

Sarah Stribley Productions presents

GHOST FROM A PERFECT PLACE

by Philip Ridley



PRACTICAL RESOURCES PACK

Introduction

Welcome to the *Ghost From A Perfect Place* resource pack.

Back in the swinging sixties, Travis led a gang that terrorised East London. Now, after an absence of many years, he returns to find his old turf in the clutches of a new kind of gang...with a new kind of leader. Rio - ruler of a mob of girls - instantly captivates Travis with her haunting beauty. But soon a shocking story begins to emerge - one that shatters both their distorted memories.

Ghost From A Perfect Place had its explosive premiere at Hampstead Theatre in 1994 where it was denounced as "pornographic" by *The Guardian's* Michael Billington and hailed as "a masterpiece" by *The Spectator*. Twenty years later it has its first major revival in this production at London's Arcola Theatre.

The information and resources in this pack have been collated with the aim of providing an insight into the staging of the production and a practical basis for groups to further explore the themes of the play together.

Please do get in touch if you would like to receive a copy of the playtext, provide feedback or to request and further information or resources. Email us at: office@sarahstibleyproductions.com

Enjoy!

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Ghost From A Perfect Place by Philip Ridley opened at the Arcola Theatre on 11 September 2014.

Cast (in order of appearance):

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| Torchie Sparks | Sheila Reid |
| Travis Flood | Michael Feast |
| Rio Sparks | Florence Hall |
| Miss Sulphur | Scarlett Brookes |
| Miss Kerosene | Rachel Redford |

Production Team:

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Production Manager | Andy Reader |
| Stage Manager | Niki Buys |
| Costume Supervisor | Kat Smith |
| Production Assistant | Sam Parkinson |
| Set Construction | AWAV Production Services |

Creative Team:

| | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Director | Russell Bolam | Producer | Sarah Stribley |
| Designer | Anthony Lambie | Assistant Producer | Natalie Allison |
| Lighting Designer | Malcolm Rippeth | Press Representation | Kevin Wilson |
| Sound Designer | Richard Hammarton | Graphic Design | Rebecca Pitt |
| Movement Director | Jack Murphy | Photography | Ben Broomfield |
| Fight Director | Malcolm Ranson | | |
| Casting Director | Francesca Bradley | | |
| Assistant Director | Lisa Carroll | | |

This production was supported using public funding by Arts Council England. To mark the first major revival of the play since it premiered at the Hampstead Theatre in 1994 a new edition of the updated script was published by Methuen Drama to coincide with the production.

A visual artist, poet, novelist and film-maker, Philip Ridley is one of the country's most celebrated living playwrights.



In 2012 *WhatsOnStage* named him a Jubilee Playwright (one of the most influential British writers to have emerged in the past six decades) and he has won both the Evening Standard's Most Promising Newcomer to British Film and Most Promising Playwright Awards. The only person ever to receive both prizes.

Philip was born in the East End of London where he still lives and works. Many of his plays including *Ghost From A Perfect Place* are set there. His first stage play *The Pitchfork Disney* premiered at the Bush Theatre in 1991 and was a controversial hit, kick-starting the 'In-Yer-Face' theatre movement of the 1990s. Philip's next two plays *The Fastest Clock in the Universe* and *Ghost from a Perfect Place* opened at the Hampstead Theatre to both critical acclaim and uproar, establishing him as one of Britain's most promising and controversial playwrights.

Since then he has written 10 adult stage plays: those mentioned above, plus *Vincent River*, *Mercury Fur*, *Leaves of Glass*, *Piranha Heights* and most recently *Tender Napalm*, *Shivered* and the award-winning *Dark Vanilla Jungle*, plus several plays for young people: *Karamazoo*, *Fairytalesheart*, *Moonfleece* (recently named as one of the 50 Best Works About Cultural Diversity by the National Centre for Children's Books), *Sparkleshark* and *Brokenville* (collectively known as *The Storyteller Sequence*), and a play for the whole family, *Feathers in the Snow*. His work is regularly revived both in the UK and internationally, and his plays are staple texts for study and performance in UK drama schools.

Philip also wrote the highly acclaimed screenplay for the *The Krays* feature film starring Gary and Martin Kemp (winner of The Evening Standard Best Film of the Year Award). Whilst researching for the film, he became interested by perceptions of the Kray brothers in the East End, and this was one of the factors that led to him writing *Ghost From A Perfect Place*. Philip has been described as "a visionary" (Rolling Stone), "the master of modern myth" (Guardian), "probably a genius" (Time Out) and "the best British playwright of the last 20 years" (Aleks Sierz, author of *In-Yer-Face Theatre*).

Plot Summary

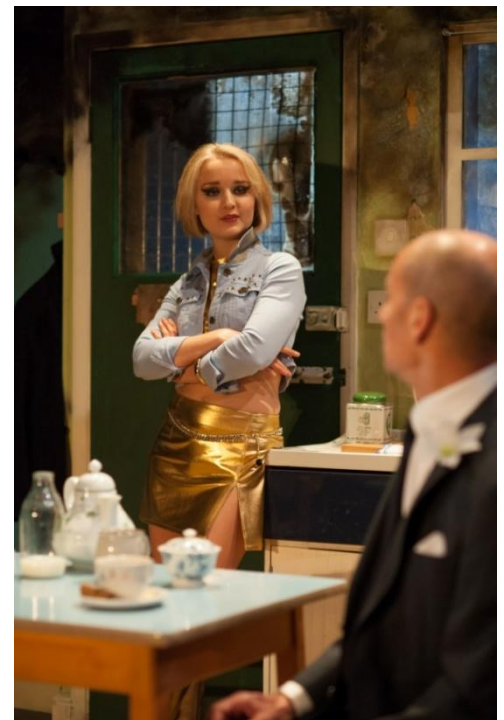
Act One: The play takes place in a fire-gutted flat in Bethnal Green belonging to Torchie Sparks and her 25 yr old granddaughter. It follows former gang leader Travis as he returns to his old turf in Bethnal Green. Having met Rio in the graveyard earlier that day, Travis goes to meet her at the flat immaculately dressed in a black suit and tie. When he arrives it is to find only Torchie in, and she agrees to let him come in and wait. Travis is surprised Torchie doesn't remember him and draws her attention to the lily in his jacket lapel to remind her. His gesture sparks recognition and Torchie becomes very excited and apologetic. Her manner to Travis is reverential and they both lament how the area has changed since the 'heydays' of the gangsters. When Travis gets soot on his sleeve from the windowsill Torchie explains there was a fire in the flat and her leg was badly burnt. Rio is now the breadwinner and Torchie defends her granddaughter's occupation, saying how special she is. Torchie tells how her daughter Donna (Rio's mother) used to idolize Travis. Donna became pregnant at 13; she wouldn't tell her parents who the father was and was beaten by Mr Sparks who was a very religious man. After having the baby early Donna dies in childbirth, leaving baby Rio. Travis tries to commiserate with her, though much to Torchie's frustration he doesn't remember her. He then shows Torchie a book 'The Man with the White Lily' which he says is his life story. Looking through it Torchie reminisces about the 'heydays' and the awe-inspiring figure Travis was, and he gifts the book to her.



"No one has the ability to laugh at their misfortunes like the women of the East End"

Torchie tells Travis about how her husband fell apart when Donna died. One night he fell from the roof of the flats and ever since has been hospitalised in a coma, leaving Torchie to raise the baby. Travis asks Torchie to make him a cup of tea and tells her about his life in LA, sweeping her up into the story of his blissful existence there. He does however admit he is lonely sometimes for the East End and old times. Torchie announces that she wants to show him something and makes Travis close his eyes whilst she turns the lights out. When she opens them she is carrying a cinema tray and holding a torch. Travis realises the meaning of her nickname – she was a cinema usherette. He suddenly becomes troubled as memories come flooding back and he finally recollects Torchie. He becomes very upset as the reality of some of the things he did dawn on him. Travis tries to tell Torchie but she thinks he is worrying about not having prevented people's troubles and assures him that all hurt is paid for in this life or in hell.

As they are talking Rio enters, startling them both and Travis especially. She is hauntingly beautiful, with blond hair and wearing a denim jacket and gold lame skirt. She hurries Torchie out and starts to ask Travis about the stories of the people he tortured and killed, though he is reticent in answering. Rio makes to lead Travis to the bedroom but he struggles away, and when she demands payment upfront before having sex he pushes her away. Rio goes to the window and signals to the gang in the graveyard with a light. Travis laughs at this attempt to intimidate him, declaring that crowds used to part to let him through. Miss Sulphur and Miss Kerosene rush into the flat and the lights go down.



Plot Summary

Act Two: Travis is shown tied to a chair with Rio, Miss Sulphur and Miss Kerosene chanting around him. The girls are collectively known as the Disciples; Miss Sulphur and Miss Kerosene wear cheap blond wigs and similar outfits to Rio. Miss Kerosene struggles to remember the words of the chant and becomes angry at Travis whose presence, she says, is distracting her. She compares him to an old man whose flat she broke into on the estate, and beat with a poker when the man found her intruding. As she recounts the violence she remembers the sense of safety it gave her and in revisiting this moment calms down. Apologising to Rio for her behaviour she talks about how much the gang means to her and the feeling of power it gives her. Miss Sulphur and Miss Kerosene excitedly tell Rio about the bonfire they have been building and Miss Kerosene accidentally lets slip that Miss Sulphur has got some pills for them. Miss Kerosene makes Miss Sulphur tell how a fearful man in the street handed his wallet and possessions to her, and amongst them they found the pills and an 'orange diamond'. Rio explains to the girls that the 'orange diamond' is amber. The girls decide the ring will be worn by the leader of the Disciples and take one of Travis' shoelaces to make a necklace of the ring for Rio. They make amber the official jewel of the Disciples and recite 'Saint Donna's Prayer'.



"When I walk down the street – These clothes. My hair. I hear people whispering – 'She's a Disciple.' No one fucks with me anymore"

Whilst they are doing so Travis begins to choke and Rio realises he is having an asthma attack. She helps him with his inhaler, much to the disgust of Miss Kerosene who argues he's failed to show Rio respect and she is breaking a commandment in not punishing him. Miss Sulphur tries to defend Rio and enforce order which annoys Miss Kerosene more. When Travis says Donna's name Rio allows Miss Kerosene to hit him. However Travis challenges her and belittles the Disciples and their lack of discipline and influence in comparison to that he had in the heydays. Travis ridicules their reverence of a 13 yr old school girl and tells Rio she is better than the others. This incites the girls and Rio decides to give Travis 'the Sermon'.

Rio's Sermon tells how as a child she played with matches and burned things. One night she woke up to find she had set the flat alight and whilst she escaped unscathed, her gran Torchie was badly hurt. She tells how whilst keeping vigil at Torchie's hospital bedside, she met another girl (Miss Sulphur) with bandages around her wrists who had been abused by a group of men. Miss Sulphur becomes upset as her story is told and is comforted by the other girls. Rio goes on to say how when she was in the graveyard one day her mother Donna appeared to her. Donna entrusted Rio with spreading a message to the lost girls living in the ruins, to banish men from their lives and to form a gang to worship her. Donna also told Rio that no man was involved in her creation, making her the start of a new breed of woman. As the Sermon comes to a climactic end the girls repeat their chant, cheering and challenging Travis to say he believes in 'Saint Donna'.



Plot Summary

Travis laughs at them and the girls encourage Rio to exact punishment. When she falters Travis goads her and she leads the girls in burning him with his own cigars. He still refuses to give in and through the pain tells them that they and 'Saint Donna' are nothing. Furiously Rio grabs a pair of scissors and goes to kill him, but as she's about to strike Travis lets out that he knows who her father is and met her mother. This stops Rio in her tracks and desperate to hear what he has to say she lowers the scissors. Her failure to punish Travis for this ultimate act of disrespect horrifies Miss Kerosene and Miss Sulphur. Miss Kerosene argues that as Rio clearly doesn't believe in her own Sermon (according to which she has no father) she is unfit to lead the gang, and challenges Rio to either kill Travis or hand over the ring. Rio does neither and Miss Sulphur tries to get them to talk about the matter, but when reminded by Miss Kerosene that the future of the gang is at stake she gives in. Miss Kerosene makes to take the ring from Rio and they fight, resulting in Miss Kerosene falling to the floor. Getting up she goes to leave, first telling Rio that she is finished and ordering Miss Sulphur to bring the ring. Left alone Miss Sulphur pauses and then as Miss Kerosene calls for her she takes the ring from the unresisting Rio.

Travis tells Rio how he used to collect money from the local cinema owner. One night he is shown up to the projection room by a woman holding a torch, and the man tells him he can't pay that day. Travis' men torture the cinema owner but are interrupted by the man's daughter – a young girl with blond hair. Travis and his men leave, but as he goes to the car the girl follows him and asks him to stop hurting her father. Travis says she can make him stop and forces himself on her. Afterwards he tells her not to speak about what has happened. The next day the police round up all the gangsters and Travis is offered a deal to give evidence which he accepts and leaves the area, not to LA as he told Torchie but to a village in the North. He explains that as the years went by, the past became so distant it was like a dream. In a last ditch attempt to reclaim the glory of his former life he writes a book about it and returns to Bethnal Green for last time. Torchie returns before Rio can react and, unfazed by what she finds, orders Rio to untie Travis. The gang have now lit the bonfire in the graveyard. Rio insists Travis has an appointment and he slowly leaves. As Torchie tells Rio about her visit to see Mr Sparks the bonfire is seen to suddenly flare extremely brightly and the yells of the girls are heard.



Characters



TRAVIS FLOOD

Travis is 78yrs old and led a gang in the East End in the Sixties. When he returns to his old turf he is horrified by the changes that have taken place. Immaculately turned out, he is proud of his legend, which impresses Torchie more than the crimes he committed. An abrupt and harsh character he shows his human side in his exchanges with Torchie. According to his stories Travis has led an exotic life, but over the course of the play he is forced to confront the truth behind his distorted memories.



TORCHIE SPARKS

Torchie is 76yrs old and has lived in the East End all her life. She is a survivor and has experienced a lot of personal tragedy but maintains a sense of humour. Her leg was badly injured in a fire so she depends on her granddaughter Rio to be the breadwinner, though she is fully aware that Rio sells sex for a living. She is in awe of Travis who reminds her of a different time.



MISS SULPUR

17yr old Miss Sulphur is Rio's sidekick, backing her decisions and managing Miss Kerosene. She is the law-enforcer and peacemaker of the gang. Her loyalty is tested by Rio's treatment of Travis and her changed behaviour.



RIO SPARKS

25yr old Rio lives with her grandmother Torchie and is the leader of girl gang The Disciples. Hauntingly beautiful she instantly captivates Travis. Strong, intelligent and quietly assertive, Rio has fought for a means of power in a male dominated world. As a leader she needs to set an example to the other girls but is torn between her need to maintain control of the gang and her desire to find out about her origins.



MISS KEROSENE

12yr old Miss Kerosene is the youngest of the Disciples and the most volatile and fervent member. Her explosive nature is underlain by an intense vulnerability. The sense of identity and power that comes from being a Disciple is very important to her.

Assistant Director Lisa Carroll talks us through the rehearsal process and how *Ghost From A Perfect Place* was staged ...

The Disciples are a group that are feared by their local community and their scenes move at a fast, explosive pace. How did the group approach the amount of violence to be explored on stage?

The first port of call for actors and the director is always to see what the text is giving you. Philip Ridley uses incredibly strong, evocative language which gives brilliant clues as to who the characters are and their temperaments. So we found that a character like Miss Kerosene had a lot of outbursts, often had to be silenced or controlled by the other characters, and swore a lot. In contrast, Rio is often very controlled and uses silence, which is no less terrifying as when she does speak it is all the more powerful. By being able to explore how each character is written we could find the moments of tension and the moments where things bubble over and explode, to get the right balance in telling the story.



We also worked with movement director Jack Murphy, who was able to communicate with the actors in a more physical language. He looked at how they could shift quickly when confronting Travis from a more relaxed stance to an intense alertness. Jack helped the girls tap into the idea that they can become fearsome through being able to turn on a sixpence, so that you never know what they will do next. He talked a lot about violence with the actresses and brought visual aids of real girl gangs fighting one another, which really helped us to approach the violence which happens on stage.

Finally, we also had experienced fight director Malcolm Ranson on the team to help the girls safely find ways to stage the moments of violence which Ridley has built into the text, such as Miss Kerosene punching Travis. We had to take into account that we were working on a thrust stage (one that extends into the audience on 3 sides) so there is little space to hide any stage trickery, as well as the limitations of costumes and wigs. Within this framework, Malcolm was able to find ways of making the violence plausible for the audience by using angles, but remaining truthful to the girl's performances by finding moves which felt in character.

All these elements operate in tandem to create the world of the play in the production: so that the violence feels believable and truthful, the story-telling is clear, and very importantly, it is all done safely even if it appears the opposite!

The play is set in Bethnal Green and explores gang violence in two different eras – the 1960s and the 1990s. How did you conduct your research as a team? Were there any discoveries that surprised you?

Bethnal Green is incredibly fertile ground as it has a long history of crime and violence dating back to Jack the Ripper. More recently it was home to the notorious Kray brothers in the 1960s and today there are many gangs operating in the area. Michael Feast (who played Travis) did research into the Kray brothers as his character was loosely based on them. Research is an important part of the role of an assistant director so I also provided information on the Krays to the team; about how they operated and where they were based. For example, The Blind Beggar pub in Whitechapel was one of their favourite haunts and is still popular with locals today. Fortunately there is plenty of material on them, including several biographies and the 1990 film which Philip Ridley wrote.

Philip Ridley himself was born and bred in Bethnal Green so has an incredibly in-depth local knowledge. He took us on a walking tour of Bethnal Green in the first week of rehearsals and was able to point out to us where the Krays operated as well as other landmarks which are referenced in the play, like Pelicci's café mentioned in Act One. It was fascinating to hear his own memories of how fearful the Krays were, even to him as a small child: everyone knew what they were up to but no one wanted to turn them in, out of fear of retribution. This all helped to build the world of the play in the actors' minds; we were able to use what we saw as a spring board to do more research and to find images so that I could build a clear picture of the Bethnal Green of the play on the wall of the rehearsal room.



A snapshot from the company's research trip to Bethnal Green

Another important part of the rehearsal process was getting the chance to speak directly with people who have had firsthand experience of gangs. Our producer organized a talk with Nadine Woodley, who had done youth work with people affected by gangs and written a play called *40 Elephants* about this very topic. Nadine was incredibly articulate and answered all our questions about gang culture, from how young girls get involved with gangs and why, to what they do on a daily basis and their codes of conduct. This session really opened the cast's eyes to the psychological side of being involved in gangs which was no doubt a helpful way into their characters.

All this research cumulatively helped to create the fabric of the play as it is on stage, with the actors being able to picture their way into the world thanks to seeing Bethnal Green, as well as relate to their characters thanks to the research and talk. One of the most interesting and surprising things was to learn about how differently gangs operate today from how they did in the 1960s. Back then, gangs were governed by strict codes of honour, and respect as much as fear. Gang leaders were very enterprising and played a long game. However, Nadine explained to us today that gangs have very short term aims: usually to sell drugs in order to buy nice new things. Equally, the way gangs treat their members and outsiders has changed, and we were shocked to hear about some of the initiation rites gangs use today, as well as how females are treated in gangs – they are often sexually exploited by their peers, both male and female. This can lead to gang members having deep seated trust issues and projecting these feelings onto others, which only perpetuates the problem.

One of the main themes of the play is nostalgia and the re-telling of stories. How did you go about making these interesting for the audience? Did you explore different ways of presenting these accounts?

Thankfully the writer Philip Ridley had done most of the leg-work in making the stories interesting for the audience: they are so vivid and colourful it is hard not to find them compelling, both on the page and on stage.

In rehearsal the director Russell Bolam was always careful to ensure the actors were having as creative a role as possible in shaping the play. So in realizing the stories, particularly in Act One, he handed it over to Michael Feast (Travis) and Sheila Reid (Torchie) to find a way of telling stories which best worked for them within the world of the play. The actors would have the opportunity to try different things, to run sections one way and then another. Russell would then step in and simply ask questions of the actors to help them refine the storytelling, as well as highlight moments which were successful and asking them to bring these out even more. For example, what really helps in this kind of active, physical storytelling is being precise in laying out the world of the story: essentially helping the audience to visualize what the characters are seeing. So Russell would work with the actors to make sure they could clearly visualize and believe in the people they were talking about, where they were and how they did things, and this in turn ensures the stories come alive for the audience.



Michael Feast (Travis) & Sheila Reid (Torchie) in rehearsals

Nostalgia and telling stories about the past is an interesting one, as the failing of many plays is not making the past an active part of the present and real-time action on stage. Too often we see plays which have two people sitting down talking about something that happened in the past, and this can become stale and dull for an audience because it has no impact on what is really going on in front of us on stage. This is where Philip Ridley's craft as a playwright comes in; because he has made sure that each story has a function it helps each character realize their objective, and because each character has a need to share their story it immediately becomes very dramatic and incredibly interesting for an audience. The fascinating thing about how Ridley is using stories in *Ghost From a Perfect Place* is to also highlight that truth is always in the eye of the beholder – these characters may believe in their own stories but that does not necessarily mean the characters themselves should be believed.

Act Two is incredibly rich because there are many different modes of storytelling, which makes it gripping to watch. From Miss Kerosene recounting a particularly violent memory in a sensory way, to the girls re-enacting Miss Sulphur's encounter with a man who gave her all his money out of fear, to a lesson on the origins of amber, and of course the sermon, the whole act explores what storytelling means to us as people and as a culture. Ridley cleverly shows how we construct our very identity through stories and the versions of ourselves that we cling to from the past. On a wider scale, he examines how religions, education and our lives are given a narrative structure – in this regard the play has a huge political resonance.

What challenged the team most of all throughout the rehearsal process?

The greatest challenge with bringing any play to the stage is to ensure that everyone's vision of the play is realized through their creative role. It is vital to ensure that the playwright's intentions are brought to life – they will have written that play because there is something they need to articulate and share with the world. Philip Ridley's work is always strongly imagistic, evocative and other-worldly, and it is important to create an on-stage world which is as powerful and vivid as the one in his imagination for the play to work.

The director and creative team's role is to find a way to translate all that onto the stage in practical terms, but to also be creative artists in teasing out their own meaning from the text. The actors too will see things in a character that the director or writer may not, and it is they who must perform every night and feel ownership of the words, world and characters, so it is imperative to ensure that they have been able to inject something of themselves into the project. While this balancing act is a challenge the best way to address it is to lay the groundwork for collaboration by having open channels of communication and a warm, friendly rehearsal room where people can speak up with any ideas. It has also been incredibly rewarding on this production where in most cases the team were in agreement as to what the play was saying and how it should be said.

The final challenge of the rehearsal process is to create something that will resonate with an audience, but not knowing how or whether it will until opening night. There are many elements to the story which are seeded in very subtly so some of the audience may pick up on it and others not. This kind of ambiguity makes the piece very textured and gives everyone a different experience of it, but it was a challenge working out how far to go with some aspects of it.



The cast in rehearsals

The writing has some very dark themes and moments, yet at the same time could be described as comedic. How did the group find playfulness in the story telling?

People always trot out the same phrase, that comedy and tragedy go hand in hand, but ultimately this is so often said because it is true! You cannot have dark without light, and audiences do not want to pay to sit for two hours and simply be depressed. There is a lot of humour built into the play; it isn't just about the bad things that happen to characters, it is about how they cope with them. Torchie, for example, has had a huge amount of tragedy in her life but has an unbeatable sense of humour and tells her sad story with a huge amount of verve. So, again, it's all there in the text and it was simply our job in the rehearsal room to tell that story as clearly and honestly as possible to allow it to all come through. Ultimately the play has to be something the actors will enjoy doing, and most importantly, the audience would enjoy watching, so playfulness was encouraged throughout by having a culture of playing games before rehearsal to warm up and an environment where actors could experiment with ideas.

Staging the Play

Design is an integral part of a production – it creates the world of the play. All the different elements like the set, costume, lighting and sound need to come together to give the audience a sense of time, place, mood and atmosphere.

The playtext gives the design team some specific instructions, e.g. that the action all takes place in Torchie's burnt-out flat, Travis wears a silk-shot suit, there is a bonfire seen through the window in the final scene and the Disciples are heard cheering as they mount the stairs to the flat. In addition to finding ways to realise these directions, the design team work with the director to build a fully-fledge world for the action and to help communicate the story clearly and effectively. For example, lighting and sound played a key role in staging Rio's sermon, with different lighting states and soundscapes being used to enhance the performance and immerse the viewer in the scene. We asked some of the creative and production team to explain how they dealt with particular parts of the play:

SET & COSTUME DESIGNER– ANTHONY LAMBLE

The presence and energy of fire is key to the lives of the characters as well as the dynamic of the writing itself. How did you explore this when creating the physical world of the play?

Philip Ridley is a very visual writer, so that is a gift to a designer. I really wanted to support that vision. One of the main themes that come through is that of fire and light. In this play I treated the set like an individual character. The way it was designed impacts on the lives of the other characters on stage in different ways. For example: Torchie's window was a main feature to showcase the different sources of light and its effect on the play's action, especially at the end where we see the brightness of Rio's bonfire. The quality of that light streaming through gives the characters on stage an idea of what might be happening outside. Phil's writing also explores naturalism, which I wanted to incorporate into Torchie's flat. You can see her love of the hey-days reflected in the way the flat was decorated. It had to look plausible and grounded in the reality of the East End, despite some of the story being fantastical.

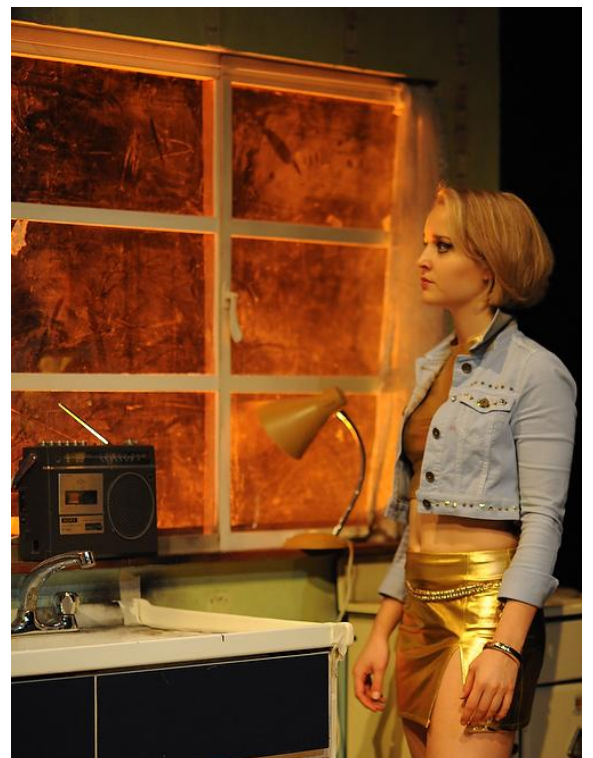


A storyboard sketch for the play

LIGHTING DESIGNER – MALCOLM RIPPETH

The bonfire offstage is a strong visual image in the play. How did you achieve this?

It's a heightened effect based on reality - you'd see a bonfire through a sixth floor window but the light from it would have little impact in the room itself. This is much brighter and deliberately theatrical. The actor looking out is seeing five 1000 watt fresnels (soft-edged theatre spotlights) on the floor, in five different flame colours from apricot to deep orange. These are on a rapid random chase [a series of lighting steps] with levels independently fluctuating from 30-100%. The fact that the window is so dirty completes the effect, meaning we can really see light hitting the surface and this silhouetting the actor on stage.



Staging the Play

SOUND DESIGNER – RICHARD HAMMARTON

Travis, an infamous mobster who ruled East London in the 1960s, returns to find his old turf in the hands of 26yr old Rio. How did you reflect Travis' and Rio's worlds in the sound that accompanied the action?

I approached it from the perspective of what music fits their generations by and large. Travis is a 60's man so mainly had a standard kit (drums), playing various 60's ish patterns, rolls, shuffles etc. I also used a bit of a crusher on the drums when he got angry which essentially reduces the quality of the sound making it more aggressive and fractured. The girls had a more synth [electronically created sound] based approach, lots of ambient drones [long continuous notes] mixed in with more contemporary beats. I also used a delayed guitar as a bridge between Travis' music and theirs' and occasionally threw in Travis' drums underneath it all when Rio was at her most 'gang leader' ie. when she became a version of Travis. There were also more metallic sounds to give the girls a spikier sound. I used a bass pulse throughout both Travis and the girls to keep the sense of pressure or tension going and again to unify their sounds a little.



The set at the start of Act One

COSTUME SUPERVISOR – KAT SMITH

The play is set in the 1990s but calls back to the 1960s. How did you and Anthony reflect this within the costume choices?

As Rio is trying to emulate her mother we used a mainly 60s influence for her look with the gold mini skirt, matching short top, knee high boots and sharp bob hairstyle. Then using her look as a basis we worked our way further in to the 90s for Miss Kerosene and Miss Sulphur. Using the gold mini skirt as a basis we kept a vaguely 60s look but added tops and accessories that were much more of the 90s. For example Miss Kerosene's gold sprayed doc martins were very popular in the grunge scene of the early 90s. The denim jackets that all three girls wear are also a 90s addition to their gang uniform, using studs to customize them which again was a very popular look in the early 90s. For Travis we picked a modern suit, but cut in a way that heavily suggested the 60s silhouette with its slim line jacket and fitted trousers and accessorising with a skinny tie, an item that was supremely popular in the 60s. Finally for Torchie we chose a dress that was rather timeless, a dress that could belong in any era but in a fabric and pattern used a lot in the 60s. By mixing and matching elements from both periods we routed the characters in the 90s but with a heavy hint of something past.



Ghost From a Perfect Place by Philip Ridley explores many themes such as gang culture, violence, nostalgia and the past.

Below are suggested questions and exercises to help groups unlock their own thoughts about the play and share their responses. Many of the drama exercises are accompanied by discussion sections - leaders are welcome to focus on the areas that are most relevant to their group interests and time restrictions, however, it is recommended to start with the memory refresher before moving on..

SECTION ONE: MEMORY REFRESHER

Discuss: To reacquaint the group with the play sit as a group and answer these questions together:

- 1) What happens in the play? Together write a list of the key events of the story in order.
- 2) Name the characters in the play and their relationship to one another.
- 3) Put 5 volunteers in the middle of the circle - each representing a different character from the play.
 - Put the 5 characters in order based on how much 'status' they have in the events of the play. At one end the person who has the highest status/the most power throughout the play and at the other end the person with the lowest status.
 - Does this change throughout the play? Swap the characters to show how the power shifts.
- 4) The story is set in Torchie's council flat in East London. How did the set design, sound, lighting and costume make this story and the setting clear to us? If you haven't seen the production, what does the writer say in the text (including stage directions) that gives us a clear idea of where we are?

For example:

How do we know that Torchie isn't very well off?

What clues do we have that the play is set in the 1990s?

Why do you think The Disciples have chosen to be dressed in gold miniskirts with blond hair as their uniform?

How important is the use of the different lighting effects in creating a continuing sense of fire, burning and light?

- 5) Philip Ridley is viewed as being part of the 'In-Yer-Face' genre of theatre. 'In Yer Face' theatre describes the wave of new writing in the 1990s that was aggressive, raw, confrontational and angry. It often shocked people and went to extremes to be truthful about the life of the characters. When *Ghost From A Perfect Place* premiered in 1994 it caused some controversy, specifically around the violence the Disciples inflict on Travis which one critic called "pornographic". However, society's values change over time so what was written 20 years ago isn't necessarily as shocking now.

If we were writing a story about The Disciples in 2014, what would change in the story telling to make it more *in-yer-face*? Would there be more or less violence?

Play: Storytelling is central to the play and how each character makes sense of the world around them. There are all kinds of ways of telling stories which can be explored:

As a group or class, decide on a well-known story, like a fairy-tale, which everyone is familiar with. Divide into small groups and find new and different ways to tell the story.

Share these with the group and discuss how and why people come up with different ways of telling the story, and what the most effective elements were that people found.

SECTION TWO: IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM BY LISA CARROLL (ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)

One of the first stages of the rehearsal process is to identify what we call the “Facts and Questions”. The facts pertain to anything we definitely know to be true in the play, such as its setting, or the characters’ names. The Questions refer to anything that isn’t concrete in the text, such as why a character has made a certain decision, or what motivates them to say a particular line. These are vital for rehearsal so that the creative team can find answers to those questions and build a coherent logic for the world of the play.

Below are some examples of questions the director and actors might ask about characters:

- 1) Travis and Torchie come from a different age, where gang culture was very different and gang leaders like Travis were revered:

Why do you think the writer chose to show us this gang leader in a very different time, coming back after all these years? Furthermore, what can be said for the difference between how Torchie treats Travis and the girls?

- 2) Travis and Torchie talk a lot about the heydays:

When exactly were the heydays? What were they like? What was their relationship in the heydays, and how has it changed now? How revered and feared was Travis in the heydays? Why does Torchie have such a vivid memory of this time, when Travis struggles to remember anything at all?

- 3) Are all the stories they tell true? Are the stories that Rio ask Travis about, such as the Bow Flyover, true?

- 4) The Disciples are a girl gang – there are many (predominantly male) gangs in the UK.

However, these gang members have a very distinctive aesthetic. Why do you think the writer made this decision? Why do you think the other girls want to look like Rio?

- 5) What does Torchie know of the Disciples, and what does she think of them? What relationship do the girls have to Torchie?

- 6) The Disciples have a very strong conviction in Saint Donna, Rio’s mother, and Rio’s immaculate conception. Why do you think they have created a religion around this and what does it mean to each of the girls?

- 7) The Disciples do not flinch at the idea of violence like we may expect other young women to. Why do you think the writer has chosen to show these young women behaving this way? How does this play into the religious and aesthetic aspects of what they do?

- 8) What kind of rituals and beliefs do the girls have? How do they become a member of the gang, and how does someone work their way up in the gang? What exactly is their relationship to men? What do they do in their normal, day to day lives?

- 9) How much truth is there to Travis’ story at the end? Why does Rio not kill him at the end, and let him go? Where does Travis go when he leaves?

SECTION THREE: EXPLORING THE PLAY

In collaboration with specialist drama companies, charities and local organisations we have devised some exercises and games to aid in exploring the themes of the play.

There is more information about our community partners at the back of the pack.

Task One: Themes

Discuss: As one group identify as many themes the play explores as you can.

(Answers: Gangs, Violence, Family, Nostalgia, Sexual Exploitation, Feminism, Cult beliefs, The 1960's, Poverty, Future Building)

Exercise One: Tableaus

Split the group up and divide the themes amongst the groups. Each group or pair choose a theme and present a live action freeze frame/tableau that sums up that theme.

(The image doesn't have to link to the play directly, it can explore that theme in life generally/the group's interpretation).

Each group presents their freeze frames back to the group and the rest of the class guesses what is going on in every picture.

Task Two: Gangs

Discuss: Gangs work on a hierarchy system where there are members of higher status who make decisions and give orders, and those of a lower status who carry them out. What makes someone high status? Are there certain personality traits or behaviours that help define this?

Exercise One: Status

Use a deck of cards, or write out cards numbered from 1 to 10. These numbers represent the status of each player, 1 being low and 10 being high. Get two volunteers to choose a card, making sure they show nobody the number on it, and then begin a simple scene. For example: 2 friends playing a video game, or having a meal together.

When the scene is over, get the audience to guess what number had been on each person's card. Discuss what traits made it easy to tell who had each status. Try the game a few times, each time refining what traits make someone high or low status, so that the audience can eventually tell exactly what number people are.

Exercise Two: Interaction

Get the whole group to walk around the room, filling all the space, and walking at a neutral pace. Ask everyone to choose a number between 1 and 10 in their heads, 1 being low status and 10 being high status. Get each person to slowly take on that status.

Notice how the interactions change in the room and how the dynamic shifts. Go back to neutral and repeat the exercise. Talk about what it felt like to be each status and what everyone did to convey it.

Exercise Three: Collectives

The idea of the collective is very important in the play, particularly with the girl gang in Act Two. There are many different forms of groups, whether it is a sports club or a political party. What kind of elements do these all share in common? Why and how are collectives formed?

In groups, choose an idea or policy that you think would make the world a better place. Discuss what elements you would need to put this into practice, and how you might convince other people to join you in this. Together, write a manifesto, or – like the Disciples – commandments, for how everyone should behave to achieve these means.

Task Three: Sexual Exploitation and Identity

Discuss: The Disciples have each gone on their own journey before becoming a gang member. They are trying to find their own identity as women in the world. In the play gang life has influenced them to put on gold skirts, blonde hair, build bonfires and torture men to help them find their identity and build confidence. The gang was formed as means of protection against violence experienced at the hands of men, e.g. Miss Sulphur was sexually abused by a group of men.

Is this a good way of building their self esteem? *Why or why not?*

What tasks are boys and girls asked to perform to 'fit in' to gangs in 2014? How does this affect how they see themselves or find an identity? *Make a list for both genders.*

In what way are these girls in control of their actions and in what ways are they being controlled? How do we feel when labels are used to control and define us? (Skets/Sluts/Whores/Wifeys)

What influences young women in the media, music, religion and culture that pushes them/pressures them to see themselves in a certain light? *Can you remember any specific images, song lyrics, news stories or rules that highlight these influences?*

How are men told they have to act by the media/parents/society?

Do our levels of self-confidence affect our actions and how we make personal decisions?

Exercise One: Identity

Everyone should devise a 2-3 minute piece of theatre about themselves, finding a way in the piece to bring their first name into it 5 times. Show everyone's story back to the group. What did we learn about each person that we didn't know before?

Discuss: What is it to ...

a) *Self objectify?*

Degrading ourselves to the status of a mere object. Or put another way, seeing ourselves as a physical thing deprived of personal qualities or individuality.

Research has found that women who self-objectify (valuing their appearance over their intelligence and ability to change the world) would show less motivation to challenge the gender power balance, and ultimately reduce their participation in social action, in politics and in the business place. By seeing themselves as objects that are held up to a certain 'standard', women can become depressed, anxious, feel ashamed and have a diminished internal awareness. Further reading can be found [here](#).

b) Sexually objectify?

Sexual objectification is the act of treating a person as an instrument of sexual pleasure, making them a "sex object." In gangs this means treating girls as a commodity or an object, without regard to their personality, dignity, health or safety. When we allow sexual labels or stereotypes to influence us we begin to look at ourselves in a negative way, critiquing ourselves and making changes to fit-in ie. we self-objectify.

Exercise Two: Images of Women

Each member of the group choose a negative female stereotype that you have just discussed.

For example: The media may portray women as 'bossy' 'bitchy' 'slutty' 'weak' 'too ambitious' 'crazy' 'not intelligent' / Boys may say they prefer it if you were 'girly' or 'cute' rather than being yourself.

Each person should go into a space for 5 minutes by themselves and create an *exaggerated* character based on that word or stereotype image. Each character should have their own:

- a) Physicality/Body mask b) Voice c) Walk/way of moving

Put 2 seats in front of the group and form an audience. The leader or another participant becomes a talk show host beside the empty chair.

One by one each person takes the chair as their character. The group asks them questions like an interview. The person in the chair should make up the answers and answer like they think their character would.

The talk show host should always start off the interview with:

- 1) What their character name is? 2) What their job is? 3) How old they are?

The rest can be passed over to the group. After a few questions the group can guess what female stereotype the student was exaggerating and discuss how each character made everyone think and feel.

Are there positive alternatives to what these females might be expressing instead:

- Opinionated
- Dedicated to their work
- Educated
- Free to explore their sexuality

SECTION FOUR: SCRIPT ANALYSIS

The script below was created by community partner **Immediate Theatre** with a group of young women at risk of gang involvement and sexual exploitation as a means of introducing potential dangers to their peers.

Read the script with your group. The members of the group take turns to play different characters.

- Discuss the scene to identify the issues it raises
- Ask the group whether they think the piece is realistic
- Ask them whether they know of anyone who may have experienced similar issues.
- Are there any moments in the script that you would change?

Leaders: Challenge the group's response where necessary and if they find it funny question why.

(Immediate Theatre can facilitate this workshop for you. See the 'Community Partners' section at the back of this pack for details.)

Focus on Girls

Scene 1

Amanda walking to/from school on her own. Approached by Micah she has seen around but doesn't know.

- Micah: Yo babes
- Amanda: Alright?
- Micah: Yeh I'm alright. I know you innit?
- Amanda: Do you?
- Micah: Yeh I've seen you around before. You know innit?
- Amanda: Yeh.
- Micah: You're looking nice, still.
- Amanda: Thanks
- Micah: What you doing on Friday?
- Amanda: Dunno yet.
- Micah: My boy's having a party, you should come. Bring some friends.
- Amanda: I dunno.
- Micah: Well give me your number innit
- Amanda: I dunno.
- Micah: Come on. Just so I can let you know about tomorrow. Just friendsinnit? I've got a girlfriend.
- Amanda: Alright, I'll give you my pin.

Amanda gives Micah her pin. He agrees to PING!!! her later with the details

Scene 2

Amanda and Micah are texting. Amanda is at home. Micah is hanging out with friends. The following conversation appears on the screen behind the actors on stage.

- Micah: yoo Beautiful, u alright?
- Amanda: heyy, yh u x
- Micah: Yeh I'm calm. How was your day?
- Amanda: It was crap. School work is stressing me out.

Practical Exercises

Micah: you wanna come cinema with me?
Amanda: wen x
Micah: Thursday
Amanda: I'm not sure x
Micah: Come babe I wanna get to know u better
Amanda: hmm who's going? X
Micah: I could invite people but it would be better if it was me and u ;)
Amanda: I might bring my girl : x
Micah: send me pic of her
Amanda: ite x
(sending picture)
Micah: You know you're better looking than her, Im glad I got you.
Amanda: You aint got me.
Micah: Ya know what I mean ;)
Amanda: Eyelashes (symbol)
Micah: Real talk. You better show me that bumper when I see you.
Micah: u wanna come then
Amanda: yeah , anyway Night x

Scene 3

Amanda talks to her friends, they encourage her to go, telling her that they've all had sex before.

Friend: Hey, how was last night?
Amanda: Yeh it was good.
Friend: What did you do?
Amanda: Just went cinema and chilled.
Friend: Cinema? You didn't kiss him?
Friend: You didn't do anything else?
Amanda: No.
Friend: *(Laughs)* If you wanna keep this guy yeh your gonna have to do stuff. It's what boys want.

Amanda: Really?
Friend: Yeh . Everyone's doing it. Anyway, see you tomorrow after the party yeh?
Amanda: Ok. *(exits)*
Friend: Oh my days, did you see her, she listened to it! If this girl does anything Everyones gonna hear about it I tell you!

Scene 4

Amanda is getting ready for the party, Micah still texting, starts asking her for a picture, she says no.

Micah: You still coming tonight?
Amanda: Not sure, my friend can't come
Micah: Just come babes. I'll look after you ;)
Amanda: Maybe
Micah: I wanna see ya beautiful face.
Amanda: Lol
Micah: I beg you send me a picture of you.
Amanda: No. I'll see you later
Micah: Yeh, ok . I'll text you address in a bit

Scene 5

Amanda meets him at party and he gives her a drink. She gets drunk, he acts like he is taking care of her and takes her upstairs. He lies her down and she passes out. He takes a picture of her.

Micah: Yo babes you good?
Amanda: Yeh, Im good.
Micah: You're looking good y'know, you want a drink?
Amanda: Errrm ok.

Gets a drink

Micah: Let's dance.

Amanda drinks quickly. Starts to feel drunk.

Micah: ayy babes, you ok?
Amanda: Yeh I just wanna dance
Micah: Nah you've had too much to drink. Come. *(takes upstairs)*

Babes, lie down with me.

Amanda: I don't want to

Micah: I won't tell anyone. It's just between you and me.

Amanda: You will (*tries to get up*)

Micah: Woah, lie back. Lie down. It'll be alright. In the morning things will be cool. Just lie down.

Amanda passes out. Boy takes photo and leaves her.

Next morning Amanda wakes up in own bed. She texts Micah to find out what happened.

Amanda: What happened last night?

He doesn't reply. We see Micah with friends, ignoring texts from Amanda and showing them a photo on his phone. He sends it to them.

Scene 7

Amanda arrives at school, friends react badly to her, call her a sket etc.

Amanda: Since the party I've had so much trouble. Everyone at school calls me a sket, or says that I'm easy. I didn't even do anything with him. Even my friends don't believe me, say I've got a rep and it's my fault. I don't know what to do?

SECTION FIVE: FAMILY AND FUTURE BUILDING

The exercises below were created by community partner **Only Connect**.

Exercise One: Introductory Game

Leaders should explain that the group is going to play a quick game to get everyone thinking about *parenting*. The link between the game and parenting may not be obvious at first.

Half of the group should sit on chairs in a circle. There should be one empty seat. There must be a person standing behind each chair, including the empty one. The person on the chair is person A. Those behind the chairs are person B.

Person B with the empty chair wants one of the A's in the room to come and sit in their chair. They can do this by signalling one of the A's, either by a **wink** or a **nod**. When this happens the A that is signalled to must rush to come and sit in their empty chair. However, B's can stop A's from being able to leave their chair by tapping them on the shoulder. If they manage to do this before A gets away, A needs to sit back down.

Keep playing for a while. Then swap A's and B's over.

At the end of the game think about:

- Which person had the power/authority? Why?
- What role did people prefer? Why?
- Which role is most like the parent? Why?
- What situations in a parent-child relationship might link to this game?
- Should a parent child relationship always look like this?

These questions can be asked as a whole group, or in smaller groups or pairs depending on the dynamic of the group.

Exercise Two: Thinking about Parents

Split into pairs. Give each group a large piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to draw an outline of a person on the paper. If the paper is big enough, they could draw around each other.

Explain that this is the outline of a parent. We are going to talk about how a parent relates to their child in the following ways:

- In the heart, we are going to list all of the different emotions a parent might feel for their child
- In the head, they should write or draw all of the things a parent might worry about for their child (e.g. the child's future, their safety, whether they are happy)
- Lastly, in the hands, we are going to write or draw all of the practical things a parent does for their child (e.g. wash them, cook for them, help them with homework)

Now ask participants to think about the responsibilities a parent has. These can go outside of the body, surround the outline. They may already have written some responsibilities in the hands.

Ask each pair to feed back on their diagram and discuss any similarities or differences.

Exercise Three: Thinking about Listening

Split into groups of three. Label each other A, B and C in your groups.

Round One:

A is listening

B is talking

C is observing

B's rule is that they should talk about their last birthday until the room leader calls stop.

A's rule is that they must only look down at the floor and not speak.

C's rule is to observe, noting anything they find interesting, strange or uncomfortable.

After a while stop. Ask C's from each group to feedback on what they noticed. How did that feel for B's? And what did A's find difficult about this task?

Round Two:

A is talking

B is observing

C is listening

Now, A's should talk about a memorable train or bus journey.

B's rule is to observe.

C's rule is to listen, but to try and relate everything that A says back to their own memorable experience of getting on a train.

Ask the same questions as before, and encourage comparisons between the first time we ran the exercise and this time. What can we do next time to make sure that we are listening effectively?

Round Three:

A is observing

B is listening

C is talking

A's rule is to observe.

B's rule is to listen and follow the guidelines from the previous discussion.

C's rule is to talk about a time when a stranger helped them out

From this activity, what skills/points of learning do we think might apply to parenting?

What is difficult about always trying to listen?

Should we always be listening to our children?

Are there times when decisions are non-negotiable?

Only Connect is a crime prevention charity providing a positive community – including training, support and creative opportunities – for young people at risk, prisoners and ex-offenders. Our programmes deliver support at every point in the crime cycle in order to reduce offending. We see the people we work with as assets, not liabilities, with a contribution to make to their families, communities and wider society.



OC Create is Only Connect's arts programme delivering opportunities for members to experience and learn new skills across a spectrum of art forms. Members also get the chance to collaborate with creative professionals on specific projects to produce high-quality work inspired, produced and performed by them for public audiences.

To book the Impact Team for delivery at your organisation please contact adil.morrison@oclondon.org

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Immediate Theatre has been based in Hackney since 1996 working with you people in schools and in the community, using drama as a means of helping young people explore the reality of the world they live in. The script included in this development pack was created a by a group of young women at risk of gang involvement and sexual exploitation as a means of introducing potential dangers to their peers. We would very much appreciate you letting us know if you use the material and how it went.



Our **Meet the Parents** project trains young parents as sexual health workers and employs them to deliver sex and relationship education programmes in schools. We have delivered high quality SRE to over 20,000 young people in Hackney and Tower Hamlets since 2004. Subjects covered include:

- Relationships
- Assertiveness
- Contraception
- Female Genital Mutilation
- LGBT Issues
- Sexting
- Parenting
- Puberty
- STI's
- Sexual Exploitation
- Attitudes and Values

Please call 0207 923 8180 to book a session or for further information

Vision:

The company's purpose is to engage the young people of today in the process of creating "immediate theatre"; believing that questioning, articulate and motivated people can build thriving communities for tomorrow.

Aims:

- To provide inspirational participatory theatre programmes, enabling young people at high risk to reach their potential
- To offer a theatre programme for young audiences which explores social issues and enables them to engage in the process of change
- To improve employability for young people and create pathways to employment and further education
- To support the involvement of young people in decision making and to develop future community leaders.

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In October 2010 Hackney introduced the first co-located **Integrated Gangs Unit (IGU)** in the UK to proactively deal with gang crime. By locating the partners together communication and information sharing is vastly improved.



The IGU is made up of:

- Hackney Council
- Police
- Probation
- Young Hackney
- Safer London Foundation
- Department of Work and Pensions

How it works:

The IGU works with gang members identified as being of greatest risk. A lead agency is appointed for each gang member and a tailored individual intervention and support package is created. An officer will meet with the individual and offer opportunities to make positive changes. A range of prevention and enforcement tactics are used. These include incentives such as employment support and mentoring, while sanctions include tenancy terminations, parenting orders, gang injunctions, ASBOs and targeted police enforcement. The progress of support is regularly reviewed by the IGU.

The team is now working on early years prevention work with those at future risk of going on to become gang members. As well as this the IGU works with young women and girls at risk of gang exploitation. This work is led by the **Safer London Foundation** and combines early intervention based group work with intensive targeted one to one support. Issues such as healthy relationships, sexual consent and the consequences of offending are explored. The programme provides individual support for young women and girls and is intended to support self esteem and equip clients with communication and negotiation skills, safety awareness and life-skills. The IGU also supports victims and witnesses to ensure offenders are brought to justice.

- The level of Gun Crime is a third of what it was four years ago (182 down to 67)
- Offences where a knife was used to injure a victim under 25 (not domestic related) are less than a third of what they were four years ago (218 down to 65)
- Firearms discharges fell by 61% in the last year alone (31 down to 12)
- 154 firearms have been recovered in the last four years

Hackney Safer Communities Services

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Thanks and Further Reading

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For more information:

Ghost From A Perfect Place Production Page:

<http://www.arcolatheatre.com/production/arcola/ghost-from-a-perfect-place-by-philip-ridley>

Ghost From A Perfect Place Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELxrhPYwbe0>