

# Escaped Alone Resource Pack



## CONTENTS

- 1. About The Production**
- 2. About The Writer**
- 3. Introduction to Escaped Alone**
- 4. James Macdonald on Escaped Alone**
- 5. About The Design**
- 6. Caryl Churchill at the Royal Court**
- 7. Interview with the Assistant Director**
- 8. In Rehearsal – Practical Activities**
- 9. About Royal Court Education**

## **About the production**

**The Royal Court Theatre presents**

## **Escaped Alone**

**by Caryl Churchill**

First performance at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Sloane Square, London, Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

Cast (in alphabetical order)

Mrs Jarrett	Linda Bassett
Lena	Kika Markham
Sally	Deborah Findlay
Vi	June Watson

Director	James Macdonald
Designer	Miriam Buether
Lighting Designer	Peter Mumford
Sound Designer	Christopher Shutt
Casting Director	Amy Ball
Assistant Director	Roy Alexander Weise
Production Manager	Tariq Rifaat
Stage Manager	Kate McDowell
Deputy Stage Manager	Sophie Rubenstein
Assistant Stage Manager	Rachel Hendry
Costume Supervisor	Lucy Walshaw
Set built by	Miraculous Engineering
Scene work by	Kerry Jarrett
Cyclorama by	Gerriets Great Britain Ltd.
Special Lighting Effects by	Howard Eaton Lighting Ltd.

## About the writer

***Caryl always manages to have her pulse on the moral, social, and political issues that are current in our society. She is and has consistently been throughout her career, a formal adventurer in terms of her theatrical language, so that she's constantly challenging not just literally the language in which theatre is spoken, but also the context, the theatricality and the dramatic landscape in which she works. In that sense she is one of the great innovators of post-war British drama.***

**Stephen Daldry, Royal Court Artistic Director, 1992-1998, in an extract from *The Royal Court Theatre: Inside Out* by Ruth Little and Emily MacLaughlin, Oberon, 2007**



Playwright Caryl Churchill was born on 3 September 1938 in London and grew up in the Lake District and in Montreal. She was educated at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, where she read English. *Downstairs*, her first play, was written while she was still at university, was first staged in 1958 and won an award at the *Sunday Times* National Union of Students Drama Festival. She wrote a number of plays for BBC radio including *The Ants* (1962), *Lovesick* (1967) and *Abortive* (1971). *The Judge's Wife* was televised by the BBC in 1972 and *Owners*, her first professional stage production, premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London in the same year.

She was Resident Dramatist at the Royal Court (1974-5) and spent much of the 1970s and 1980s working with the theatre groups 'Joint Stock' and 'Monstrous Regiment'. Her work during this period includes *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Cloud Nine* (1979), *Fen* (1983) and *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), written with David Lan. *Three More Sleepless Nights* was first produced at the Soho Poly, London, in 1980.

*Top Girls* brings together five historical female characters at a dinner party in a London restaurant given by Marlene, the new managing director of 'Top Girls' employment agency. The play was first staged at the Royal Court in 1982, directed by Max Stafford-Clark. It transferred to Joseph Papp's Public Theatre in New York later that year. *Serious Money* was first produced at the Royal Court in 1987 and won the *Evening Standard* Award for Best Comedy of the Year and the Laurence Olivier/BBC Award for Best New Play. More recent plays include *Mad Forest* (1990), written after a visit to Romania, and *The Skriker* (1994). Her plays for television include *The After Dinner Joke* (1978) and *Crimes* (1982). *Far Away* premiered at the Royal Court in 2000, directed by Stephen Daldry. She has also published a new translation of Seneca's *Thyestes* (2001), and *A Number* (2002), which addresses the subject of human cloning. Her new version of August Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (2005), premiered at the National Theatre in 2005 and

*Drunk Enough to say I Love You?* (2006) premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in Winter 2006.

Moved by the suffering of Gaza in 2008, Churchill wrote *Seven Jewish Children*. The writer as rapid-response unit put out this tiny seven-scene play, licensing all performances free provided that a collection was taken at each one for Medical Aid for Palestinians. Four days after the Royal Court premiere, the text was made available for free download across the world.

In 2010, Churchill was commissioned to write the libretto for a new short opera by Orlando Gough, as part of the Royal Opera House's ROH2 OperaShots initiative. The resulting work, *A ring a lamp a thing*, played for five performances in the Linbury Studio Theatre at the Royal Opera House.<sup>[4]</sup>

Her *Love and Information*, opened at the Royal Court Theatre in September 2012, directed by James Macdonald. It gained great critical and popular acclaim. The play, featuring 100 characters and performed by a cast of 15, is structured as a series of more than 50 fragmented scenes, some no longer than 25 seconds, all of which are apparently unrelated but which accumulate into a startling mosaic, a portrayal of modern consciousness and the need for human intimacy, love and connection.

In 2015, Caryl Churchill's play *Here we Go* was staged at The National, directed by Dominic Cooke, a 45 minute "play about death".

**Source:** [www.literature.britishcouncil/caryl-churchill](http://www.literature.britishcouncil/caryl-churchill), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caryl\\_Churchill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caryl_Churchill) and [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/11556204/Caryl-Churchill-the-David-Bowie-of-contemporary-theatre.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/11556204/Caryl-Churchill-the-David-Bowie-of-contemporary-theatre.html)

## **Plays and Awards**

### **Plays (most recent work listed first)**

- 2016: Escaped Alone
- 2015: Here We Go
- 2013: Ding Dong the Wicked
- 2012: Love and Information
- 2009: Seven Jewish Children
- 2008: Bliss/Olivier Choinire, translator
- 2007: Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?
- 2005: A Dream Play, new version of August Stringberg's play
- 2002: A Number
- 2000: Far Away
- 1997: This Is A Chair
- 1997: Hotel
- 1997: Blue Heart
- 1994: The Skriker
- 1994: Thyestes, translator
- 1991: Lives of the Great Poisoners
- 1990: Mad Forest: a Play from Romania
- 1989: Ice Cream
- 1987: Serious Money
- 1986: A Mouthful of Birds, with David Lan
- 1984: Softcops
- 1983: Fen
- 1982: Top Girls
- 1980: Three More Sleepless Nights
- 1979: Cloud Nine
- 1978: Vinegar Tom
- 1977: Traps
- 1976: Light Shining in Buckinghamshire
- 1975: Objections to Sex and Violence
- 1973: Owners

### **Awards**

- 2010: Inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame
- 2001: Obie Sustained Achievement Award
- 1988: Laurence Olivier/BBC Award for Best New Play, Serious Money
- 1987: Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Serious Money
- 1987: Obie Award for Best New Play, Serious Money
- 1987: Evening Standard Award for Best Comedy of the Year, Serious Money
- 1984: Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Fen
- 1983: Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Top Girls, runner-up
- 1982: Obie Award for Playwriting, Top Girls
- 1981: Obie Award for Playwriting, Cloud Nine
- 1961: Richard Hillary Memorial Prize
- 1958: Sunday Times/National Union of Students Drama Festival Award, Downstairs.

*In an article from The Guardian newspaper, Playwright, Moira Buffini discusses the debt she owes to Caryl Churchill.*

## **Caryl Churchill: the playwright's finest hours**

**By Moira Buffini**

**The Guardian, June 2015**

In Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker*, a shape-shifting spirit torments two teenage mothers. It is a play about psychosis and comes with stunning and seemingly impossible stage directions such as "pound coins come out of her mouth when she speaks" and "the woman gets on the kelpie's back and rides off". At the Manchester International festival this month, Maxine Peake plays Churchill's shapeshifter. The thought of seeing the play staged excites me because the language at times avoids sense. *The Skriker* turns the theatre into the experience of being inside a fractured mind. It also shows a desire to push theatre as far as it can go as a visual, aural, live art form. As such, it is typical of Churchill, whose collaborations with dancers, choreographers, musicians and composers have been fuelled by curiosity. They are searches for what a play might be and how a story might be told – or a reality conveyed through spectacle.

I first became familiar with Churchill's plays when I was a student in the 1980s. *Top Girls*, *Vinegar Tom*, *Cloud Nine* and *Serious Money* – all studied or seen in various student productions. I appreciated immediately Churchill's use of history to explore the present, and the way she used humour and music to take you into the darkness. She had wit. She had courage. She wrote songs, huge speeches, rhyming couplets, scenes about having periods! She was playful with gender.

Churchill's work carries urgent themes – with restraint. Her conclusions aren't obvious, the issues never simplified. Her work forced questions: if *Top Girls* was a feminist play, why were most of the women in it so unsympathetic? Why didn't her plays follow the traditional hero journey like other dramas did? She was provoking and stimulating, never reductive, and she never patronised her audience. Perhaps this is why her plays are standing the test of time. One thing I knew for sure: my contemporaries and I kept watching and doing them. Her work offered fantastic opportunities for nascent actors, directors and designers. It was eminently theatrical.

Several of Churchill's big plays of the 70s and 80s, including her English civil war epic *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, were written in a collaborative process with actors and a director. Such a way of working creates ensemble plays, plays about society. It's hard to write an epic about a nation in your garret (I have tried it). *Light Shining* is such a good play about the British, about democracy; a play about being on the losing side, about disillusionment; a play in which time passes, regimes change and ideals crumble into experience. A play in which hope comes in the form of human kindness. I left it inspired. Like all her work, it left me asking the question: "Who are we?"

In the mid-90s, Churchill's restless questioning of form, story and the political responsibility of the playwright led her to write three plays that attack themselves. They are among my favourites. In *This Is a Chair*, the scenes all have ponderous titles such as *The War in Bosnia* or *The Labour Party's Slide to the Right*. The action of the scenes has nothing to do with their titles. The scene *Pornography and Censorship* is 10 lines long; a mother and father try to get their daughter Muriel to eat her dinner. It's a strangely disturbing scene and is reprised under another portentous banner: *The Northern Ireland Peace Process*. I have always associated Churchill with political integrity and courage. *This Is a Chair* shows a real humility about the political inadequacy of playwrights.

Next came the Blue Heart plays. The first, *Heart's Desire*, is about a family waiting for their daughter; the second, *Blue Kettle*, is about a son searching for his mother. Churchill doesn't give interviews but she does write very helpful introductions. "The plays are *McGuffins*," she wrote. "My main intention was their destruction." Sure enough, *Heart's Desire* starts naturalistically, and within moments is hijacked and repeatedly sabotaged by the playwright. At one point, masked gunmen come in and mow down the characters, then a giant yellow bird enters, then a horde of small children. Each time, the scene resets, picks itself up, and lines and gestures are repeated until another brutal or hilarious sabotage. When one of the characters finally reveals his heart's desire, the play ends. It's a shocking moment of truth. The drama survives despite every effort of the playwright to destroy it.

The second play, *Blue Kettle*, shows us a young man telling a series of older women that he is their long-lost adopted son. I am jealous of this story because it's such a good one – outrageous and very moving. But the language of the play is infected with a virus that attacks it, gradually replacing all the words with "blue" and "kettle". The final lines are mere letters, stuttered: "b-k-k-k-k." Churchill succeeds in silencing her characters, but their anguish is felt more fully in this desperate inarticulacy. I find these plays deeply affecting – not just because they are powerful drama, but because of what they say about the struggle to write. It's as if the play will be, no matter what the playwright tries to do to it.

I remember watching *Far Away* in 2001. I sat in my seat long after it had ended. I reread it recently. The first scene is so potent and disturbing it actually raised my heart rate and quickened my breathing. I have heard *Far Away* described as the perfect play: the first scene is personal, the second societal, and the third universal. I think that's a bit neat. But it's weird and huge and damned brilliant. As epic as her earlier plays – but with only three characters.

Churchill, who in the 70s and 80s was the daughter of Brecht, has become the daughter of Beckett. Her writing is distilled to its very essence. She has the epic sweep of the former: the alienation (your emotions never manipulated); the bare bones of the theatre constantly visible. And she has the distillation, the humour of the latter: the human condition writhing on a pin. In 2012's *Love and Information* – a brilliant, funny, shattering synthesis of fragments – the characters (a hundred of them) have no names and rarely speak in full sentences; only the vital words are given. Scenes can be done in semaphore and sign language. I cannot convey how rich it is or how long it will stay with you after you have seen or read it. It is characterised, like all her work, with love.

Do I need to talk about her gender? She is undoubtedly one of the reasons why I acknowledged no barrier to a career in playwriting. Her work itself transcends gender. She writes about all of us. She holds that urgent, unanswerable question up to the light and lets it resonate: Who are we?

**Source:** <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jun/29/caryl-churchill-the-playwrights-finest-hours>

# Introduction to Escaped Alone

## The Idea

This new play combines the domestic with the epic. *Escaped Alone* is about four women, around the same age range as the 77-year-old playwright, drinking tea in the garden and their conversation over an afternoon. Mrs Jarret comes across her 3 neighbours in the garden. The play explores the idea of catastrophe, global and personal. Seemingly verging in to the absurd, yet we see parallels with many of Mrs Jarrett's speeches with current affairs.

*"There is something very interesting in the fact that Caryl has written a play for four women within her age range, the thing I find incredible is its dramatic simplicity ... it is deeply domestic yet within that the form is one of the most challenging things you will ever read."* Vicky Featherstone, Artistic Director, Royal Court

<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/oct/12/caryl-churchill-play-mature-women-kicks-off-royal-courts-60th-year>

*"She thinks in terms of images, the scripts are open-ended—they want you to enter into that world and play and find your own conclusions."* James Macdonald, Director, Escaped Alone

<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/caryl-churchills-prophetic-drama>

## The Structure

As is the nature of Caryl Churchill's work, the structure is very deliberate, the form is untraditional with short unfinished sentences, a lack of punctuation and short, snappy conversation – all of which is thoroughly honoured in rehearsal as it informs the actors of the rhythm required, however also allows a freedom for the actors as the creation and movement of the characters are open to theirs and the directors interpretation. There is a narrative to the conversation as we learn about these women's lives, interrupted by monologues from Mrs Jarrett which explore global catastrophes – these monologues surround the conversations significant of global demises surrounding personal downfalls. These monologues represent another world from the women in the garden.

*"In her bucking of traditional structure and increasing tendency towards brevity – it's 28 years since she has written a work requiring an interval – Churchill is often compared to Samuel Beckett, but they are spectacularly apart in one regard. Beckett's stage directions were so detailed and precise that they resembled choreographic notation. Contrastingly, Churchill, especially in her later work, has, as her regular director James Macdonald puts it, "almost dispensed with instructions altogether. The director and actors are granted extraordinary freedom."* Mark Lawson, Guardian Columnist and Theatre Critic

<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/nov/20/caryl-churchill-conquered-british-theatre-here-we-go>





## Director, James Macdonald on Escaped Alone

"I'm drawn to plays that I don't know how to do," he says, refolding himself in his chair. "I like plays that set me a directing challenge. I like puzzles. My taste now is for plays that push the boat out in terms of both content and form, plays that take risks or do something bold with language."

It makes perfect sense, then, that Macdonald has become Caryl Churchill's preferred director of late. No other living playwright is so associated with formal experimentation. "Of all writers," he says, "Caryl is the one who prides herself on saying something new each time she writes in a form that reflects what she's saying."

Since 2006, he has directed all of Churchill's new full-length plays – *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?*, *Love and Information* and now her latest, *Escaped Alone*. Meanwhile, in New York, he's been working through the best of her back catalogue – *Top Girls*, *A Number* and, last autumn, *Cloud 9* – to considerable acclaim.

Her recent plays, he says, borrowing the critic Edward Said's phrase, are classic "late style". "They're quite typical of senior artists. Mature artists don't need to say as much. They're more interested in the kernel of an idea than in dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's. Pinter did the same thing. So did Beckett. What interests them is the shape of an idea, so the gesture is more interesting than filling in the detail."

He points to Churchill's elliptical style; lines that tail off or stop short. "They allow you to hear a longer conversation quite quickly, to encounter a bigger philosophical world." Far from simply finding the rhythm, directing them becomes detective work. "You actually need to figure out what the rest of the line is, and then what the rest of the conversation is. It's a bit like directing a much longer play without having all the material."

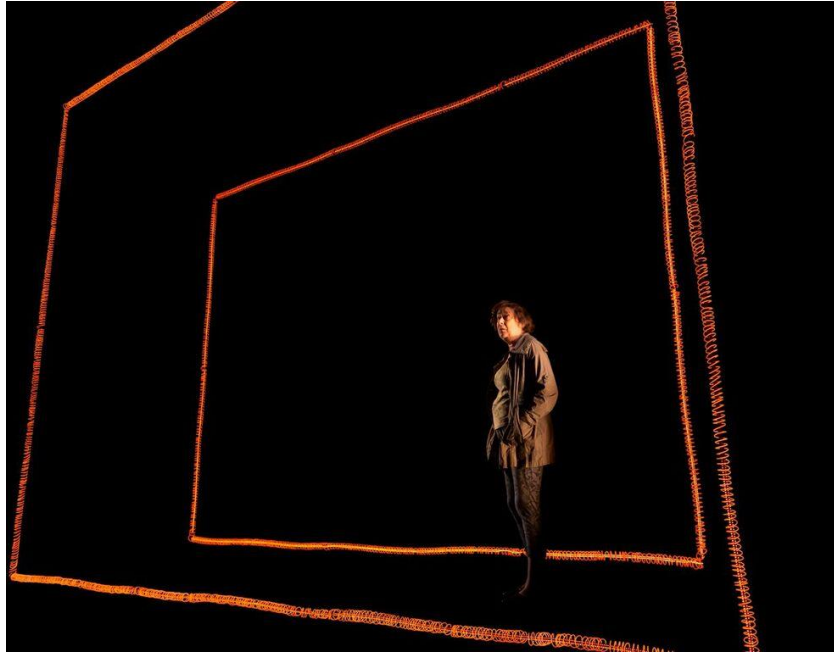
Figuring out what *Escaped Alone* is up to is not dissimilar. Macdonald's keeping schtum, keen to preserve the play's secrets. Written for four senior actresses, it's a play about old friends. "It's playful, elliptical and highly moral," Macdonald says, choosing his words as carefully as Churchill herself. "It's about two opposites banged up against each other. It's about where the world is up to. It's about seeing catastrophe."

**Source:** <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/james-macdonald-on-caryl-churchills-escaped-alone-im-drawn-to-plays-i-dont-know-how-to-do-a6819916.html>

## The Design

### The Challenges

The main challenges for the designer were making the garden and the women's location non-specific and Mrs Jarrett's speeches appear to be in a different world to the garden.



### The Design

The design for Escaped Alone is fairly straightforward and naturalistic, the play is set in a garden and therefore on stage you see real turf, a shed and four chairs. However, the wider idea of the play is the notion of personal and global catastrophe and this being relevant to everybody and so to give this sense of ambiguity in location, there is a cyclorama at the back of the stage. This gives the feeling that this garden is a representation, a fictional place, a platform for exploring the themes of the play.

It was essential to the creative team that Mrs Jarrett's speeches take place in a different location to the garden. In order to achieve this, a proscenium has been built at the front of the stage, this is a square filament that you look through to see the action, when Mrs Jarrett steps out of the garden, the lights on this filament shine and "blind the audience" making the garden behind disappear. During Mrs Jarrett's speeches black sand fell from above, however, in technical rehearsal the creative team discovered that in order to do this you would still have to see the garden and therefore the sand had to be cut.

### **Design Activity**

In pairs, discuss and draw possible design ideas for making Mrs Jarrett's speeches appear to take place in another place/ world to the garden. Consider the use of set, lighting and sound in your discussion.

## **Caryl Churchill at the Royal Court**

Caryl Churchill's first stage play, *Owners*, directed by Nicholas Wright, had its debut at the Royal Court in 1973. This production heralded the start of a long-standing creative relationship between Churchill and the Royal Court that has continued for 39 years. During this time, the theatre has produced 18 of her plays, including ground-breaking pieces such as *Top Girls*, *Cloud Nine*, *Serious Money*, *A Number* and *Far Away*.

*Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, a Joint Stock production in 1976, marked the beginning of a number of landmark collaborations between Max Stafford-Clark and Caryl Churchill at the Royal Court. This was her first experience of what became known as the 'Joint Stock Method'. The Joint Stock Theatre Company became known for its distinctive and influential method of play development, involving a workshop period of three to four weeks during which writer, director and a company of actors collaborate to explore a subject or idea using improvisation, research conducted inside and outside the rehearsal room and rehearsed readings. Following this intensive period of investigation the playwright creates a draft script and the group meets again in an extended rehearsal period to hone the material for production.

**Source:** *The Royal Court Theatre: Inside Out* (Little and MacLaughlin, 2007)

### **Royal Court Reflections**

*Directors, actors and Caryl Churchill herself reflect on staging some of her best-known work at the Royal Court.*

#### **On Owners**

Director Nicholas Wright: Unusually for an agent, she [Peggy Ramsay] liked having clients who were, as she saw it, uncorrupted by too much success. She finally got Michael Codron to commission a play from Caryl and that was *Owners* and Codron brought it to the Court. It did, at last, put Caryl properly on the map.

#### **On Light Shining in Buckinghamshire**

Director Max Stafford-Clark: I enjoy it...it does have a clean, spare beauty and passion in it. I love watching it. The scrubbed table... the figures...the actors lit against the black...the skull, the hourglass...Soon it will be gone forever, but it is beautiful.

#### **On Top Girls**

Caryl Churchill: The ideas for *Top Girls* came from all kinds of things...The idea of Dull Gret as a character I found in some old notebook from 1977 or '78. There'd been the idea of the play about a lot of dead women having coffee with someone from the present. And an idea about women doing all kinds of jobs.

Actor Carole Hayman: The difficulties of staging new work are always underrated. There is no yardstick. There are script battles, personality clashes, frantic searches for meaning. *Top Girls* was no exception. With its extraordinary structure and revolutionary use of overlapping speech, it nearly had us beat.

### **On Far Away**

Director Stephen Daldry: I remember reading *Far Away* on the tube and turning over the page and seeing this stage direction which says, 'The Parade (Scene 2.5): five is too few and twenty better than ten. A hundred?' And I thought, 'Oh my God, Caryl, how can you do this to us? A parade of 100 people and it's only 45 minutes long!'

**Source:** *The Royal Court Theatre: Inside Out* (Little and MacLaughlin, 2007)

### **On Love & Information**

Actor, Linda Bassett: If you sit back and relax and let it come to you, you get a visceral thing happen. Don't try and work it all out in your head, just let it happen. This play more than any of Caryl's other work perhaps. You could say the audience is the only constant character. They're the ones who are seeing everything. All 100 characters, the snapshots. We're in a tiny bubble.

#### **Research Activity**

Love and Information was revolutionary in form, both the writing and production. Research thoroughly why this was the case and how the play was realised in production and perceived by audiences.



## **Interview with Assistant Director – Roy Alexander Weise**

### **What did you think when you first read the play?**

To be honest when I read the play I didn't really know what I felt because it's not a very easy play to read and in a way I guess that was the beauty of being able to step in to the rehearsal room because then you can hear it and see it come alive and see how interesting a playwright Caryl Churchill is. But, I struggled a little bit to know what it was about and what it was trying to say because we're always told that plays in our day and age have to say something specific so I didn't quite know what that was, I had a sense or a feeling of it but I wasn't completely sure.

### **Caryl is present in every rehearsal, what contribution does she have in the rehearsal room?**

In rehearsals, she's very present as the playwright, she doesn't try to be invisible at all. Sometimes you have a scenario where the playwright sits very quietly in the corner, just takes notes and communicates with the director but I think, because Caryl and James have worked together for such a long time they have a mutual understanding of the way that they work, I think negotiation is probably too strong a word to use, in terms of their relationship, it just sort of happens and they're very easy and comfortable about talking about things. Sometimes James might suggest a mini cut, which is very rare actually, or Caryl might suggest a cut and he would defend the words and encourage her not to cut it or help her to find the right edit or the right word. It feels like they work like real creators together and not like a writer and a director in that very conventional sense. Sometimes, Caryl gives acting notes and James is absolutely fine with that but it doesn't feel like it's very defined.

### **How have you worked in the rehearsal room considering the form of the play and the nature of Caryl's work, with the freedom of not having stage directions or too much background information?**

I think James is aware of Caryl's style, the things she does and doesn't like in theatre and the kind of work she likes to make as an artist and so he's aware of things that won't go down well as suggestions but also it's very simply put, it's four women who are drinking tea in a garden and chatting and talking about life, about the everyday, so in a way, you can't really go wrong. I think also, because he's very aware the language is so important, he really invited the actors to pay close attention to punctuation, so for instance, she doesn't put many full stops in. So when there is a full stop, he really makes a moment of the fact that there is a full stop. Caryl puts everything in the language, you understand how a character needs to move because of who they're speaking to and what they're speaking about. You really get that she trusts the actors.

### **You say that the entire action is the characters drinking tea in a garden, is it therefore quite a static play? How do you ensure the audience is engaged the whole time?**

It is pretty static, but then at the same time it's not, it depends what your definition of static is but sitting in the rehearsal room and experiencing this play with those actors, it feels so alive. Caryl and James are both so much more about truth and the truth of human behaviour and human relationships and not necessarily displaying that, so when you start rehearsing a scene and it starts to come to life it suddenly feels like something as menial as drinking tea suddenly becomes quite exciting because of what they're talking about. There aren't really any changes of location or anything like that so in that sense it does feel like that, but the play is broken up with monologues exploring catastrophe. So I guess the challenge for the director would be about keeping it fresh,

alive, keeping the audience engaged and about the real precision and detail of how the actors present the play, the story, the text and their individual narratives and their relationships.

### **Can you tell me about the design for the show?**

The set is a garden, there is a cyclorama at the back of the stage, a white cyclorama, we didn't want it to be too realistic, so the garden could be anywhere and then there is a proscenium which you look through to see this garden and on the outside of that there is a filament because we didn't want the place where Mrs Jarret's catastrophes are reported to be in the garden, it feels like two separate worlds. We wanted it to be non-descript so in order for that to happen we want the garden to be able to disappear.

### **It's an interesting play politically as we see four older women on stage, what can you say about this?**

It's actually the women's least favourite topic, because they think it's a huge focus. I guess politically its interesting because you don't see many plays where women have to be at least 70 on the stage or be able to play at least 70 having conversations but the play could be performed by women who are 20 years younger, they only need to be old enough to have grandchildren, but I think it's the fact that we don't really have those voices on stage that it's important to push those voices. It's not really a focal point at all, I think it was just the playwright's preference and the way she envisaged the play.

### **What approaches did you take to explore the background of the play and what research did you do?**

At the beginning when I first met with James, I asked if there were any things that he would like me to look at and research and he said no, it will come up when it comes up. So, in the rehearsal room I've become Google so I sit there with my laptop or my phone, myself and Sophie, the Deputy Stage Manager and whenever a question comes up about anything, we research it.

So, for instance one of the women has served time for manslaughter and we looked at what that experience would have been like. We had Lucy Morrison, Associate Director at The Royal Court, come in to rehearsals because she had worked closely with Clean Break, which is a theatre company that works very closely with women who have encountered the justice system. She gave us lots of interesting insights around the experience of being a woman in prison, about the hierarchy, relationships and visits – that was really useful.

We've done research on things like depression, phobias, we met with a man called Mark who is a friend of Caryl and James who actually helped Caryl while she wrote Love and Information in terms of research. He spoke about his understanding as a psychiatrist about depression, what it is and the details of how physically it might be manifested through these people and the different levels of depression and phobia.

There's a moment where the women sing a song, so we have been researching songs from a very particular time period, like the 50's and 60's, thinking about songs that all these women would know, that don't make too much of a comment on the play and what it's talking about. Also you need to look at who wrote the songs and who is most likely to give us permission to use the songs in the performance.

Any question at all that comes up, we have a copy of the bible in the room and we've been reading sections from the Bible. Especially where the phrase Escaped Alone comes from which is in the book of Job and it comes from a phrase which repeats itself in a very particular story which is "And I only am Escaped Alone to tell thee" which means

that this particular messenger was the only person who survived this particular catastrophe and atrocity and has been able to come and deliver this message and story to you. It's that element of truth coming up, where that came from. It's also in Moby Dick as well.

There's lots of phrases that come up from popular culture of very particular time periods so we did lots of research into that as well.

**What can you tell me about the structure of the play? The use of monologues alongside conversation?**

Within the structure of the play, people experience catastrophe in very minute ways sometimes in a way that we're not aware, so that is why these monologues exist within some of these conversations but also we are constantly surrounded by catastrophe – some of it is down to humankind, authority, the way we treat the planet and some of it is inevitable and it feels to me that this is why Mrs Jarret's monologues surround these conversations where they're drinking tea. Funnily enough, since reading this play, I can't read a newspaper without thinking about the things that happen in the play. It feels like it's so on the money, everyday that we discover something, we look it up and it's happening right now. There's a moment where Mrs Jarret talks about children dying from the sugar in the Monkeys. Actually, sugar isn't made from parts of monkeys but it's an enhanced version of what's happening. In a way, it seems slightly ridiculous but it's not, we can find parallels and similarities in what's happening now.

**Can you tell me about any rehearsal techniques you used?**

James works very simply, we sat at the table for three weeks. We read the play over and over, we discussed it and researched around it, tried to find the rhythm and created lots and lots of backstory because there isn't much given which is another wonderful thing about the way the play is written because it allows the performers to create their own backstory and the lives of these people. It has been very simple, eventually we got up on our feet but we haven't really got on our feet as most of the play is the women sat drinking tea. At the moment we're working by sitting in the circle and doing the scenes off book. It's a fairly standard rehearsal process but the unique way in which James works is that he leaves a lot of space for the actors to own the room and have ownership of the way in which the play is developed and there is a real ease about discovering what it is and it doesn't feel like there is any pressure on anybody. If there is ever any pressure in the room it is their own pressure. There is a real sense of knowingness and not knowing which encourages discovery in the room.

It has been really magical being in the rehearsal room, there is so much patience and care and a real sense of ease, even when people are flustered. We work in an intimate space. The creatives sit on a sofa and the women sit on 4 chairs around us, so that we are all in a circle, it is very relaxed, we're talking. You don't often hear this in a theatre rehearsal room, you hear it with dance, with music, but the phrase it's about practise and that it will come with practise has come up a lot, we don't usually give ourselves the opportunity to practise. There is an understanding that you can't play until you thoroughly know the play. This play requires specificity. You have to have the right thought in order for the rest of the line to sound right. So that the audience can hear in the silences, what might come before or after the line.

**Since bringing it to life in the rehearsal room, do you feel you now know what Caryl and James want the audience to leave with, what is the play trying to say?**

Interestingly enough, I don't think it is trying to say anything specific. I think it's exploring what catastrophe is; what a personal catastrophe is, what a global catastrophe is. Catastrophe meaning a downward turn and I guess it's to get a sense and a feeling of the intimate, the internal, the external idea of what a downward turn is and what that experience is. But I don't think it has, in a way that a lot of other plays have, a message. It feels like Caryl comes from a time where writers wrote plays and didn't have to explain why their play was an important play to be on, in the way that we do now. So, they have the freedom to write a play and be led by the characters, the way that it made them feel, led by dramatic action not necessarily by political agenda, message or selling point.





## **In rehearsal – practical activities**

### **1. Intimacy and Space**

Read the text below as a group, sit with all of your chairs together in a tight circle. Repeat the scene but move further away from each other each time. How can you keep the intimacy of the first reading but also play with the space?

LENA are you all right?

SALLY yes I'm fine thank you

VI sorry I'm so sorry

SALLY the third series

LENA particles

VI though mind you are we helping by never saying?

LENA don't start that

SALLY it's all right, you needn't

VI shouldn't we just say it, say black and white, tabby, longhaired, shorthaired, Siamese

MRS J I've got a lovely tabby but he's a tom so

LENA stop it

VI expose her to it and nothing bad happens and she gets used to nothing bad

LENA stop it

VI I'm helping

MRS J is she going to faint?

SALLY no no I'm

LENA see?

VI I'm sorry I just get

SALLY I know it's stupid

VI no



## 2. Backstory Improvisations

Read the text below, at the given moment, break out and improvise a discussion around a past event that explains why Sally thinks Vi hates her and how unpleasant Vi can be. Then find a way to get back to the given text. This was a technique used throughout rehearsals, you can use this for any text in order to discuss the characters experiences and therefore explore their past.

SALLY I know you hate me sometimes

VI no, I

LENA see?

SALLY you just need to face

VI I need to face?

SALLY how unpleasant you can be

LENA see?

VI oh it's me now, it's always someone

**Characters break out and improvise.**

LENA stop it

MRS J let's hear it

SALLY it doesn't bother me

VI oh let's not

SALLY it's fine

VI I know I shouldn't

### 3. Finish the line

In rehearsals, James Macdonald used a technique where the actors continued the lines in the script to aid their characterisation and to inform their intentions and objectives.

Performing the text below, finish the characters lines, what do you think comes next? Does it make sense for the following line?

Once you have done this, return to the script as it is but inform your delivery with what would come next.

VI did Abel make jokes about Cain being stupid and that's why he killed him

LENA odd they needed a story about how killing started because

SALLY chimpanzees

LENA but you do wonder why of course, so you make a story

VI easily done I found

SALLY different each time

VI I don't know why, I never knew why

MRS J found it easy did you?

LENA never mind that

SALLY not always easy and a lot of men in the war never fired their guns because

VI no it's all right, she can know

### The Big Challenge

James Macdonald used *Actioning* as a rehearsal technique for *Escaped Alone* particularly for Mrs Jarrett's speeches, playing with the intentions in order to find ways to hook the audiences in so that the speeches are not just pedestrian.

We would like to challenge you to discover the process of Actioning and apply it to a speech from the play. This is a difficult ask as Actioning is usually applied to separate lines and this speech appears to all be informing the audience, however we want you to use Actioning with Mrs Jarrett's text, as James Macdonald did, in order to find a variety in the characters intentions. Follow the exercise below in order to do this.

#### 4. Actioning

- Actioning is a rehearsal technique first pioneered by Max Stafford – Clark and is used by almost every director at the Royal Court, in different ways.
- Actioning is the attributing of an action to each line. It is done using a transitive verb, which is an action verb, expressing a doable activity. It must have a direct object, something or someone who receives the action of the verb, such as "charm, flatter, warn, inform, welcome, enlighten".
- On each line (or sentence) an action is given to that line, in the form of "I \_\_\_\_\_ (insert verb) you".
- The action is the intent behind that line.
- When there are no defined characters, the "you" becomes the audience.

- **Actioning Worksheet**

- Read Mrs Jarrett's speech below
- Decide who the "you" is that your actions are aimed towards – perhaps the audience? Society?
- Using the breakdown below, apply an action to each sentence. In the form of "I \_\_\_\_ (insert verb) you".

**e.g.**

**I inform you** The hunger began when eighty percent of food was diverted to tv programmes.

**I bemuse you** Commuters watched breakfast on iplayer on their way to work.

- Read the speech with your "I *verb* you" sentence before each section letting it influence the way you say the line.
- If you feel the action you have chosen doesn't sound right in performance then change it to one better suited to your character.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** The hunger began when eighty percent of food was diverted to tv programmes.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** Commuters watched breakfast on iplayer on their way to work.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** Smartphones were distributed by charities when rice ran out, so the dying could watch cooking.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** The entire food stock of Newcastle was won by lottery ticket and the winner taken to a 24 hour dining room where fifty chefs chopped in relays and the public voted on what he should eat next.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** Cars were traded for used meat.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** Children fell asleep in class and didn't wake up.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** Fifteen countries were declared to be no longer members of the United Nations as they no longer had populations of more than a hundred.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** The obese sold slices of themselves until hunger drove them to eat their own rashers.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** Finally the starving stormed the tv centres and were slaughtered and smoked in large numbers.

**I \_\_\_\_\_ You** Only when cooking shows were overtaken by sex with football teams did ingredients trickle back to the shops and rice was airlifted again.

Perform the speech again, this time without saying your action before each section, but letting those choices influence your performance.

**Mrs J**

The hunger began when eighty percent of food was diverted to tv programmes. Commuters watched breakfast on iplayer on their way to work. Smartphones were distributed by charities when rice ran out, so the dying could watch cooking. The entire food stock of Newcastle was won by lottery ticket and the winner taken to a 24 hour dining room where fifty chefs chopped in relays and the public voted on what he should eat next. Cars were traded for used meat. Children fell asleep in class and didn't wake up. Fifteen countries were declared to be no longer members of the United Nations as they no longer had populations of more than a hundred. The obese sold slices of themselves until hunger drove them to eat their own rashers. Finally the starving stormed the tv centres and were slaughtered and smoked in large numbers. Only when cooking shows were overtaken by sex with football teams did ingredients trickle back to the shops and rice was airlifted again.

## About Young Court

Young Court is the Royal Court's inclusive programme of activities by, for and with young people up to age 21. Through our participation projects, young people have the chance to learn from the foremost artists and facilitators in current theatre practice, encouraging them to investigate the craft of making theatre. Young people can experience unique learning exchanges, across all departments, opening up the world of the rehearsal room as well as backstage, offering a fascinating insight into the professional process of staging Royal Court productions. Young Court aims to encourage young people to discover their power to influence and change theatre, giving them a platform to experiment, question and innovate, placing young people at our centre and fostering a live dialogue in which their views and ideas are valued and can inform our work.

Young Court offers a wide-ranging programme of activities including:

**Youth Board**

**Young Script Panel**

**Primetime**

**ReAct**

**Art on Stage**

**Insight workshops around productions**

**INSET workshops for teachers**

**Post-show talks**

**Royal Court in a Day Study Day**

**Performing Arts Business Study Day**

**Bespoke workshops**

A full description of all Young Court events can be found on the Young Court page of the Royal Court web-site, [www.royalcourttheatre.com](http://www.royalcourttheatre.com) if you would like more information, please e-mail Lynne Gagliano, Head of Young Court, at: [lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com](mailto:lynnegagliano@royalcourttheatre.com) or phone 020 7565 5174.

***The Escaped Alone* resource pack was compiled and written by Romana Fello, Deputy Head of Young Court with the kind assistance of Roy Alexander Weise and the creative team of *Escaped Alone*.**