

National Theatre Learning



Background pack

Home

Background pack

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Welcome to the National Theatre's background pack for *Home*.

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Our background packs reveal how the National Theatre brings the plays in its repertoire to the stage. They describe the interpretations, processes, design choices and technical methods that have been applied to a particular play – demonstrating how a play *could* be staged, rather than how it *should*.

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Click on this arrow, when you see it, for more online resources.

Further production details:
nationaltheatre.org.uk

The National Theatre production of *Home*

This production had its world premiere in the National's Shed Theatre on **7 August 2013**;
it was revived in The Shed on 26 March 2014.



Original cast:

Young Mum/Portugal **MICHAELA COEL**
Priest **JONATHAN COOTE**
Security Guard/Key Worker **TREVOR MICHAEL GEORGES**
Singing Boy/Ex-Resident **KADIFF KIRWAN**
Sharon **ASHLEY McGUIRE**
Jade **GRACE SAVAGE**
Bullet **SHAKKA**
Eritrean Girl/Asian Young Mum/Young Mum's Sister
ANTONIA THOMAS
Tattoo Boy/Garden Boy **TOBY WHARTON**
Other parts played by members of the Company

2014 cast:

Young Mum/Portugal **MICHAELA COEL**
Priest **JONATHAN COOTE**
Busker **SETH ELTON**
Bullet **GERSHWYN EUSTACE JNR**
Singing Boy/Ex-Resident **KADIFF KIRWAN**
Sharon **ASHLEY McGUIRE**
Security Guard/Key Worker **DANNY SAPANI**
Jade **GRACE SAVAGE**
Eritrean Girl/Asian Young Mum/Young Mum's Sister
ANTONIA THOMAS
Tattoo Boy/Garden Boy **TOBY WHARTON**
Other parts played by members of the Company

Director **NADIA FALL**

Designer **RUTH SUTCLIFFE**

Lighting Designer **CIARAN BAGNALL**

Movement Director **JACK MURPHY**

Music **TOM GREENE** and **SHAKKA**

Music Director **GARETH VALENTINE**

Fight Director **KATE WATERS**

Sound Designer **MIKE WALKER**

Company Voice Work **RICHARD RYDER** (2013),

JEANNETTE NELSON (2014)

Staff Director/Assistant Dramaturg (2013) **ROB DRUMMER**

Staff Director (2014) **SASHA McMURRAY**

Synopsis

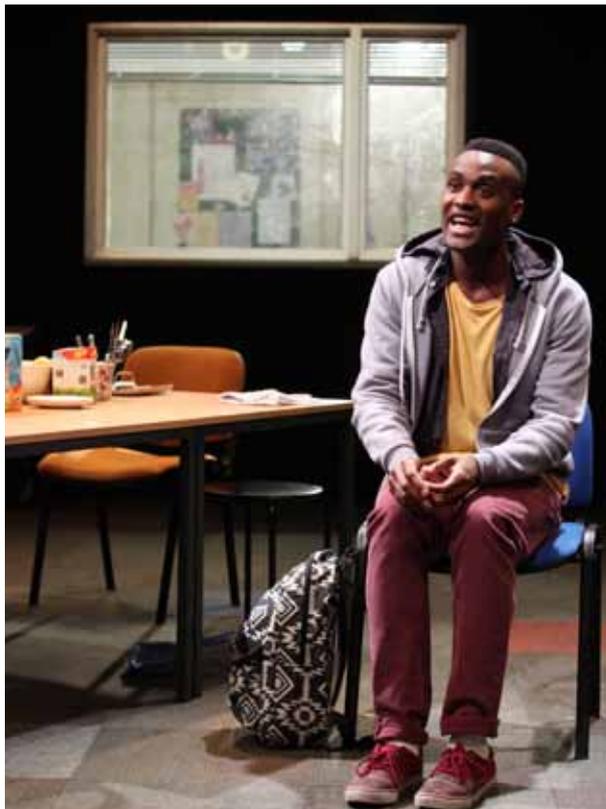
Home is based on interviews with real people but is set in the fictional hostel Target East. The characters respond to questions from an unseen and unheard interviewer. One character, JADE, responds in beatboxing only.

Singing Boy

An inner London supported housing block for young homeless men and women. There is traffic outside and activity on the many floors of the tower block. SINGING BOY arrives for his interview. He says his mum kicked him out when he was 17. He wants to keep his head down and studies singing and acting at college. Singing Boy asks if he should sing a song and gives his rendition of Beyonce's 'Halo'. He admits he is unsure about his sexuality at the moment but hopes to 'get to the bottom of it' soon.

Breakfast Club One

A guitar plays in the background as YOUNG MUM introduces us to Breakfast Club, which takes place every Tuesday. This boisterous breakfast club is a place for young mums and other residents to have a free breakfast. Responding to a question from the interviewer Young Mum says for her, home is 'wherever you're comfortable.' BULLET, TATTOO BOY, SINGING BOY and ASIAN YOUNG MUM are also at the breakfast club. For Asian Young Mum, home is a place 'where you are feeling safe.' The SECURITY GUARD tells us Target feels like his home, 'because I spend the majority of my time here.' Bullet leads them in the song 'Keys', which describes how they are looking forward to a home of their own.



Singing Boy (Kadiff Kirwan)
Production photo: Ellie Kurtz

Sharon's Office

SHARON, the Manager of Target, talks to the interviewer about her experiences and past (she was a single mother and studied psycho-social at university), describing the unique challenges of the job and how reliant on her the residents are: 'you get to know what makes them tick and you get to like them, and you want them to succeed.' KEY WORKER interrupts, asking about an afternoon meeting. Sharon tells us there were lots of problems between police, Target East staff and the residents, 'The police had a terrible perception of the residents here and of the staff, they felt that staff were colluding with the residents.' Singing Boy enters with a letter about his housing bid; he wants some advice. Young Mum arrives to take the interviewer on a tour, but rushes off to find someone at the request of the interviewer.

New Resident

JADE, who is heavily pregnant, is in the breakfast room making a phone call to the council to discuss her housing situation. This is a phone call she makes regularly and is always met with the same response: being put on hold for a long time. Jade only communicates in beatboxing and over the course of the phone call gets more and more frustrated, shouting and swearing, until finally throwing her phone in anger.

The Tour Begins

Young Mum and EX RESIDENT take us on a tour of Target. Showing us the mother and baby unit, they are interrupted by the EDF LADY who is here to check meters ('Yeah there's a lot of, like, fraud!')

Throughout the building we can hear music playing and the sounds of the residents. As GARDEN BOY walks past, we move outside to the courtyard of the building, where we can hear aeroplanes. Learning that the greenhouse, which is used as a play area for young children is closed, Young Mum and Ex Resident go inside. Garden Boy is working outside. He tells us about how he came to live at Target and of the issues of living in a hostel: 'this guy lives three doors down from me and he's been done for burglary, there's drug dealers...' He tells us that a resident has been fatally stabbed.

A Dressing Down

Key Worker is having a stern conversation with Bullet, who has not been paying his bills and is now in arrears to the council. Key Worker makes a phone call on Bullet's behalf. As he goes to leave, Key Worker is surprised to see the interviewer waiting outside the room.

Synopsis

Babies and Boyfriends

Asian Young Mum and Young Mum recount their stories of becoming mothers – they each have a 9-month-old baby. The mother and baby unit, where Young Mum lives, is ideal for a young mother because ‘the lift is rubbish’. However, Asian Young Mum, who is on the seventh floor, is having a bad time with broken lifts and the smell of weed from other residents’ flats. Both have had different experiences: the father of Asian Young Mum’s child is violent and caused her to miscarry once before. The young women sing several lines of ‘Sweet Nothing’ by Calvin Harris (feat. Florence Welch) building to a crescendo with Jade who beatboxes. As Young Mum’s baby gurgles, she exits.

Bullet

In a heightened imagined scene, Bullet is on the run from a gunman who chases him outside his house. This story, revealed through his interview, is one that has had a profound impact upon him. The chase continues until Bullet hides. He then tells us about his experience of being shot. Towards the end of his interview, he sings ‘Bullets’:

‘All your bullets can come for me
No bullet can conquer me’

Bullet and some of the other residents sing a chorus of ‘Ghetto Story’ by Chan.

The Tour Continues

Young Mum and Ex Resident continue to show the interviewer around the building. They argue about the best route to take – ‘Listen, I’ve been in the block for the last six years, she doesn’t know the building.’ They take us to the front desk, where Security Guard and other residents can be seen. This is the frontline of Target with lots of noise from the building and the constant sound of a buzzer as residents are allowed in and out. The Security Guard is tough but fair and isn’t impressed that a visitor makes his way into the building.

Security

The Security Guard gives an interview. He talks about his work and how visitors come into the building to make trouble, ‘They tend to come over here, you know to meet their friends, smoke weed, they try to, you know destroy the properties...’ He is interrupted by Tattoo Boy and Ex Resident, passing through the space and then is forced to leave as Sharon is seen talking to ERITREAN GIRL who is looking for a mouse.

Refugee

Eritrean Girl rushes into the breakfast room. She is being pursued by two residents who are coming on to her. She tells the interviewer she left Eritrea as she was a Christian in a Muslim country and felt persecuted. To reach the UK she travelled by boat, plane and lorry. She says how uncomfortable she felt in having to share with men during her journey. She describes the trip in the lorry from France and she sings ‘O Lord’. In London, a Somali man took pity on Eritrean Girl and helped her to find somewhere to stay.

This Is England

Tattoo Boy, a young man from East London, enters the breakfast room and talks to the interviewer about life at Target and his friend, DANIEL, who was killed at Westfield a year ago. Simultaneously, Sharon is seen having a cigarette and tells us about the day the police came to tell her about Daniel’s death. This event has had a big impact on both of them and the other residents. Tattoo Boy tells the interviewer that the culture of East London is being diluted – he uses the range of different shops as an example, ‘... for instance, you go to Poland, you go to China, you go to India... you’ll never see a shop saying, oh, only English shop...’ He gets increasingly worked up with his argument (though admits his girlfriend is not English, but Turkish) but is eventually interrupted by Young Mum, who wants to show the interviewer her flat. Key Worker enters and sings ‘No Shoulder To Cry On’ with the other residents and Sharon.

Singing Boy asks Sharon whether she knows if his housing bid has been successful. She hasn’t heard anything but give him some vouchers for taking part in the interviews. Sharon tells the interviewer ‘that voucher came just in time. He’s had no money to buy food or anything and he was getting really down about it.’

INTERVAL

Breakfast Club Two

The residents are at Breakfast Club with their babies. The mothers and residents interact with each other while the interviewer talks with Ex Resident and Bullet. Ex Resident was made homeless because he lost his job. Bullet reveals he went to prison in Watford ‘for my own safety’. Ex Resident keeps returning to Target for the social life, and the support Sharon gives him.



Eritrean Girl (Antonia Thomas)
Production photo: Ellie Kurtz

Synopsis

He has been volunteering as a football coach to get some experience to get a job. Bullet and Ex Resident both have children but neither sees them very much. They sing 'Sooner or Later'. Tattoo Boy comes in and overturns a table – he says he didn't know they were recording an interview.

Portugal

PORTUGAL and Jade meet the interviewer. Portugal speaks about her relationship and her family, including how she met her boyfriend. Jade beatboxes responses in parts of Portugal's story. When Jade temporarily leaves, Portugal imagines her BOYFRIEND, and sings 'We've Found Love' by Rihanna.

When Jade returns, Portugal admits her boyfriend continually cheated on her and infected her with STIs – after contracting chlamydia she miscarried.

Daniel's Wall

Sharon is holding a hot tray which burns her hand. She invites the interviewer to a barbecue to mark the anniversary of Daniel's death.

Jade and a resident wearing a hood perform for a pirate radio station at Target. He MCs and she beatboxes. They are interrupted by Young Mum and Ex Resident who continue the tour for the interviewer. They show us the laundry rooms and more corridors. Young Mum says that most of the noise is usually confined to people's flats.

Asian Young Mum says she gets worried by people having loud parties or arguing 'you don't know whether to go out and say something... or... or not, just in case if you do go and say something it does cause more of a problem for yourself...' She wants to leave the hostel because she doesn't want her daughter growing up there, 'everyone's really young, there's lots of drinks and drugs around... she's most probably coming out buzzing out of the lift.'

Young Mum's sisters lived in the block when she moved in and she thinks it was a communal place but that changed when Daniel died: 'no one really comes to residents' meetings no more, no one jams really in the block... you don't realise the impact that one person has...' She shows the interviewer the memorial wall.

Garden Boy

Garden Boy is watering plants. He says he is looking for a job, but draws the line at cleaning toilets or working in a McDonald's. We can hear aeroplanes overhead and the sounds of the city around the block. He sings 'Waiting For a Change'. He tells the interviewer he wouldn't leave East London but since the Olympics he has found the cost of living there becoming too much: 'I used to go to a shop, get a can of Coke for 40p, as soon as the Olympics come 80 pence...' He reveals his ambition is to give his brother a good life.

Tattoos and Piercings

Jade and Portugal discuss Portugal's piercings and tattoos ('Nah, I like piercings more than tattoos. I've got only one tattoo. It's my mum's name.') Portugal says her mum, despite walking out on her when she was seven, is important to her: '... end of the day, she gave birth to me no matter what she did to me.'

Tattoo Boy calls up to a flat which is playing music too loudly to 'Turn that shit off.' The music becomes louder so he picks up a stone and throws it at the window, which smashes. As he leaves, the two girls laugh before continuing with their interview. Portugal shows the interviewer to reception.

Cancelled Breakfast Club

The interviewer is joined in the breakfast room by Key Worker who says 'I've done a lot of work with the police, representation of young people.' Bullet comes in looking for food but is told Breakfast Club has been cancelled this morning and there is no food. Key Worker explains his tough-love approach as more residents come in looking for food – Jade, as always, beatboxes. Tattoo Boy bangs on the window and enters, telling the interviewer that Key Worker is leaving and won't even make the memorial barbecue for Daniel. Key Worker justifies his decision, 'You shouldn't put your life on hold for anybody, you're supposed to be going for it here.'

Playing With Fire

Tattoo Boy, Jade and Bullet are left with the interviewer. Tattoo Boy talks about his friends – 'I didn't mix with the wrong people 'cause I'm, they're my friends they're the right people' – and the factories he used to break into. He speaks the lyrics to 'Playing With Fire' by Plan B (featuring Labyrinth) while Jade beatboxes and Bullet whistles the tune.

Sharon taps on the window and gives Tattoo Boy a dressing down for smashing another window.



Synopsis

Memorial Barbecue

The residents and staff assemble in the courtyard, some with their babies, for the memorial barbecue to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Daniel's death. Each of the residents reveals their idea of a dream home: they range from the simple 'something cosy' to Bullet's 'I'd probably have two houses, like a townhouse in Miami...'

The arrival of THE PRIEST causes Tattoo Boy and Ex Resident to become aggressive. The Priest reads a prayer: 'Bind us together, Lord.' Bullet sings a chorus of 'Keys.'

Singing Boy tells us he has finally got the keys to his own place. He invites the interviewer round with the promise 'I'll cook for you.'

What Next?

In her office, Sharon goes through the realities for residents at Target; in face of new government cuts there is always a rumour the hostel will be closed down.

Jade enters the room, wanting advice on her pregnancy.

Sharon complains that people are being pushed into insecure private accommodation rather than council housing 'I see it all the time, these young people even when they are pregnant they don't get council housing...'
Sharon sings 'Stay With You' by John Legend and the other residents join in.

Sharon turns to Jade: 'so what are we going to do with you then?'

Epilogue

BUSKER sings 'Keys'.

A year has passed and some of the residents give an update on their situation. Many have moved out, like Tattoo Boy, Singing Boy and Bullet; others, like Asian Young Mum, have been evicted and face an uncertain future. Portugal and Jade are now living in Southend. Funding cuts have had an impact on staff: Security Guard and Sharon have both lost their jobs and are looking for work elsewhere. Sharon says they are not the only ones to have been affected by the cuts. For one resident in particular the cuts had a devastating effect 'you've got a vulnerable young person who's fine one day and not the next... they're vulnerable, they're all high risk.'



Rehearsal diary: week one

Staff director and assistant dramaturg Rob Drummer documented the four-week rehearsal period; these extracts from his diary reveal how the production emerged

Home is a new play, created from interviews with young people at a homeless 'foyer' in London. These interviews have, over the past several months, been developed into text for performance, through a series of workshops as well as by Nadia [Fall, creator and director] and I working together to develop a story shape that opens up the central questions of the play. This text (which really came into focus several weeks before rehearsals began) is verbatim, with new music written especially for the play.

Each morning Gareth Valentine, our music director, leads sessions on the songs in the play. It is a real treat to hear, even at this early stage, how powerful these songs are and how special the storytelling becomes once the characters open up through music. This is one of the most distinguishing features of *Home*: it is a verbatim play but with an energy and attitude that is generated through music – especially when that music is largely accompanied by guitar and our beatboxing cast member Grace Savage.

Afternoons each day are about having a first pass at the text, working together as a company to ask questions about the script, and for Nadia to offer thoughts on character, story and the themes running through the play. Of course the unique demands of verbatim text

mean that there is a space between the words on the page and the real voice of the person interviewed. Each member of the cast has been given recordings of the interviews to listen to as well as having the opportunity to meet the real people they are playing.



Halfway through the week, we are visited by Gerder and Veronica, environmental psychologists, who are able to offer wonderful and insightful reflections on homelessness, as well as the psychology of home. The company are really encouraged to think of the psychology of a young person made homeless and how this instability leads to a lack of connectedness, a lack of stability in one's life. We speak at length about the politics of caring for vulnerable young people, about security and aspiration, all themes that drive the narrative of *Home*.

The real centre-point of the week is a visit to the foyer in London that the show is based on, where the interviews took place, and where Nadia has been engaging with the young people the show is about. We are invited to lead a workshop and decide to take lunch with us, turning up with more pizza than I think I have ever seen. We are greeted by a room full of people, some of whom are represented in the play and others, new and curious, who want to see who we are. The afternoon is a real success, we share exercises, Grace beatboxes and Shakka sings, and we go on a tour of the building. For us all, being in this real place has a huge impact upon how we begin to build the performance and the generosity, openness and humour we are met with is truly inspiring.



For more information on verbatim theatre, go to page 13 of this pack.

Rehearsals: week two

There is something about exploring the movement through the playing space that feels important to us all, especially after visiting the foyer on which the play is based. Trying to find that balance between the energy of the storytelling and the atmosphere of the building has become our mission. There are positive angles and reflections from all the young people we engaged with to create the show, but there is also a lot of oppression, a lot of diminished hope, and we are mindful of telling a clear story throughout the play.

Some of the major inspirations for Nadia in staging and establishing an atmosphere are the photos of Gregory Crewdson – an American photographer known for his unnerving staged images (similar in many ways to the films of David Lynch). Crewdson’s work has come to fascinate us all and highlights our interest in finding the dark shades in otherwise domestic settings.



As assistant dramaturg, I maintain the evolving performance text, which has, after several months, settled but still continues (as all plays do) to grow and be reshaped through rehearsals. A lot of this development, especially with the verbatim nature of the text, is about working with the actors, returning to original transcripts and tightening the storytelling by looking at phrases. With only four weeks rehearsal, this work is quick but detailed, and ensures that there is a life to the work on the page as well as in performance.

We conclude the second week with a Saturday stagger-through of Act One – our first attempt at fitting the units of the play together chronologically. The actors are able to feel for the first time the motors and mechanics of the play’s chronology and the spaces between moments, as well as identify the work for the coming weeks.



Top: Antonia Thomas (Eritrean Girl/Asian Young Mum/Young Mum’s Sister);
bottom: The company, (left to right): Trevor Michael Georges, Antonia Thomas, Ashley McGuire,
Grace Savage, Shakka, Michaela Coel, Kadiff Kirwan and Toby Wharton in rehearsal
Photos: Ellie Kurtz

Rehearsals: week three

The play is really emerging and finding its story, with relationships being clearly established between characters. As we work through the play, it is becoming more important to capture the attitude and energy of the foyer, somehow representing the 210 young people who call it their home. A lot of this evolves through movement work with Jack Murphy (movement director), who develops an abstract language of movement that is rooted in activity and the physical space.



In working the second act of the play, it becomes clear that we are telling a very specific story, focused on the coming together of residents, the community and the memorial barbecue for Daniel. These events, with new layers being added to existing scenes, help us to tell the story with forward momentum. Dramaturgically the play and how the story is told was always about 'lifting the lid' on characters and a real place, rather than several moments in time, strung together. The interviews featured take place across the course of a day, so each scene builds a new layer of action or story in the lead up to the barbecue, a bit like creating a mosaic.

Typically you would expect to see characters struggle with an objective, followed by a conflict caused by an obstacle, and then an eventual resolution. With *Home*, however, these journeys are shorter and the verbatim form gives us more intimate details about people at a specific moment in time.

We are also fortunate this week to spend time working in The Shed with the actors. This allows us to explore the realities of moving this play from rehearsal room to performance. Each of the actors plays at least two characters or is part of an ensemble for movement and songs. With this comes the pressure of the 'quick changes' [changing costumes very quickly] that our stage management team are currently mapping out and the need – through costume, voice and movement – to clearly define each character.

Working in The Shed and running the play also means we can test the relationship with the audience and the strengths of the thrust staging. As opposed to playing end-on, it is dynamic to stage the play with special attention to the downstage area (with back to central audience) and to open up to the balcony and audience at both sides downstairs. All of this is then consolidated back in the rehearsal room as we work through notes and prepare for our final week working on detail ahead of production week.



Rehearsals: week four

The play has fully emerged and our focus is to keep delving for detail and tightening the storytelling. We add a new MC transition after discovering that Toby [Wharton], who plays Tattoo Boy, was formerly an MC. This new section further develops the prominence of beatboxing in the play, which has grown to be its own type of storytelling.

One of the challenges of working in thrust (with audience on three sides) and also a second balcony level is to ensure all the audience feel included. Throughout our final week in the rehearsal room we encourage the actors to open everything up and not neglect one bank of audience. To help this, we decide to make the 'interviewer' the whole audience and the actors can refer to multiple people throughout.

We hone transitions and songs through the week, focusing on the flow or journey between units. This also allows us to return to the transcripts and insert several new lines from the interviews. Our reasons for this are varied but often relate to giving a clearer sense of time or new character details. One real discovery is the addition of a line for Sharon at the end of the play, which came from a later visit to the homeless hostel, when the real 'Sharon' asked us for 'four tickets' to the play. Not only does this root the play in reality but also reminds us that these are real people continuing to work at the hostel and fight for more resources in whatever way they can.



PRODUCTION WEEK AND FIRST PREVIEW

We move into The Shed, where *Home* is being staged, and have a short time to 'tech' and dress-rehearse the play. There is an intimacy in the theatre, that can only help in telling the various stories of the play. With a dedicated team and quick, focused work, we move through technical rehearsals and find a striking language for the play. This language grounds the play in a naturalism but also transforms the space for the more abstract moments such as Bullet's chase and monologue and the Eritrean Girl's story of how she travelled to the UK in a lorry.

Before we know it, our dress rehearsal for an invited audience is over and the actors are preparing for the evening's first preview. The opportunity to preview the play ahead of opening night is valuable and allows Nadia to make any necessary amends to the work. After our first preview we make some small and one larger change to the work. The smaller changes are mostly cuts or tightening of transitions to help the flow of the narrative. The largest change is a reimagining of 'Playing With Fire', a song later in the play that comes out of a Tattoo Boy speech. Opting for a much more stripped-back arrangement and a new staging means we can prepare the audience for the final units of the play and results in a more powerful scene.

Staff Director, 2013 – Rob Drummer



Left: Toby Wharton (Tattoo Boy/Garden Boy);
right: Ashley McGuire (Sharon) in rehearsals
Photos: Ellie Kurtz

Keeping it current: reviving the production

Several months after the first run of *Home* we face the exciting challenge of reviving the play. As it is based on a constantly changing situation it is crucial that we keep the play current. It is very important to Nadia that we update the political situation of the hostel as it has faced substantial changes and funding cuts since the first run of the show.

To do this, we go back to the drawing board and arrange interviews with almost all of our original interviewees. Out of six hours of new material we manage to extrapolate our two-minute Epilogue.

As well as the addition of an Epilogue we have added a new character to the show. The guitar-playing Busker adds a fresh perspective of what life is like for different types of people at Target. Amongst the original interviewees there was a common theme that many of the residents wanted to keep to themselves in the hostel. While some people do live comfortably amid the Breakfast Club family, there are many others who spend their time at Target in isolation. Busker is uncomfortable around the other residents and we never hear him speak. Having Busker play the guitar also helps to integrate the music into the show.

Up until the Epilogue, the play takes place over a weekend and so one of our main challenges in

rehearsing for the revival is showing the passage of time passing between the last scene of the original play in Sharon's office and the new Epilogue. With some help from music and a very quick change out of a baby bump we situate the Epilogue substantially later and we hear from some of the characters about how their lives have changed since the original interviews.

The Epilogue starts with the positive journeys that some of the residents have experienced thanks to their time at Target. Bullet and Tattoo Boy are examples of the people who have benefitted from their time in the hostel.

The news takes a turn for the worse when we are faced with the reality from Asian Young Mum that the young mums are facing eviction. If they are not willing to accept housing from a lucky dip of places outside of London then the government will not help them. The young mums on whom they are based have had an extremely public and successful campaign against evictions and it is very important to us that their struggle was included in the show.

Sharon gives us a final update about the bleak situation that the staff and residents are now facing.

Staff Director, 2014 – Sasha McMurray

Home, 2014



The 2014 production, clockwise from top left: Jade (Grace Savage); Young Mum (Michaela Coel); Ex Resident (Kadiff Kirwan); Eritrean Girl (Antonia Thomas); Garden Boy (Toby Wharton); Sharon (Ashley McGuire); Security (Danny Sapani); Bullet (Gershwyn Eustache Jnr); Busker (Seth Elton). Production photos: Ellie Kurtz

Verbatim: the process

Assistant dramaturg Rob Drummer explains the process of gathering and shaping content for *Home*.

Home has evolved from the transcripts of interviews with young people, conducted over a short period of time at the beginning of the project. By collecting real testimonies, Nadia Fall, the play's creator, is able to get closer to the reality of a situation facing so many young people today. In total, around 48 hours of interviews were transcribed and collected and these formed the basis of the workshop process.

Two workshops were arranged before rehearsals began as a way to explore the themes and ideas that may emerge from the raw material. The first workshop focused on character and text, and looked at some of the ways music and staging could make connections across the material. The second, which lasted a week with a company of actors as well as a music director and movement director, focused on playing with the text, now in an early scripted draft. Nadia and I had spent several weeks extracting threads of stories and pulling these together to form the basic skeleton of the script.

Our first challenge was to edit. Nadia and I spent many hours reading and re-reading the interviews aloud to each other before making a shape out of those that felt the most urgent. This shape was initially complex to organise as we didn't have the usual narrative arc of time passing (the interviews were all conducted over a short period). However, what did start to happen was the emergence of patterns, or subjects that several people spoke about, alongside more general concerns that were affecting more than one resident.

We entered the workshop with a solid first draft, and decided to focus on movement, some music and on how we might begin to stage the piece. Nadia and I had found that *The Breakfast Club* and *The Tour* could be two hot areas to play with and these two parts of the play have remained to anchor the narrative for the audience. The workshop was a real success, although of course we had far too little time to develop a meaningful response to around 90 minutes of material. Instead, we presented around 50 minutes to an invited audience and attempted to simply put side by side a handful of units that we thought might make the final cut.

After the workshop week, Nadia and I returned to the text and continued to work on the characters and shape of the the play. We asked questions of the material in much the same way you might with a new play but with the added emphasis on trying to best represent the real people's lives. As a result, we made specific decisions about how and why to put certain people on stage together at the same time, when to be more inventive

with the interviews, and from an early stage, commit to a theatricality that allowed us to accentuate images, attitudes and ideas coming out of the interviews.

The script passed through several further drafts and over time became a two-hour piece that we knew would continue to develop during rehearsals. This was comforting: the process remained lively and collaborative and several of our company, who have been involved from the early stages, continued their ownership of the work.

Throughout rehearsals we remained open to improvements and met with several of the residents portrayed in the play, early in the process. This did something really important to us all: it grounded the story and enabled us to work together to find the language of the piece. Verbatim material should ask questions and encourage active engagement from its audience.



The Collision of Disciplines

The Collision of Disciplines: A Dramaturgy of Beats, Transcripts and Music

As staff director and assistant dramaturg, my role on *Home* has been to support Nadia as she created the play and to encourage a shape to emerge through early drafts of the play. Our first hurdle was to tackle the short period of time the narratives bear witness to. Unlike other examples of verbatim work, in which people may be interviewed several times over a longer period, the interviews for *Home* were conducted over the course of only a few weeks.

Dramaturgically we were always working with a 'day in the life of' or, at most, 'several days in the lives of' the residents of the homeless hostel. This encouraged the dramaturgy to work like a mosaic: lots of small pieces creating a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The work always focused on creating a tension in what we placed side by side, drawing up the daily conflicts, the highs and lows, and the contradictions of these young people's lives. We were dealing with a politically charged and urgent narrative which came from the interviews, and which acted like the glue of the piece. The honest and open words of the young people whose lives are featured in the play also allowed us to reflect on society.

If the raw material is to be seen as this mosaic, then what ensures that the production has real drive is the music, both original and found, as well as the live beatboxing which features throughout. There is a dramaturgy of beats and sound that is rooted in the experiences and emotions of the interviews. The audience could step away from verbatim monologues, so we have been clear in using music, sound and even movement to send signals. These signals are so important – they lift the work, give time to reflect, drive through the narrative and anchor the work.

This collision of urban music, performance, text, interviews and an awareness of a wider socio-political tension creates a robust form that feels like the world of the hostel – a place where music is always playing, pirate radio stations are set up in bedrooms and breakfast clubs are either the only place to be or a Marie Celeste at the heart of the building. We have creatively solved the lack of time passing by suggesting that this is the ongoing reality, which for an audience raises an important set of questions, including: 'what does home mean to you?' and 'how dissimilar are these young people to us?'

This is always the crux, the heat of working with verbatim material: how do you treat it with respect whilst also building a theatrical experience that transcends the text? By confronting the audience with music that is made in front of them – a beat-boxing pregnant resident and others who can only express themselves wholly through song – the lives of these real people have found a representation on stage.

Article by Rob Drummer

