

WE KNOW WHAT SHE DID,
WE KNOW THAT WE HATE HER,
AND WE KNOW SHE'S STILL OUT THERE.

A MERCURY ORIGINAL IN ASSOCIATION WITH WILDCARD
present

EVELYN

WRITTEN BY
TOM RATCLIFFE



Education Pack

WED 1 – SAT 11 JUN 2022

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ENGLAND**



MERCURY

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Synopsis

Ten years ago, Thomas Sampson brutally murdered Grace Chadwell in a crime which captured unparalleled press coverage across the country. His girlfriend of the time, Evelyn Mills, was convicted of perverting the course of justice, serving two of three years in prison. For her safety, upon her release Evelyn was placed on a lifelong anonymity order. Now, nobody knows where she is.

The play begins as Sandra, a woman in her forties, arrives in a small seaside town with no connection to the place or anyone in it. However, when she arrives it is immediately apparent that the one-bed listing she had responded to is actually a spare room in local resident Jeanne's flat in a retirement village. Late at night with nowhere else to go, Sandra agrees to take the room initially, although, due to the strict rules of the village, she has to pretend to be Jeanne's goddaughter in order to do so. In the coming weeks, the energetic and charming Jeanne develops a close friendship with Sandra and we learn that the latter has a child she is no longer in touch with and that Jeanne is struggling with the early stages of dementia. Throughout this, we meet the pragmatic and no-nonsense Laura, a nurse at Jeanne's retirement village, who reveals that Jeanne is on her last warning in the village due to her erratic behaviour. Jeanne then sets Sandra up on a blind date with Laura's brother Kevin, and as the pair unexpectedly hit it off, a vicious rumour that Evelyn Mills has moved to the area spreads around the local community. The first act ends with the news that Laura's young daughter, Bella, has gone missing.



Act two opens with Sandra attempting to comfort a worry-stricken Laura and opens up about her own child. News arrives that Bella has been found safe and Laura's dislike for Sandra becomes apparent, swiping at Sandra's parenting and chastising her for abandoning her child. Jeanne, in her condition, attacks Sandra who defends herself by pushing Jeanne off her. Laura witnesses the tail end of this confrontation and assumes Sandra was attacking Jeanne - becoming even more suspicious of her in the process. Upon digging, Laura discovers that Sandra is not Jeanne's goddaughter and is not related to Jeanne. With rumours about Evelyn's presence in a seaside town continuing to swell in the media, Laura's suspicion of Sandra becomes too great and boils over as she confronts her in front of Jeanne and Kevin, revealing her reasoning of moving to the town to be false and that she is not Jeanne's goddaughter. She then outright accuses Sandra of being Evelyn. Sandra is forced to move in with Kevin as the threat of violence towards her becomes a reality. After she is hit with a brick, she forces Kevin to confront his own suspicion of her before leaving the town.

Themes

Inspired by real life events following Maxine Carr's release from prison, Evelyn is a fictional story of mob-justice in modern day Britain. The stylistic and provocative thriller forces its audience to question when justice is really served; the press' role in how we think, hate and act in tight-knit rural communities; and whether we treat women involved in serious crime differently to men. Other themes include the deprivation and history of seaside towns and the monopolisation of violent crime against children. A chorus of shapeshifting women are present to guide us through the story, exploring how vigilante justice can run rampant online; the role of the press; and the fact that there are many more women accused of being 'Evelyn' out there. Throughout the play, we are led to question whether Sandra really is the reviled 'Evelyn' and ultimately, by the end, we are asking: does it even matter?

Interview with the Writer



Tom Ratcliffe

How did you find your way to writing plays – was it something you always wanted to do?

Looking back writing was clearly something I always had an obvious passion for and actively did - but I don't think I was able to articulate this as a career path I wanted to take until I first attended drama school. I feel like my journey as a playwright is something that organically happened through my love of writing stories and determination to have them staged. This passion started simply from creative writing assignments in English classes at my school - to which I would always have a surprised comment from my teachers who has been underwhelmed by all my other non-creative work in the subject. My love of theatre was initially found through acting. I attended Saturday schools and studied Drama at GCSE (as it used to be) and A Level. It was here that I first started writing plays. I would take up any opportunity to take complete control of any work we had to create in class and would insist on writing the script (and giving myself the best part of course!) This passion for creating stories on stage is something that just quietly didn't end whilst I was undertaking my acting training. I was very lucky to be mentored on my first play, *Circa*, by the wonderful Rikki Beadle-Blair whilst I was still at drama school and it was from here I was able to launch my career the minute I graduated.

How did you come up with the idea of Evelyn?

I grew up in a small village called Little Downham near Ely and Soham, where the tragic and incomprehensible murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman took place. This is something that had a profound affect on the small fenland community, regardless of whether you knew the girls or their families personally or not. I was a child of around the same age at the time and growing up, I was always aware when a story about the case came up in the national press. I was struck by reports that women across the country had been attacked for being 'Maxine Carr' when they weren't after her release from prison and placement on the Mary Bell order (lifelong anonymity). It was this that inspired me to write a story that takes a hard, in-depth look at mob-justice and question when we as a community really feel justice has been served.



How long did you work on it for? How did it organically develop?

A very, very, very long time...

I first came up with the idea in 2016 when the premise saw me shortlisted for the 2016 intake of the Old Vic 12. After the play wasn't selected, I took it upon myself to write the play that same year. It is worth noting I was only a year into my playwriting career and at the tender age of 23 at the time. This is a play with an exceptionally mature subject matter and the play is something that organically grew with me over six years whilst I was having other work produced and staged. I was aware this was a big story that needed a significant platform in order to be staged and realised to its full potential & therefore it was best for me to exercise patience and wait for the right team to come on board. Wildcard and the Mercury Theatre took the play under their wings in 2019 & 2020 respectively and continued, explorative and ruthless dramaturgical development has brought the script to where it is today.

What do you hope that audiences will take away from the session?

I'm excited for the different perspectives every audience members are going to have of the story. This isn't a play which tells you how to think. I hope the play challenges audiences to look within themselves and makes them question their own judgement and parameters for forgiveness.



Interview with the Director

Madelaine Moore

What did you find particularly interesting when first reading Evelyn?

I was really drawn into the relationship between Jeanne and Sandra; two women who live on the margins of the community. Both are in need of care but not always able to accept it for individual reasons, and yet both are searching for companionship and safety. Often the representation of women on stage can be quite stereotypical and one dimensional, but what I love about all the women in this play is that they defy labels, such as victim, perpetrator, carer, or vulnerable. In this story the women are complex enough for multiple things to be true simultaneously; Sandra is a victim and a perpetrator, Laura is a carer and a perpetrator, Jeanne is vulnerable and both a carer and cared for. I was also intrigued and excited about the use of the Punch and Judy characters as a device to explore the theme of mob justice. Theatrically it's a brilliant offer for a Director and one the entire creative team can collaborate on to build a world that feels simultaneously familiar and yet strange. The violent crime of Thomas Sampson and Evelyn Mills' part in it, which is the trigger event before the story of our play begins, is mirrored by the violence of the Punch and Judy show. I was really mindful of how horrifying the real-life violence of that crime actually is and how to make sure that we don't completely traumatise the audience! So I was really interested in how to stylise the puppet violence which has zero real-life consequences, and draw parallels with the behaviour of the characters online who can often act without considering the real-life consequences of their actions.

For you, what is the most poignant theme in the play?

There is a big conversation in the play about the idea of redemption and justice, particularly when it comes to those who have committed the most terrible crimes in our society. As someone who also works regularly using drama in prisons, it is often clear to me that the route to offending is very seldom black and white. This is particularly true of those perpetrators who would also be considered vulnerable in some way. What interests me about this in terms of the play, is the assumptions that are made about Sandra; if the people genuinely believe that she is Evelyn, who has been involved in a terrible crime, at what point has she paid their price for her actions? Do we trust the systems in place to deal with offenders? Do we believe that prison works? We can condemn the actions of offenders, but do we allow them to redeem themselves?



How have you worked with the set-designer? What did you have to consider with it being performed both at the Mercury and touring to Southwark Playhouse?

TK, who designed the show, spent some time in Walton-on-the-Naze and compiled a set of pictures which gave us an idea of both the organic structures e.g. vegetation, sand and water, and the man-made structures e.g. the parade, signage, beach huts, arcade etc. This served as the basis for the structures on the set. We then thought about the differences between the present day reality of Walton, Punch and Judy's world, the online space, and the Walton of Jeanne's childhood memories. I have always been very interested in the very British idea that somehow things in the past were better 'back in the the good old days', so TK and I thought about all the things we associate with the traditional British seaside of the past, and looked at all the ways we could find moments where that world feels really exciting and vivid. We then thought about contrasting that with the slightly worn, faded elements of the seafront, along with the more natural colours and textures in the present day. This stark contrast is mainly seen in the Punch and Judy scenes which I always imagined to be supersaturated, bright, loud, frenetic; a bit like someone has vomited 'seaside' over the stage. Another element was creating the online world, which we experience through the eyes of the Punch and Judy characters. We worked closely with Rachel Sampley, Lighting and Video Designer, and Micheal Crean, Sound Designer and actor/musician, to create a state which always gives multiple layers of information through visual elements; projection, lighting, the actor's movement and also through sound; whether that's live music, pre-recorded sound and technical elements such as voice modulation.

How do you want the audience to feel when they leave after the show?

I'd like them to come out having been taken on a bit of a journey; to have been entertained, to have made a connection with some of the characters and their situations, and hopefully wanting to continue talking about the themes long afterwards!

Meet the Cast

RULA LENSKA AS JEANN **YVETTE BOAKYE AS LAURA**



OFFUE OKEGBE AS KEVIN **NICOLA HARRISON AS SANDRA**

Meet the creative team

Written by – Tom Ratcliffe

Direction by – Madelaine Moore

General Management by – George Warren and Simon Paris for
Metal Rabbit Productions

Set Design by – TK Hay

Lighting Design by – Rachel Sampley

Costume Design by – Trynity Silk

Movement by – Temitope Ajoye-Cutting

Composition / Sound design by – Michael Crean

Fight Direction by – Claire Llewellyn

Casting by – Nadine Rennie CDG

Production Management by – Richard Parr

Marketing by – Chama Aimable-Kapumpa

Assistant Direction by – Lou Corben

Stage Management by – Lisa Pleass and Goose Masondon



Secondary Activities



Curriculum Links: Drama & English Literature
Key Stage: KS3 & KS4
How to generate character and material from world/life events
Skills: ensemble work, storytelling, devising

Exercise #1: **Starting points for** **Devising**

Ask the group to move around the room. When they have found their rhythm ask them to think about an event that has happened in the last week that has been in the news, a world event or in their own life, ask them to think of it in their own imagination as they move around. They don't need to share at this point.

As they continue to move around ask them to play out the events in their heads, as though watching it as a film. Ensure they are thinking of an event where they feel safe and comfortable to think about.

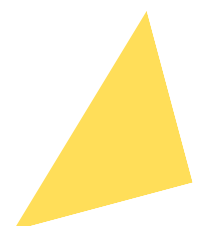
Then ask them, as they move around, to think about an event in the news, in the world or in their own lives that has happened in the last year. Again, ask them to play out the event in their head like a film, remembering what the smells were, what they were wearing, how they felt, who was with them, what they saw and experienced.

As they continue to move into new spaces, moving neutrally around the room, ask them to think of an event that has taken place in the world, in the news, or in their life in the past ten years. Repeating the steps about visualising the event or memory.

Then ask them to choose one of the events they have thought of. This can be a funny story, a world event, a story local to them. However, it must be a story that they feel safe to share.

Ask the group to move into groups of four or five. Once seated in their groups, give them 10 minutes to share their chosen events/stories from either the last week, the last year or the last 10 years. The group will then decide which is their favourite event/story. Label the groups A) B) C) etc.

Ask Group A to share their chosen story with Group B, Group B share with Group A, Group C should share their story with Group D and so on.



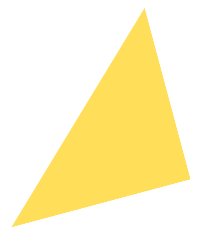
Exercise #1: Starting points for Devising

Once shared, give the groups 10 minutes to create 5 still photographs of each other's stories. Group A create 5 still photos of Group B's story and so on. There should be no words, just 5 strong images to tell the story in chronological order, being as clear and visual as possible.

Then Group B shares the 5 images with Group C. Group A shares with Group D and so on. The groups should learn these new images, being as exact and precise as they can. Finally give the groups a further 25 minutes to create a story with text, movement and narrative, using the 5 images they have been given as a starting point for their new story. Share back and discuss.

The aim of the exercise

This is a great way to generate new stories based on real life events. It's also a great way to build a story and for each group to feed into the new stories as an ensemble. The images provide a strong starting point to create from. The group could then share back their original stories to see how close to the original story the final piece are.



Curriculum Links: English Literature & Drama

Primary: KS3 & KS4

How to generate character and material from text

Materials paper, pens, source text (i.e. newspaper clippings, London Underground Map)

Exercise #2: Using unusual source material to devise new stories

Skills: analysis, ensemble work, storytelling, writing

Split the group into groups of four and distribute a random text to each group. Ideal texts are not those you would expect to draw a narrative. It's also helpful to use something unusual and interesting to look at on the page. A newspaper article or the London Underground map is ideal because it has lots of unusual words and names, whilst also having an interesting visual layout.

Give the groups one minute for the first task, in which each player must choose a word from the text. If using the London tube map, for example, John, Kiedy, Celia and Gurneet might choose 'Monument' 'Oval' 'Moorgate' and 'Crescent' as in Mornington Crescent. Each person should write their word at the top of their piece of paper then hand it on to another member of the group.

Give everyone one minute to write a sentence for the word they have been given.

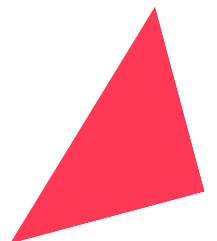
John could write: "The monument stood still in the coldness of night, absorbing stories of meetings, arguments, child's play and pigeons of the city"

Kiedy could write: "His eyes became oval orbs as he looked on with shock at the scenes before him"

Celia could write: "Sergeant Moorgate crouched low beneath the barricade, explosions ringing in his ear as his troops prepared to move forward"

Gurneet writes: "The Crescent moon glowed a marvellous pink as she crept from the house into the dead of night"

This sentence then forms the starting point for a scene. Give the group 3 minutes to read their phrases and to look for links. Consider the images in the text, any suggestion of characters, themes, period. Sometimes the sentences fit together coherently, other groups will find some funny contrast in the sentences or might initially feel stumped. It is often the groups were the most challenging collection of sentences, come up with the most engaging work.



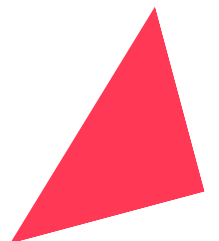
Exercise #2: Using unusual source material to devise new stories

Ask the group to create four tableaux from the sentences. They might choose to create a tableau of each sentence, or, having explored more of an overview, they might present four images from an emerging narrative. Creating still images will keep the focus on the images and emotions that the text evokes rather than trying to force a narrative.

Once the group has arrived at four tableaux, share these with the other groups and asked the audience what they can read from these pictures. This can often jump start further ideas for scenes that the group might not have thought of. Once feedback has been received, give the groups between 5 and 10 minutes to generate a short scene.

The aim of the exercise

This devising method encourages students to steer away from obvious scenarios when creating scenes. By working from a random text, they will arrive at a different collection of words and phrases. It will allow them to think more creatively to find links between them. Often the results are quite unique and a great starting point for devising a new story. It's also a way of exploring non script-based text as a starting point.



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Visit us at the Mercury Theatre for the tour of Evelyn on Wednesday 1 June - Saturday 11 June.

We hope to see you there!