Angus Thongs & Even More Snogging

Based on the books by Louise Rennison
Adapted for the stage
by Mark Gatley and Louise Rennison

Special thanks to Lucy Tomlin from Skillz Education

Director Ryan McByrd
Designer Hannah Clark
Composer & Musical Director Alex Silverman
Puppet Design & Animation Blind Summit
Lighting Designer Ben Cracknell
Sound Designer Simon Baker
Casting Director Jessica Ronane
Assistant Director (Birkbeck Theatre) Sam Wood
Production Manager Suzi Cubbage
Stage Manager Michelle Booth
Deputy Stage Manager Vickki Maiden
Assistant Stage Manager Adele Vines

Resource Pack
including materials for KS3 PSHE.
Blimey O’Reilly it’s EVEN MORE Snogging!

Guten morgen, bonjour, hello and welcome to the ‘Angus, Thongs and Even More Snogging’ Resource Pack! We are trés excited about this fabby new Production here at West Yorkshire Playhouse where Louise Rennison and Mark Catley have joined forces to bring the fabbity-fab madnosis of Georgia Nicholson’s confessions to the stage!

Delve in and find out more about the marvy Partnership between Writers Louise and Mark; have a peek at some splendidico moments from rehearsals; discover how Angus, the Scottish wildcat, was brought to life for the stage, plus lots more!

As this is such an exclusive occasion we wanted to provide a Resource that would hopefully be vair useful and unique. So, we have locked Viking horns with our petite amie and general personne extrordinaire, Lucy Tomlin from Skillz Education, to put together some ideas about how the splendidico ‘Confessions of Georgia Nicholson Collection’, starting with ‘Angus, Thongs and Full Frontal Snogging’, can be a marvy help to deliver PSHE lessons for KS3!

Au Revoir and Enjoy!
Contents

Part One
4 The full frontal story – Information about the splendidifico Writer Louise Rennison and her full collection of works
5 Cast and Crew list of our fabby Production
6 Meet the Characters
7 Interview with the trés talented writer Mark Catley
8 Interview with Puppet master extrordinaire, Nick Barnes from Blind Summit
10 Interview with Sam Wood, the vair sophis Assistant Director

Enjoy!
So, where and how did it all begin?

The year is 1951, the place - Leeds and author, Louise Rennison is born. She grows up in a three bedroom house with her mum and dad, aunt and uncle and cousin and her Grandparents until she is fifteen. At fifteen years old, her parents decide to emigrate to Wairakei in New Zealand. Some time later, Louise returns to England and lives in Notting Hill Gate, London, for a while before moving to Brighton to complete a course in Performing Arts.

After completing this course, Louise writes her first autobiographical one woman show called ‘Stevie Wonder Felt my Face’ - a comic monologue telling the story of Louise’s life and loves growing up in Leeds and living in London. This piece wins great critical acclaim and awards at the Edinburgh Festival in the 1980s. Louise’s sheer honesty and great sense of humour does not go unnoticed and she contributes regularly to BBC Radio 4 shows including Home Truths and Woman’s Hour. Louise is contacted by a publisher and asked if she has ever considered writing a book – particularly from a teenager’s perspective.

‘Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging’ is born – the first book in the Georgia Nicolson series, written in a diary format and described by the Sunday Telegraph as: ‘Bridget Jones – but funnier’.

The huge success following the publication leads to another ten books to the ‘Georgia Nicolson’ series.

Louise has won many awards for her work including:

- 1999 - Nestlé Smarties Bronze Award
- Sheffield Children’s Book of the Year shortlist
- Branford Boase Award
- Federation of Children’s Book Groups Pick of the Year
- Cuffies Award funniest novel designation
- 2000 Booklist Book for Youth Editor’s Choice Top-Ten Youth First Novels
- Lancashire Children’s Book of the Year Award shortlist
- Waterstone’s Pick of the Paperbacks for ‘It’s OK, I’m Wearing Really Big Knickers!: Further Confessions of Georgia Nicolson’
- 2001 New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age
- American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults and Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers designations
West Yorkshire Playhouse & Micklelou Ltd

By Louise Rennison
Adapted for the stage by Louise Rennison & Mark Catley

Cast & Crew

Margaret Cabourn-Smith
Rachel Caffrey
Mabel Clements
Edward Green
Emily Houghton

Yemisi Oyinloye
Naomi Petersen
George Potts
Lewis Rainer
Leon Scott

Muti
Jas
Wet Lindz
Robbie
Rosie
Ellen
Georgia
Vatti
Dave the Laugh
Masimo

Margaret Cabourn-Smith
Rachel Caffrey
Mabel Clements
Edward Green
Emily Houghton
Yemisi Oyinloye
Naomi Petersen
George Potts
Lewis Rainer
Leon Scott

Director
Composer & Musical Director
Puppet Design & Animation
Lighting Designer
Sound Designer
Casting Director
Assistant Director
(Birkbeck Trainee)
Production Manager
Stage Manager
Deputy Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager

Ryan McBayde
Hannah Clark
Alex Silverman
Blind Summit
Ben Cracknell
Simon Baker
Jessica Ronane
Sam Wood
Suzi Cubbage
Michelle Booth
Vicki Maiden
Adele Vines
Georgia

Georgia, the honest, energetic, and thoroughly funny 14 year old who invites us to come on a journey with her into the world of boys, bestest friends, embarrassing parents, adorable little sisters, and a beloved scottish wildcat cat called Angus.

Ace Gang

Georgia and her bestest friends, Jas, Rosie and Ellen.

Dave the Laugh

Dave the Laugh aka ‘The Hommeister’ – Georgia’s best ‘male’ friend and accidental snogging partner.

Robbie

Robbie, aka ‘Sex God’ and Georgia’s first real boyfriend. Lead singer of ‘The Stiff Dylans’.

Masimo

Masimo, the Italian Stallion, who becomes the new lead singer of ‘The Stiff Dylans’. He is suave, sophisticated and drop-dead gorgeous.
Interview with Mark Catley

What did you find most challenging about adapting the 'Angus, Thongs' Collection for the stage? Compacting 10 books into 2 hours on stage and keeping the material faithful to the books were the hardest tasks - it would have been so much easier to write a brand new story using Louise's characters!

Please describe your working partnership with Louise Rennison during this process. Louise is the expert I needed to listen to and then, at times, ignore. The play is such a different medium from the novel and certain things just wouldn't work so I had to trust my own instincts as a stage writer and trust the source material - which wasn't difficult as it is so good. Louise has been very brave in letting her baby be looked after by someone else but at all times I tried to look after it in a responsible manner.

Was it difficult to write the play from the point of view of a teenager? How did you go about this? Strange question and one I keep getting asked but, I'm a writer, I've written for Dot Cotton but I'm not a 300 year old chain smoking cockney - I use the brilliant source material to understand the characters and get on with it - we're all human! Plus, as a fourteen year old boy, I was obsessed with fourteen year old girls so there is a certain amount of experience there.

What advice would you give to anyone who would like to pursue a career in writing for television or the stage? It's getting harder, there are less jobs - make sure you want it and make sure you believe you can be good enough. The best writers I know have varied and quite bonkers lifestyles - it all helps to create stories. And remember: writing isn't about showing the audience how clever you are, it's about entertaining them. Less is more.

Tell us about when you started writing? Started writing in my final year at uni (1996) - mainly because I didn't have anything I wanted to write about in my dissertation. I wrote a play called “Angel” about a friend of mine in Beeston whose boyfriend escaped jail to visit her.

What do you enjoy most about writing? Coming up with ideas and the finished piece - all the stuff in the middle is a royal pain in the neck.

What are the main differences between writing for television and writing for the stage? More people in TV tend to think they can tell you how to write despite not being able to write themselves - that doesn't happen in theatre. The medium of TV is less taxing though as you can have multiple locations and cast and jump cuts and special effects - but I tend to ignore those restrictions when writing for the stage anyway (see ATAEMS).

Up until now what has been your involvement with West Yorkshire Playhouse in regards to writing projects? Have written three plays for WYP (Sunbeam Terrace, Crap Dad, Scuffer) and have run the So You Want To Be A Writer course for the last 7 years. I have also worked for Theatre Co. Blah Blah Blah and Slung Low in Leeds.

How did your involvement with Angus, Thongs and Even More Snogging come about? I was contacted by WYP who pitched the notion of doing an adaptation - they neglected to mention that there were 10 books.
Interview with Nick Barnes – Artistic Director of the marvy ‘Blind Summit Theatre’

Blind Summit

Can you remember your first experience of puppetry? Please tell us when your interest in puppetry began and your journey up until you formed Blind Summit in 1997. I first became interested in puppetry whilst studying drama at Hull University.

A group of us took a puppet production of Ubu Roi to the Edinburgh Festival, which we performed in the Pleasance Courtyard. Whilst there, I saw a show by a French theatre director Philippe Genty. It was a magical blend of design, puppetry and dance and I was transfixed. A couple of years later I spent the summer at the International Institute of the Marionette in France taking a workshop led by Philippe. It was there that I became really interested in the idea of making puppets.

Thereafter, having studied theatre design at the Slade School of Fine Art, I was continually looking for opportunities to incorporate puppets into the shows I was designing.

In 1996 I took a trip to China, travelling for several weeks across the whole country. In the south west of China I met a Chinese man who had taught himself English and written an account of his life as an English Teacher through the Cultural Revolution. I bought a copy of his book and had the idea when I returned home to try and adapt it for puppets! It was a pretty random idea and really just an excuse to make some puppets, so I began by making him at various stages in his life. Once I had the puppets I then realised I needed some puppeteers and so decided to apply for a small grant from the Arts Council to form a company. This was the beginning of Blind Summit.

Please tell us how the ancient Japanese art form of Bunraku puppetry influences your work. Bunraku informs at some level all the puppets we make and we have adopted this style of puppetry on many occasions.

Traditionally there are three puppeteers operating each puppet in Japanese Bunraku and the puppets are held directly, rather than with strings or rods. This is our preferred way of manipulating puppets. It allows for a highly realistic range of movement and a great deal of precision and control. I think we are also inspired by the beautiful design, the intricate construction and attention to detail of traditional Japanese puppetry, which has such a distinct visual aesthetic and a rigorous, uncompromising performance style and technique.

What are the main differences for an audience member in regards to watching a puppetry based performance and a performance played by live actors? Much theatre in this country is text based and requires the audience to concentrate on and follow the plot and argument and interaction of the characters.

I think with puppets the audience are asked to make an even greater leap of faith and to suspend their disbelief further than when watching actors, and to deconstruct the logic of what they are seeing as much as what they are hearing.
Interview with Nick Barnes

For us a great way of winning their trust is through the use of comedy. Ultimately though I imagine the goal of both forms of theatre is the same: to leave the audience challenged, provoked and entertained.

What advice would you give to someone who would like to more about puppetry — especially in regards to connecting with the puppet in performance? For me, making the puppets provides a direct connection to the puppet itself. However the real secret to performing with puppets seems to be connecting to the other puppeteers through the puppet, rather than connecting to the puppet itself. The puppetry could be seen as a conversation between the puppeteers, where the puppet is the cipher for a highly visual and movement based language.

Is this the first time you have created puppets to be used in a performance alongside live actors? No, in fact most of our work combines actors and puppets. We are fascinated by the relationship between them on stage and often play with this dynamic in our own shows. I think the audience are intrigued by the notion that the puppet might in some way be aware of its predicament — the fact that it only exists thanks to the puppeteers who bring it to life, and are genuinely amused when the puppet acknowledges this in some way.

What tips would you give to the actors in ‘Angus Thongs and Even More Snogging’ in regards to their interaction with the puppets on stage? The actors on stage with the puppet are often vital to its success. They have to believe in the character of the puppet as they would the character of any of their co-performers, but this doesn’t necessarily require a particular skill above and beyond that of any actor. It is probably more beholden on the puppet maker and puppeteer to provide a character that the other performers can believe in and work alongside!

Could you tell us more about how your involvement with Angus, Thongs and Even More Snogging began and how you approached designing the puppets? We were approached by the producer at WYP to be involved with Angus, having worked a few years ago on His Dark Materials, a co-production with Birmingham Rep.

Our design approach is always quite practical and tends to involve where possible a workshop with performers to consider which techniques will best serve the puppetry needs of the script. In this case Angus had several ‘action’ scenes where he is required to leap around and so we had to create quite a dynamic puppet. In addition he is required to be operated by just one puppeteer. This always creates some challenges as a fully operated cat puppet might require three puppeteers to hold its limbs, head and back, and maybe even a fourth for the tail! The solution to this is to search for a construction technique which can replace the puppeteers, whilst maintaining as much movement as possible. Ultimately a puppet is a representation of a living thing and is to some degree an abstracted version. As a puppet designer you have to decide which parts of the puppets body, when they are connected in a certain way will best make sense of the character you are creating. So for example, with Angus we decided we wanted a flexible spine and a soft furry finish, rather than perhaps, a rigid sculpted body from a material such as wood.
Interview with Sam Wood

Why did you decide to get into Theatre Directing?
I began my career as an actor, performing with many of the UK’s largest producing houses including the RSC, National, Bristol Old Vic and Lyric Hammersmith. Having acted I developed an intrinsic understanding of the actors instrument and how performers form characterisation successfully in a process. During this time I was exposed to many directors and slowly began to find my focus widening beyond an individual role and becoming increasingly interested in the conceptual nature of a production. The varying techniques employed by these directors in the rehearsal room became more significant, the aesthetic elements of design, costume, lighting, sound and how they worked together to achieve a coherent whole.

How does it feel to be involved in a brand new Production like Angus, Thongs and Even More Snogging? What are the main challenges of being part of developing a brand new Production like this?
Being part of a new play is always an interesting process. One of the main challenges and indeed benefits comes from not working with an established text. When it comes to staging a new piece of writing like this, everything is a working progress. Sometimes what has been written will transfer very well into a physical space, sometimes not, but more often than not in new writing the primary advantage you have is the writer in the rehearsal room to draw from.

Louise Rennison, and local writer Mark Catley have written the script collaboratively and at least one of them has always been on hand during rehearsal. To date they have made a whopping seven drafts of the play for us to work off each being different from the last. As we began to stage sections of the play it became apparent that some scenes worked well, others did not. Since then we have had new scenes written for us, some scenes scrapped all together, lines have been changed, cut, or moved and all to make this the best possible play it can be. This is the freedom you have with new writing but it’s by no mean easy. Sometimes you might be getting rid of scene you have spent valuable time working, or you spend even more time blocking a new scene in its place so there has to be a limit in order to work successfully.

What are your main responsibilities as Assistant Director on such a unique Production?
When working on a large-scale production like Angus, Thongs and Even More Snogging your duties as an assistant become a lot more specific.
The way that the script has been written is essentially quite filmic in nature, lots of very rapid scenes all in different locations snapping from one to the other, sometimes at breakneck pace. Achieving this practically on a stage presents many challenges and is naturally a lot harder then in film.

In the theatre even one change in location can be a logistical nightmare, meaning a whole new piece of set, a very quick costume change, co-ordinating actors, stage management, flyman, musicians. To make this work we have had to develop a system of complex transitions that shift the play from scene to scene. This not only involves three different location trucks but also incorporates live musical underscoring that compliments the world of the play and ensures there is absolutely no drop in energy or urgency as the play moves forward. As the assistant I have been responsible for monitoring the fluidity and integrity of these transitions.

I have also been allowed to be an important part of the script editing process for this production, which has been fantastic to say the least. Being familiar with the blocking and the work solidified in the rehearsal room, I have spent a lot of time working closely with each of the writers when cuts and additions have been made.

For this production the creative team have also made the interesting choice to use puppetry during the performance. Angus and Libby (Georgia’s sister) will be played by puppets and have been made by renowned puppetry company Blind Summit. Notably the puppets are going to be operated by the actors, most of who have never even picked up a puppet let alone operated one in a stage production. As a result a lot of my time has been dedicated to working with the actors one on one to ensure they feel confident and comfortable when manipulating the puppets.

Most importantly however, as an assistant your primary focus and duty is to the director. On every production you will have some general duties and some more specific ones. Speaking more generally an assistant needs to get inside the directors head and intrinsically understand what they want from a production and by that token compliment and facilitate the technical and stylistic ways they wish to work. A good assistant needs diplomacy; tact, initiative and the ability to anticipate potential problems and by that token offer creative solutions.

The Production also focuses on puppetry – for the characters of Libby and Angus the cat. What elements does this performance style add to the Production do you think?

Puppetry is an interesting convention, and very popular in the industry at the moment. If executed with precision and clarity, puppets onstage can be fascinating to watch and add an entirely different dimension to a production.

The choice to use puppets is indeed a bold one. What you are essentially saying to your audience is that you have not chosen to represent this person or animal literally but entirely figuratively, and as a director you have to make the decision as to whether it is right for your production or not. For a piece like Angus, Thongs and Even More Snogging, puppetry is entirely appropriate. The story is told from inside the head of a fourteen-year-old girl as she begins to explore her first feelings of love, everything is heightened, especially all the larger than life characters in her life, and particularly her cat Angus and baby sister Libby. These characters are perfect to be represented by puppets and as such they enjoy the advantage of not being bound to the same rules as real actors on a stage. We can do things with the puppets that would be simply unachievable were we using a real cat or young actor to play the parts.
The actors are playing characters younger than themselves – are there any techniques or exercises used in rehearsals to help the actors play these characters? What has made Louise Rennison’s books a cultural phenomenon is their uncanny ability to speak to young girls right across the world. The four actors playing the Ace Gang girls have all experienced much of what has been written in the play, so it’s not really been necessary to use exercises of techniques to help them find these characters. All that has been necessary is creating an environment that allows the actors to feel comfortable and safely explore their former younger selves.

The opening show – what’s the atmosphere like in the rehearsal room at the moment? Pressure mounts with every passing day during a rehearsal period but this has been one of the most collaborative and genuinely hilarious processes I have ever been a part of. Make no mistake however putting on a new piece of work like this is a massive risk and nothing short of a mammoth undertaking. The Playhouse is reaching out to a whole new demographic they have never really tackled before in young teenage girls. However we have a good script, a great company of actors, a fantastic creative team all of whom are dedicated to the success of this production. No one is being complacent however, everyone realises what needs to be done and as a result are working hard to achieve it.

If you could describe the Production in three words what would they be?

Courtesy of writer Louise Rennison:

Fabbity-Fab-Fab!
SNOGTASTIC!
Marvy!