived on the fringes of large political conflict. He satirised and lampooned some of the leading figures in the Peloponnesian War such as Cleon and Lamachos. He even ridiculed the gods in some of his comedies. Paul Roche, translator, states that: "As to its general structure, the Aristophanic comedy followed this pattern: (1) Prologue, which could be dialogue; (2) Parados, or entry of the Chorus, singing and dancing in character; (3) the Agon, or debate; and (4) the Parabasis

or address of the Chorus to the audience in the name of the author.”² His plays are the only complete examples of “Old Comedy” and “Middle Comedy” in existence.

Adaptations and Translations

Lysistrata is a play that deals with a number of issues that still apply to modern audiences whether due to issues of gender politics or conflict on a local or global scale. In the last fifty years, there have been numerous productions and adaptations that illustrate the altered attitudes to women, protest and war. In 1988, Tony Harrison wrote *The Common Chorus*, which adapted *Lysistrata* and Euripides’

Women of Troy to the women’s demonstration at Greenham Common, which protested against nuclear arms. In 1972 and 1999 Germaine Greer, well-known academic and feminist wrote *Lysistrata: The Sex Strike*, which dealt with ideas of the Women’s coalition for peace and freedom. There have also been musical adaptations. In 1979 *Lysistrata and the war* was published. It was a Mozart-like opera which focused on the war in Vietnam. In 2005 a version by Jason Tyne was performed in New York Central Park and focused on the current war in Iraq.

Some examples of adaptations.

1957	Dudley Fitts	<i>Lysistrata</i>
1963	Douglas Parker	<i>Lysistrata</i>
1972/1999	Germaine Greer	<i>Lysistrata: The Sex Strike</i>
1988	Tony Harrison	<i>The Common Chorus</i>
1991	Nicholas Rudall	<i>Lysistrata</i>
1993	Ranjit Bolt	<i>Lysistrata</i>
1993	David Cottis	<i>Lysistrata</i>
2004	Ronan O’Donnell	<i>Lysistrata</i>
2005	Paul Roche	<i>Lysistrata</i>

From *Lysistrata* to *Lisa’s Sex Strike*

Themes

Lisa’s Sex Strike is set in a present day northern town where there is racial and ethnic tension between the two working communities. The women decide to hold a sex strike and, on the advice of Mama Pax, seize the factory where the men work. In presenting the play in a modern northern community, *Lisa’s Sex Strike* deals with a number of universal issues such as gender, sex strikes, war and community but with specific reference to the here and now.

Gender

Nowadays there are equal rights for men and women in comparison with Ancient Greece. Women have more power within modern society but some traditional ideas, that men go off fighting, that women look after the children, for example, remain the same. Look at the scene

² Roche, Paul ‘Introduction’ in *Aristophanes The Complete Plays*, New York; New American Library, 2005

between the women and Prutt in scene 7; Capitalist villain and his attitudes to women. Do you think his reasoning is justified?

Do you think the play could work the other way round, with the men holding the sex strike? What would their cause be? What does that say about gender equality?

On a global level, even though women hold increased political sway, the attitude that it's a man world, particularly in warfare, still prevails. It is arguable that there are a number of issues that suggest that equality is mainly a western ideal whereas in other societies the male hierarchy prevails. In *Lisa's Sex Strike* the opinions of the men and women of each other across two warring communities demonstrate this global issue.

There are also implications made in the scene between Amit and Rukmini that her role is purely domestic. However, even though the women are shown taking the moral high ground by striking for peace, they are also mocked when their human desires nearly overcome their moral crusade.

Sex Strikes

Aristophanes' original fantastical idea that women could gain power by withholding sex isn't so fantastical nowadays. In the last thirty years there have been a number of sex strikes to protest for different reasons such as conflict, environment, health and equality. The initial idea of *Lysistrata* that women unite to ensure peace is an ideal that is now held by the Lysistrata Project which protests against global wars and injustices after 9/11.

Do you think the play would be as humorous if it were a different kind of strike, like silence or hunger? Why do you think sex strikes are still used?

Recent Women Strikes

- 2006 in Pereira Columbia the women held a sex strike to force their gangster partners to disarm
- 2002 in Sudan, a professor held an alHair to end civil war.
- 2001 in Turkey, women held a sex strike to protest against the lack of mains water
- 1997 in Colombia, General Manuel Bonnet urged women on TV to strike for a ceasefire between the drug gangs.
- 1992 in Poland, women held a strike over abortion laws.
- 1991 in Amsterdam prostitutes withheld their favors to protest against the treatment of illegal immigrants.
- 1981 Greenham Common Women Peace Protest against nuclear arms.

War

One of the reasons why the play is so adaptable is that the central problem is still an issue in today's society. There is still war and conflict that causes rifts in communities on a local scale and mass death and destruction on a global scale. *Lysistrata* dealt with the one conflict of Athens versus Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, whereas *Lisa's Sex Strike* deals with conflicts relating to race, religion, terrorism, and injustice. There is conflict on a local level varying from minor racial tensions on a football pitch to references to recent terrorist attacks.

There are global implications with the factory that supplies the arms trade feeding war abroad. There are references to the injustices suffered by prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. The inclusion of the character Old Man Mars shows the continuation of conflict through the ages from the ancient world to the present day. He argues that war is essential because “it sorts the men from the goats.” However, the play offers positive messages about community and diversity. The communities do join and resolve to work together and make peace. The final salvation is that of Prutt who through the actions of theatre and magic is sexualised and humanised.

Style and Structure

Lisa's Sex Strike has been freely adapted from *Lysistrata* to allow more theatrical drama, which enables it to remain true to the ethos of the original play. Aristophanes played with the fantastical idea to ensure the comedy and theatricality of the play. The language of rhyming and half rhyming couplets allows the play to deal with real issues without the play becoming a soap opera.

The structure has been altered to develop the character of Prutt as the villain, which makes possible a larger dramatic conclusion. There is music and dance in a number of different styles, and these are unsuited to parody and create fantasy, ranging from the lampooning of policemen using George Formbyesque music to the erotic tribute to the European strip club and cabaret bar for the peace treaty. Certain elements have been additionally theatricalised such as the inclusion of the war poem that pays tribute to the parabasis in old comedy. Even stage scenery that was very important to Greek drama has been incorporated in the use of the pyrotechnic ejaculation at the end of the play.

Interview with Blake Morrison

Could you tell me a bit more about how this play was commissioned?

It was originally going to be a television play for Open University students doing a foundation classics course. The idea was for them to appreciate what would it be like for a modern theatre company or television company to do a production of *Lysistrata* – and to see how you might work with the original. That project eventually fell through but there had always been an interest from Barrie Rutter and Northern Broadsides in my doing *Lysistrata* for them. The trouble was that the version I'd done at that point was very much geared towards television, which is a realist medium. So there was a lot of undoing of stuff - a lot of unwriting really as well as new writing and rewriting. Working with director Conrad Nelson and then with the actors in rehearsal has meant even more changes. One problem is that the second half of *Lysistrata* can be tricky, not least because the characters who appear in the first half don't reappear. So by modern standards, even by the standards of Greek drama, it's a play with a slightly bizarre structure. We liked the idea of one male character having some sort of prominence. The closest to this in the original is the but in the second half you never see him. So we built up the equivalent figure - that's the factory owner Prutt – whose return in Act 2 will (I hope) be a surprise.

What is it like in comparison to other adaptations you have done, working with this structure? Has it been like almost writing a new play?

It's been tougher, a lot tougher. The Goldoni play *The Man with Two Gaffers*, the one I did last year, was more or less done in a couple of months. But it's three years since I started working on this one and it certainly has been intense these last three months. I think that Conrad felt that the text was never going to work on stage with the vestiges of televisual realism, so that's all gone and it's become magical and fantastical. He's restored the spirit of the original, the burlesque as well the farce and slapstick. Another thing that's unusual in the play, if you think of *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, is the lack of long speeches. *Lysistrata* says a lot but she doesn't have a set piece where she declaims at length, the only thing close to a long speech comes from the Magistrate or Prutt. So that's been tougher in a way. The messenger that comes on to tell of Jocasta's death, or Oedipus remembering how he might have killed his father, there's none of that.

What's it like bringing something right up to date in comparison to your other plays that have been set in Victorian or timeless periods?

It is risky and quite exciting. The setting this time is very much present day. In the original the women who come together are from different cities of Greece. Here there are two different ethnic communities in a British town. You're talking about race relations, you're exploring Islam and Britain, terrorism, war, gang fights, hoodies, the debate over the veil - all this comes into this play. You do wonder about people possibly taking offence but the underlying message as in the original is pro-Peace - it's a vision of harmony among different types of people. At the same time the language isn't particularly vernacular or demotic, it's heightened. You're not going to hear people talking as they might in a David Mamet play, nor is it like listening to men in a pub.

Is that the reason behind the half rhyming couplets despite the reality and contemporary setting, so it is theatre?

It is theatre. Again I think the half rhyme was my compromise. I was coming out of a very vernacular treatment, a realist treatment, but when I heard the actors read I realised that they were much more comfortable with the full rhymes. Oddly enough the audience is too - you feel frustrated if you're anticipating a rhyme and then don't get one; indeed you become more aware of the rhyme then, not less. That's been an interesting learning curve for me, because I don't think I've ever written a whole play in rhyming couplets.

How is it working with Conrad as a director and with the different musical styles, particularly as Conrad is musical director as well.

It's been great actually. At least one of the songs is pretty much entirely by him – the words as well as the music. And even when, as mostly happens, they're my words, he sometimes contributes phrases or changes the way we've done it. I've got him to sing things down the phone to leave on my answering machine or mobile, so I have the tunes and rhythms to work with. I travelled up by train to Bolton during rehearsals and sat there in a crowded carriage on my mobile listening to Conrad sing. He gave me a rap song, which we've done, and a Greek song for the Mama Pax and a policeman song that is very George Formbyish. I mean he's working with a lot of musical styles so it's extremely diverse the musical range that he has. That's been good fun. And I hope it's worked out well.

There are a number of translations and adaptations of *Lysistrata* in recent years: what do you think is the desire to adapt it for modern audiences?

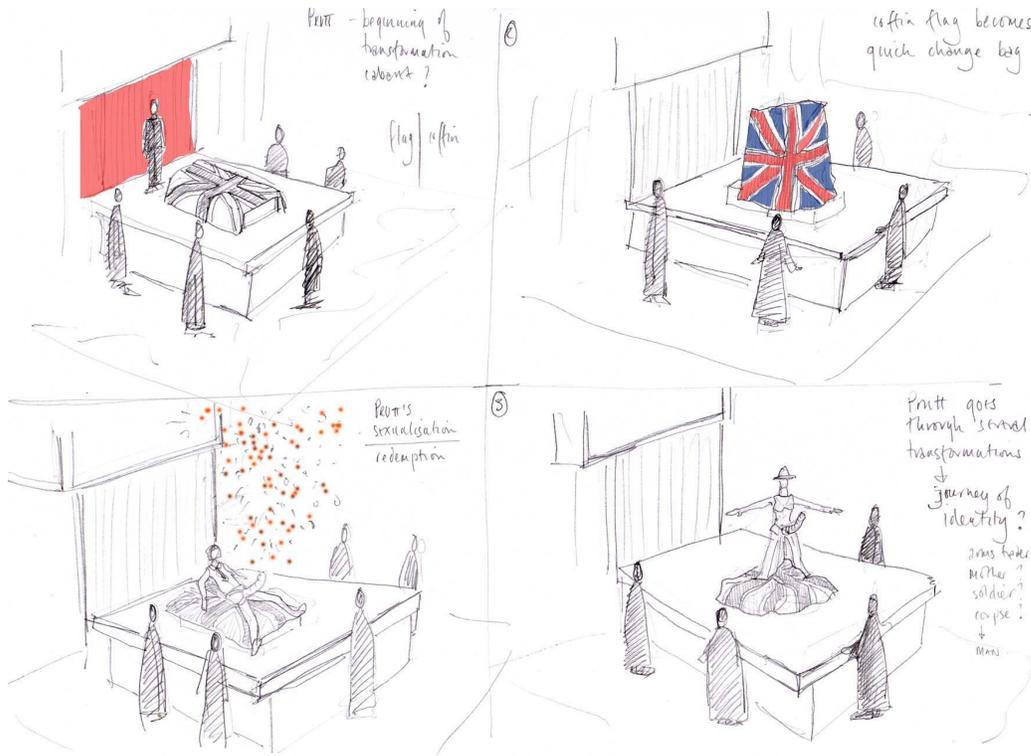
I think the idea of a sex strike is fascinating to people – there have been several example of women taking this kind of action in recent years. The idea of an occupation is compelling too,

for the same reason. People sometimes talk about protest theatre, and *Lysistrata* is perhaps of the oldest example of the form, a play about people trying to change the world.

Has any knowledge of Ancient Greek comedy informed any of your choices in adapting the play?

The main concern for me has been in getting the play to work in modern spoken (or sung) English. But there are allusions to Greek theatre in it – little in-jokes about mythology or about the original play. And I think some of the original humour is still there – some jokes never age, no matter how old.

The Design



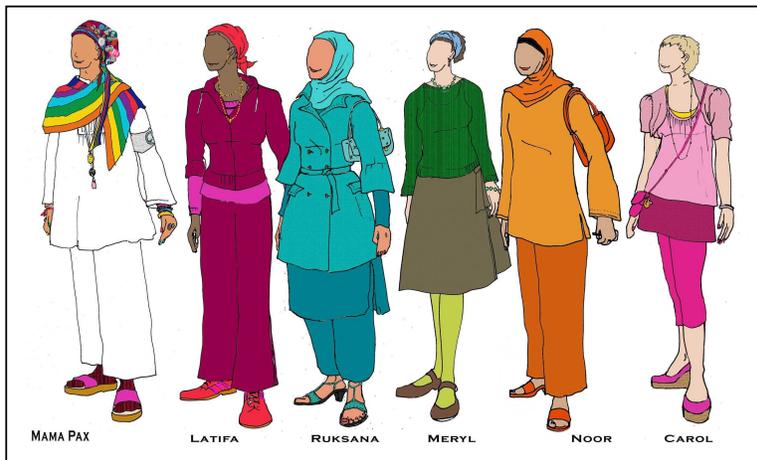
Jessica Worrall has designed the set and costumes for *Lisa's Sex Strike*. She has worked with Northern Broadsides for a number of years and this is her second collaboration working with Conrad as director (the first was *The Bells*). She has worked extremely closely with Conrad and Blake to develop the production to ensure its theatricality and its style.

Jessica not only has to design the set, props and costumes for the 14 actors but also has to contend with the fact that the company tours to different venues and stages such as the thrust stage at the Octagon Theatre in Bolton, the traverse stage of the Viaduct Theatre in Halifax and in the round at the New Vic Theatre in Newcastle Under Lyme and Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough.

The set is based on the ideas of the factory, with its iron gates and production boxes but it lends itself to other ideas of the meeting table or a bed with the use of the extra level. The sign above the factory has been designed to incorporate lighting changes to appropriate the factory into the cabaret at the end of the play. Jessica has also had to liaise with the magician Scott Penrose to make sure certain effects work within the constraints of the design. Other elements of the set have been influenced by the flower and clown protests at Greenham Common and at peace marches.

The costumes demonstrate notions of the characters' and chorus' stand-point; the girls wear bright colours that complement each other and imply the harmony of the rainbow, whilst the male chorus wear black and white to signify the divide between the communities and the over simplistic views.

The humanization of Prutt at the end of play has also meant a lot of designs so that Prutt literally is put into other people's shoes from the soldier to the grieving mother to his final transformation into a new man clad in white with a large phallic erection.



The phalluses have been modified to incorporate a puppet element, which allows them to whistle in the song "Give a little whistle."

Barrie Rutter Rehearsal Diary

Day 1

I love first days – new words, new folk, new tour, new mates – made all the sweeter by the Octagon's famed tremendous audience response, good at any time but greater still as we are the first play in the 40th year celebrations.

We, being Northern Broadsides, last here in 2001 with *Oedipus* and *Cracked Pot*, both by Blake Morrison as is *Lisa's Sex Strike* out of *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes. There's still plenty [of tickets?] to buy, so don't miss us!

What took us so long to return, I hear you scream! Well....its the Lowry. They pay a good guarantee whenever we tour there, but their piece of silver is that we don't play Bolton – too near. The Octagon doesn't think so, we don't think so but fiscal rules prevail.

So the pleasure is all ours to be invited to kick off this years' terrific programme.

Day 2

Blake Morrison and Conrad Nelson, the Director, have served up a text which is light years away from the severe, faithful narrative that I read four months ago – a mouth-watering feast of verbal dexterity and invention, with more changes to come as Blake hears actor's voices for the first time, delighting in the creative juices released with utterances. Many songs have appeared, more yet may. It's wonderful to have a poet in rehearsal – two, in fact, as Con's a poet of music, recent *Tempest* as evidence.

Overnight edits and new lines allow Blake to catch the 2 o'clock back to his family in Greenwich – there's plenty to work on 'til he arrives back next week with more. More – give us more: how exciting!

Day 4

Suddenly the building's louder, fuller – staff and production crew back from holiday; the Youth Theatre running to and from the BNT; the Spotlight Café open to the public and most of our 14 actors in every day – singing, dancing, learning going on around every corner. It's buzzing.

Day 5

A day off for me. The first time ever in the history of Northern BroadSides.

Day 6

Return to find a chorus of whistling cocks – you'll just have to see the show, am not giving anything else away – and a tumbling, trotting, truncheon-toting troupe of silly police of course!

Ambling around the Precinct and popping in to place a bet do I detect a less than favourable atmosphere towards the chap known as 'Little Sam'? Hmm. If I do it fits in with mine, being a supporter of the Tigers of Hull City, similarly throwing away home advantage on the first day of the new season. Good job the horse wins, and I whistle away with £30.

Day 7

I'm a God! Many have suspected this for some time I know but the vagaries of Aries, God of War (Mars to the Romans) are now realised in a half-deaf, half-blind, hip replacement needing old geezer from Hull – that's me!

Another Day

A frightening day, a nervous day, a 'will-I-get-found-out' day – choreographers in!

The girls love it of course. The lads love watching the girls of course!! Doesn't matter what perfume turns you on it's always delightful to see the grace that women's bodies seem to naturally possess. And as always, the movement queen herself is just sensuality on legs....

A serious discussion on how men walk with an erection ensues, particularly, a theatrically enhanced, mechanical strap-on, battery-operated throbbing erection. Oh girls, what you don't know or haven't observed – we waddle. Relaxed sauntering is not possible, even with the much smaller real thing. So it's legs slightly apart too when stood at attention.

It's gratifying to know that a large appendage (albeit a fake one!) rescues the possessor from intricate dancing steps. So, being condemned for having two left feet is put off for another day. What's more the girls will be in various Ann Summers garbs at this stage in the show and so will carry the 'dance'. For this relief much thanks. "Relief"? Oh stop it Rutter....

Madeleine's Rehearsal Diary

Monday 6th August

Meet and Greet The cast initially assembles in the café bar of the Bolton Octagon before heading upstairs to the rehearsal room. In the room Mark Babych, the artistic director of the Bolton Octagon, and John Blackmore, the executive producer, welcomes everyone to the building. Mark Babych suggests that everyone stand in a circle and introduce themselves and state what their position is. After the greeting, the company arranges seats into a circle and Jessica Worrall, the designer, presents her model box of the design and pictures of the costumes. She talks through both the practical concerns of the set, such as entrances and exit points, levels and props and the creative ideas behind the design, for example, the gate on the factory or the large meeting table. She also discussed the ideas behind the costumes that the women all wear, in different colours and contemporary styles but in harmony like the colours of the rainbow. By contrast, the different costumes for the male chorus will be in black and white, to demonstrate the polarised views and represent the conflict between them. Conrad then asks the company to read through the script with the emphasis on using the language and going for a heightened performance. He reminds the cast that this is not social realism but more theatrical. He reassures them that the language and rhymes may sound odd but to hit them anyway. The group read through the first act of the play with Blake Morrison and Conrad making notes throughout. There are a few notes throughout for different actors to take different lines of the chorus. After reading through act one there is a short break followed by the second act. The cast are then asked to form two groups, one to go on a tour of the building and the other to start work on the music and to go for individual costume fittings. Conrad introduces the boys to one of the first songs in the show, 'The Copper's Song', in the style of George Formby. The cast swap over and are shown to the Green Room, the dressing rooms and backstage areas. The day ends with the call for the whole cast announced for the following day.

Tuesday 7th August

The script for *Lisa's Sex Strike* is still under development and the second read-through allows Blake and Conrad to work through some changes with the cast. The main areas of adjustment include: developing certain characters like Will, who swears, but with odd phrases rather than swear words constantly, the removal of most of the swearing, the alteration of most of the derogatory religious references and the development of the rhyme and rhythm of certain pieces. The removal of the swearing is to make the language more

theatrical. Swearing nowadays is no longer shocking, but merely colloquial. Conrad uses the example of David Mamet's *Oleanna* to demonstrate the idea that swearing can still be effective or shocking when used minimally. Each scene is read through a couple of times with alterations. The second read-through of act one continues to lunchtime and act two continues after lunchtime.

After the read-through of the play, the music rehearsals begin. Beka Hughes and Conrad Nelson jointly lead the music rehearsals. He works through the cabaret scene where all the cast interact, the Copper's Song again, and the Cock Song, which is reminiscent of Monty Python.

Wednesday 8th August

The rehearsals start with Flo, Conrad and Becks who begin work on 'The Celibacy Blues' number, which occurs in Act Two. The range of musical styles incorporated into the piece all allow the audience to experience a feeling of total theatricality, that anything is possible on stage.

The rest of the cast steadily arrive to work on scenes with Conrad, in particular working from Act Two and improvising around the text to discover different aspects of the characters. Working on the scene between Amit and Rukmini, the actors are given the freedom to play and exaggerate the seduction. The scene takes on a Bollywood feel and the actors discuss the characters' fantasies and reasoning. Other members of the cast make suggestions about the possibilities of music and getting involved. There is also discussion about the ramifications of using the idea of Bollywood as a device: whether it is insensitive or valid. The rehearsal ends for a lunch break.

Every Wednesday lunchtime throughout the rehearsal process, the crews of the Bolton Octagon and Northern Broadships, including director and designer, have a production meeting to report on their departments' progress, from costume making to set building, and to raise any questions or issues with the rehearsals or production itself.

The afternoon includes more music rehearsals, and in particular, a discussion about the duet to be sung by Mama Pax and Old Man Mars in the style of Cole Porter.

Thursday 9th August

The first conflict of the play emerged from a football match. Conrad wanted a real football on stage. This would have been quite challenging because it would be hard to control. It could be kicked anywhere if the cast were to lose control, and might damage something or injure someone. The boys were first asked to start playing with the ball to practise their control of it. Exercises included: a single bounce, passing to the middle and out, "keepy uppie", and making a number of shots before taking a shot at the goal. This not only enabled the actors to work together, but also allowed Conrad to see their strengths and ability to control the ball. The rehearsal progressed from working on the scene with the dialogue, to choreographing the scene with the football, and finally to ordering the lines so that they make sense.

The rehearsals developed through the day. The scenes are now being blocked to work out entrance and exit points. Conrad works through the play chronologically, so that the actors can get a sense of the order of the play and the development of the story. The rest of the day is filled with music rehearsals, going over the various numbers in the different groups.

Friday 10th August

The day started with a musical rehearsal. The music has developed very quickly over a short time. Flo's initial blues number also incorporated elements of Gospel involving the rest of the female chorus. Bex and Con worked through the number for rhythm and tone.

The male chorus had arrived by mid morning, and they started warming up with the football scene. They went through the previous day's choreography, and developed the scene further to build in more layers of conflict between the two groups. There were additional suggestions of incorporating insults and tension by using adapted football chants and slogans, like shouting "England" and singing "You're going home in a big white ambulance."

In the afternoon the choreographer Bev joins the male company to work through the Copper's Number. She listens to the music and then works through the number stage by stage, from how the coppers enter to how they use the space and interact with each other. There are minor adjustments throughout to make sure that the actions are clear and precise and to incorporate elements such as two coppers holding instruments and two coppers getting up and down from the shelf on the stage.

Once the choreography is completed the boys rehearse the number a few times till they have all mastered the choreography. Conrad then asks them to show the first scene so that Bev can see the initial conflict. Once this is finished, Conrad goes upstairs and works through the

rest of the music with Bex and Bev so that Bev can start thinking about the following week with the girls.

Thursday 16th August

As the show progresses the idea is that it should become more magical and theatrical. This allows the play to deal with some difficult and global issues like race and war. Part of the conclusion of the show is the salvation of the Prutt character, the factory owner. He represents what money and power without responsibility or social consideration can be. He is so consumed by his love of money that he doesn't care about the global implications or ramifications of his actions. His salvation occurs when he goes through a process of becoming all the different people his actions affect, from the soldier to the prisoner in Guantanamo Bay to the grieving mother. These all have to be carried out as instant costume changes to have the maximum theatrical effect on the audience.

Conrad has invited the magician from the Magic Circle to develop the quick changes. Each department from design, technical, production, and writing have to join forces and discuss every aspect to make the quick changes work successfully. Blake and Conrad ensure that it makes artistic sense in the development of the scene. Jess and Mary, the wardrobe mistresses at Bolton Octagon, cooperate with each other to make sure that the costumes will work. Lesley, the production manager at Bolton Octagon, makes sure that it can all happen safely and effectively within the confines of the design. Simon, the actor, makes sure that he will be comfortable with the changes and understands how the blocking will work in the scene. Scott Penrose, the magician, discusses the various possibilities of the quick changes and how they will work. Various questions are raised about the durability of the quick-change devices as the tour continues until late November, and how the changes can work in all the different touring venues.

In the afternoon, work is developed with Blake to complete the finalised version of the first half. The scenes with the girls are all blocked through in the space, and Jess gives them their hand props to work with through the scene. This progresses to further scenes in Act One to go through the rewrites, and to work in the space and deal with the large wooden and cardboard boxes which act as props. The show is now full of different types of rhyming couplets that give it a highly theatrical feel. The cast work through the rewrites to make sure everyone is up to date with all the alterations and changes. The big changes are read through with the entire cast. It is an opportunity for Blake and Conrad to hear the rewrites and decide if any more are required.

At the end of the day the full cast assembles to work through the macho rap at the end of the first half. This is the first time that the whole chorus have worked through this number, which is quite tricky because of the nature of rap. The sense and musicality of it depends on the precision of the rhythm, which is quite tricky with a cast of 14 actors. They work through the number and then the boys work through some of the other songs with instruments.

Friends of Northern Broadsides Open Rehearsal Wednesday 22nd August

The morning starts with the girls working through scene 4 with Prutt in the space. The actors are now off book but are still dealing with script adjustments. They are also working through and discussing their characters' relationships and motivations. During the scene there is a lot of emphasis on energy and maintaining the drive throughout. It is important for actors to react and build on the scene not only in telling the story but also for the ensemble. After working through the scene section by section the company rehearses the whole scene.

In the afternoon the friends' open rehearsal takes place. The friends' open rehearsal occurs for every Northern Broadsides production. It is always well attended and beneficial for both friends and the company. The friends get an insight into how the productions develop and the company get a test audience to see the work.

Bibliography & Further Reading

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Websites

For more information about the Greenham Common women's protest check out www.greenhamwpc.org.uk/

For information on Aristophanes and people from ancient Greece check out Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* available at www.ancientlibrary.com/

The recent debates over race, the war, the veil and articles by Blake Morrison are available from www.guardian.co.uk/

For brief generalised introduction material – note always check for bibliographic references. www.wikipedia.org/

For more information on Northern Broadsides Theatre Company www.northern-broadsides.co.uk/

For more information about The Bolton Octagon and its 40th anniversary season www.octagonbolton.co.uk/

For radio discussion on Greek Comedy www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20060713.shtml

For TV and film adaptations such as *Aristophanes: The Gods Are Laughing* (1995) visit www.imdb.com/

Credits

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