



# FOCUS

## EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS AT THE WEST YORKSHIRE PLAYHOUSE

Second year BA Theatre and Performance student Becky Salt has been actively engaged in a number of activities outside her studies, such as several opportunities with the West Yorkshire Playhouse. Becky has performed in two professional shows, and earlier this year she was also part of a dynamic young company in their modern adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, and is now performing in their current production of *Grapes of Wrath*.

Along with the range of performing opportunities available as part of her course and outside the University, Becky also volunteers front of house at the Playhouse as well as participating in First Floor, an outreach project aimed to help young people learn new skills, discover new talents and interests and meet new people.

As part of West Yorkshire Playhouse's National Theatre Connections programme, Becky gained the opportunity to be assistant director, working with a group of 16 young people on a production called *Status Update*, which later transferred to Sheffield Theatres.

While enjoying the involvement with local organisations, Becky maintains her participation at the University, engaging in several performance societies and learning new skills within her committee roles. Becky also represents the University with the Leeds Love scheme, delivering theatre and performance workshops within local schools.

Opportunities for students are offered both through the curriculum and through a broad range of co-curricular activities offered and supported by the University, Leeds University Union or the wider community. Such activities can enhance a student's academic learning and work-related skills.

These opportunities have allowed Becky to develop and practice her skills base, to get involved within the University, local theatres and the community, and will provide opportunities for further development in her final year of studying and beyond graduation.



Becky Salt by Lee Watson at Midgleymedia



## PERFORM 17 FESTIVAL

First year students on the BA Theatre and Performance course recently performed four pieces of contemporary theatre as part of the Perform 17 Festival.

The festival is part of the Performance Project module which provides students with the opportunity to experience the elements involved in creating a real-life public performance. Students are allocated into groups, are referred to as 'companies' as they would be in industry. The four companies each performed a piece that emerged from a staff-led research interest producing the following plays:

### **The Message**

Eight scenes exploring life in the "post-truth" era through the lens of Marshall McLuhan's idea that "the medium is the message". Combining multimedia technology with original writing, verbatim material, choreography and film, the piece asked questions about how we distinguish the fake from the real in our increasingly mediated and always-connected world.

### **WWW.**

Technology continues to grow and advance, but where is the line between intrigue and invasion? In *WWW.* through physical theatre, ensemble choreography, autobiographical text and a live camera feed, the pleasures and perils of our cybernetic society and its underlying power to consume us are explored. Rather than resolve these issues, the piece aims to leave the audience with a question: Who's Watching Whom?

### **Resistible Rises?**

The *Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* is a savage and witty parable of the rise of Hitler, recast by Brecht into a small-time Chicago gangster's takeover of the city's greengrocer trade. It encapsulates a wide range of parody and pastiche with Brecht taking inspiration from Richard III to Al Capone, without diminishing the horror of the real life Nazi prototypes. In exploring what makes a dictator, this adaptation depicts the power struggle of gangster Arturo Ui and his rise to dictatorship, drawing on the original rise of Hitler and also on more contemporary examples. Expect music, violence and plenty of cauliflowers!

### **Four Metamorphoses: Tereus and Procne - The Wedding**

This immersive performance used six myths by Ovid to create a range of exciting environments for the audience. It updated the story of Tereus and Procne and presented it within the setting of 'Ovid's Hotel and Spa', where several unexpected comic, brutal and terrifying transformations took place.



First year students performing in *WWW.*

## NEW PLAY MARKS THE END OF BRITISH COAL MINING

*The Last Seam* has been written to mark the closure of Hatfield Main colliery near Doncaster, one of the last three deep seam pits in the country, which ceased working in the summer of 2015.

Garry Lyons, an established playwright and lecturer in the School, has based his drama on stories he has collected over a five month period from ex-miners, their families and the local community around Hatfield Main.

The play covers the period from the Miners' Strike of 1984-1985 through to the shutting of the mine and the Brexit referendum. The project was made possible by a £15,000 Grants for the Arts Award from Arts Council England.

*The Last Seam* was given its first public reading to a full house at Cast, Doncaster's professional theatre, in early April. The reading was performed by actors from the West Yorkshire Playhouse under the direction of the Playhouse's new associate director, Amy Leach.



Actor Jack Lord (middle) in rehearsals for *The Last Seam*

The success of the event has attracted interest from a number of venues and producers across the north of England. Plans are now underway for a full production of *The Last Seam* in 2018, with a run at Cast and a tour of former mining towns as well as established theatres.

"The piece really struck a chord with the audience. The nature of the miners' stories and events that coincided with the Miners' Strike are obviously of local interest. However, the personal stories and journeys that were depicted through Garry's writing enabled a wider resonance with audiences across the range of ages and backgrounds." Daljinder Singh, Associate Producer at Cast