

Director **Sarah Esdaile**
Designer **Ruari Murchison**
Lighting Designer **Chris Davey**
Sound Designer **Mic Pool**
Composer **Simon Slater**
Casting Director **Siobhan Bracke**
Voice **Charmian Hoare**

Cast Ross Armstrong, Sam Cox,
John Hollingworth, Maxine Peake, Ann Penfold
John Ramm, Lex Shrapnel, Eleanor Wylde

21^{WY} PLAY
HOUSE

18 February to 12 March

The
**Deep
Blue
Sea**

By **Terence Rattigan**



Teacher Resource Pack

Introduction



Welcome to the Resource Pack for West Yorkshire Playhouse's production of *The Deep Blue Sea* by Terence Rattigan. In the pack you will find a host of information sheets to enhance your visit to the show and to aid your students' exploration of this classic text.

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The Deep Blue Sea

By Terence Rattigan, Directed by Sarah Esdaile, Designed Ruari Murchison

Hester left her husband for another man. Left the security of the well respected judge, for wild, unpredictable, sexy Freddie – an ex-fighter pilot.

Now she's reached the end of the line. Freddie's raffish charm has worn thin and Hester is forced to face the reality of life with a man who doesn't want to be with her. The simple act of a forgotten birthday pushes her to desperation point and to facing a future that offers no easy resolutions.

Rattigan's reputation was founded on his mastery of the 'well made play'. Now, one hundred years after his birth, it is his skilful creation of troubled, emotional characters that has brought audiences and critics alike to re-visit his plays with renewed appreciation.

West Yorkshire Playhouse launches Rattigan's centenary celebrations with this exciting new production of one of his finest and most modern plays.

Creative Education at West Yorkshire Playhouse

Thousands of young people enjoy our performances as part of a school trip but we can offer much more than just tickets. From opportunities for students to work with professional directors to set design workshops the Playhouse offers a range of activities to complement a trip to the theatre.

We are always open to ideas about future projects or one off activities taking place at the Playhouse or in your school so please do get in touch to talk about ways in which we can support your work.

To find out more about the work of the Creative Education Team, please contact Jessica Farmer on jessica.farmer@wyp.org.uk.

Resource Pack Thanks

Richard Moran (cover image), Keith Pattison (production photography), Suzi Cabbage, Ruari Murchison, Sarah Esdaile, Maxine Peake

Synopsis



Set in 1952, the play opens with landlady Mrs Elton and tenants Philip Welch and his wife discovering the body of fellow tenant Hester Page who has tried and failed to commit suicide. Unable to call a registered doctor as attempted suicide was an offence at this time, Mrs Elton sends upstairs for Mr Miller, a disgraced doctor who is now a bookmaker's clerk.

Whilst Mr Miller attends to Hester, it is revealed by Mrs Elton to Mr and Mrs Welch that Hester is in fact Lady Collyer, the wife of an important judge, Sir William Collyer, whom she has left to live with her lover ex-RAF pilot Freddie Page. Unsure of Page's whereabouts and buoyed by self-importance, Philip Welch decides to telephone Collyer and tell him of the 'accident' who subsequently arrives to see Hester.

Through her conversation with her estranged husband we learn that Hester and Freddie's relationship has broken down and that they are desperately poor, relying on Freddie's golf winnings and the sales of Hester's paintings for money.

Following Collyer's departure, Freddie arrives home in good spirits having played golf all weekend. Through the exchange between them we discover that Freddie had forgotten Hester's birthday which appears to have been Hester's breaking point. Unaware of the morning's events Freddie tells Hester of a possible new job as a test pilot in South America. As they get ready to go for a celebratory drink, Freddie finds Hester's suicide letter.

As their relationship further unravels, Freddie comes to the decision that he must leave Hester since their relationship is destroying them both. Having decided that he will go alone to South America he leaves the flat and Hester is left inconsolable.

Freddie drops a letter in to Collyer suggesting that Collyer ask Hester back to her old life. Collyer makes his way to Hester and pleads with her to return to Eaton Square, stating that he loves her more than ever. Hester knows that this could never work, that she is a changed person and could never go back. Bill leaves and Hester's anguish leads her to once again contemplate suicide. However, she is interrupted by Mr Miller who tells her that she must accept that Freddie has left and find a reason to go on living.

Terence Rattigan

Timeline



- 1911** Terence Mervyn Rattigan born 10 June in London.
- 1920** Rattigan begins his studies at Sandroyd Preparatory School, where he wins a scholarship to go to Harrow.
- 1925** Starts Harrow and during his time here, writes his first substantial play script, *The Pure in Heart*.
- 1930** Goes to Oxford University to read history. Experimental one-act play submitted to the Oxford University Dramatic Society (OUDS) annual playwriting competition; Rattigan told: 'Some of it smashing, but it goes too far.' While here, he also stars in the OUDS production of *Romeo and Juliet*, which is directed by John Gielgud with Peggy Ashcroft and Edith Evans.
- 1933** Speech to the Oxford Union in support of the motion:
'This House will in no circumstances fight for its King and country.' First-hand experience of the rise of Nazism while on holiday in the Black Forest. Rattigan leaves Oxford without taking his finals to become a full-time writer after his first play, *First Episode*, transfers to the West End.
- 1935** Writes *A Tale of Two Cities*, which is broadcast in 1950.
- 1936** At his father's insistence, Rattigan takes up a job as a screenwriter for Warner Brothers. In November, *French Without Tears*, a comedy about trainee civil servants, opens at the Criterion Theatre, and is greeted by enthusiastic reviews. 'But I don't believe it, even *The Times* likes it!', Rattigan comments. Begins working as a freelance writer.
- 1938** Rattigan's anti-Hitler satire, *Follow My Leader*, is banned by the Lord Chamberlain to allay fears of offending the Germans.
- 1939** Rattigan's *After the Dance* opens at St James's Theatre, London, and a film of *French Without Tears* is also made.
- 1940** *Follow My Leader* opens in January at the Apollo Theatre. In April, Rattigan joins the RAF and, after training, is posted to Coastal Command as pilot officer air-gunner wireless operator. In May, Rattigan's *Grey Farm* is produced at the Hudson Theatre, New York.
- 1942** *Flare Path*, a wartime flag-waver, written in August. The play opens in London and runs for nearly 700 performances. *Beveridge Report* published.
- 1943** Rattigan seconded to RAF film unit, where he reworks *Flare Path* and starts work on *The Way to the Stars*. Also writes *While the Sun Shines*, which opens at the Globe Theatre.
- 1944** Three Rattigan plays running in the West End.
- 1945** Film of *The Way to the Stars*.
- 1946** *The Winslow Boy* premieres at the Lyric Theatre on 23 May. Rattigan is described by a critic as being a writer in a 'class of the distinguished and serious writer'.
- 1947** New York premiere of *The Winslow Boy*. Film of *While the Sun Shines*. Collaborates with Graham Greene on film script of *Brighton Rock*.
- 1948** *The Browning Version*, about a school teacher on the point of retirement, opens in September at the Phoenix Theatre and is also published. Also writes the film script of *The Winslow Boy*.

Terence Rattigan

Timeline

- 1949** Writes *Adventure Story*. In February Rattigan's close friend Kenneth Morgan kills himself, inspiring Rattigan to write *The Deep Blue Sea*.
- 1951** Film script of *The Browning Version*. The *Final Test* written for TV.
- 1952** *The Deep Blue Sea* opens in March at the Duchess Theatre, London. The play portrays a woman trapped in a relationship with a man incapable of loving her.
- 1953** Publication of first two volumes of Rattigan's *Collected Plays: Aunt Edna*, Rattigan's embodiment of the middle-class audience, makes her appearance.
- 1954** *Separate Tables* opens in September at St James's Theatre, London.
- 1955** Films of *The Deep Blue Sea* and *The Man Who Loved Redheads*.
- 1956** Rattigan attends the first night of John Osborne's play, *Look Back in Anger*, and tells a reporter that it should have been called *Look How Unlike Terence Rattigan I'm Being!*
- 1957** Laurence Olivier and Marilyn Monroe star in *The Prince and the Showgirl*, Rattigan's adaptation of his own play, *The Sleeping Prince*.
- 1958** *Variation on a Theme* and film of *Separate Tables*.
- 1962** A television play, *Heart to Heart*, is written for the BBC.
- 1966** Televised version of *A Bequest to the Nation*, entitled *Nation*, broadcast.
- 1969** Film of *Goodbye Mr Chips*.
- 1970** *A Bequest to the Nation* opens in
- September at Haymarket Theatre, London. *The Winslow Boy* is also successfully revived, which leads to a renewed interest in Rattigan's plays throughout the decade.
- 1971** Rattigan awarded a knighthood in the New Year's honours list. Death of his mother, Vera Rattigan.
- 1972** *High Summer* written for TV.
- 1973** *In Praise of Love* opens in September at the Duchess Theatre, London.
- 1974** *Cause Célèbre* is written for BBC Radio. It is staged three years later.
- 1977** Attends the first night of *Cause Célèbre* in a wheelchair. Two weeks later, after having toured the West End for the last time by car, he boards a plane for Bermuda where he dies on 30 November. He was 66.

Timeline © John Good. Reproduced with kind permission.



The Rehearsal Process

James Blakey – Assistant Director

We are in production week. The first preview for *The Deep Blue Sea* is tomorrow night and we are in the thick of technical rehearsals.

The actors are on stage, in wardrobe or standing by in their dressing rooms. The creative team including director Sarah Esdaile, set and costume designer Ruari Merchuson, lighting designer Chris Davey, sound designer Mic Pool and musical director Simon Slater are in the auditorium amongst desks of sophisticated technology that control all the sound and electrical elements of the production. The stage management team, following instructions from the director are 'running' the tech rehearsal. Stage Manager Julie Issott – as well as running her own team – is the point of contact between the creative team and the actors. She is in radio contact with the director, her Assistant Stage Manager Adele Vines and the Deputy Stage Manager. She is also in constant contact with Suzi Cubbage the Production Manager, who as the title suggests is the overseer of the whole gig. She is managing a minutely timetabled schedule, juggling the needs of all the other staff and calculating eleventh hour budgeting decisions – all in all not an easy job!

The smooth running of the technical rehearsal depends upon the organisation and good communication of this team. Julie runs a tight ship and at West Yorkshire Playhouse 'technicals' tend to run like a well-oiled machine. There are countless other people working who are too many to name – the set construction and props staff are on hand to make ongoing developments to the aesthetic look and practical use of the set. Sound and electrics assistants are refocusing lights or setting speaker levels. The wardrobe department are making adjustments to costumes and working on the actors' hair. As for me, I work on the basis that the director can't be in two places at once. So, if Sarah is working closely with the creative team to make a particular moment technically beautiful then I might be off on the other side of the auditorium checking audience sightlines or the actors' audibility. I could be in another part of the building liaising with departments like Marketing or Front of House, running bits of scenes with some of the actors in the rehearsal room, or getting people cups of coffee!

Over the course of two twelve hour days – our first days in the theatre after 4 weeks in the rehearsal room – we are staggering through the play in a stop/start manner until each moment is as close as we can make it to how it will be in performance. This is mainly about timing – making sure that the story of the play as it is written and the artistic aesthetic of the show as it is envisaged by the director is served by what is happening on stage and how that is supported through sound and lighting; for example when to give a cue light so an actor can enter at exactly the right moment, or when to cue a piece of music so that it chimes perfectly with the journey of a character. For the actors it's a process of crucial familiarisation with the performance space and the auditorium. Moments that work perfectly in the limited space of a rehearsal room can sometimes feel ineffective in a vacuous 750-seater auditorium, like the Quarry Theatre. It's up to the creative team to help the actors make this transition.

So let's reel back a couple of months to think about what has led us to this point...

The Rehearsal Process

The Design Process and Casting

Months before the show is on the director and designer begin working on the design process. This differs in every director/designer relationship but what they are working towards is a 1:25 scale model of what will become the set for the show. This model, and the costume drawings that usually accompany it, are taken in their various stages of development to meetings with production staff at West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Meanwhile the director is also working with a casting director and actors' agents to arrange meetings or auditions with potential cast members. A meeting is usually when an actor is well established and the director thinks they will be right for the part, in which case an audition is not necessary. It is a way of checking if director and actor share similar views about the character and the way it could be played.

Rehearsals Day One

The first day of rehearsal like all first days can be a nervous affair. Everyone wants to get on with rehearsing the play that they've spent the last few weeks thinking about but before the real business of work can begin some initial fences must be jumped. After a tour of the building there is the 'meet and greet' and a full reading of the play with everyone sat around in a circle of chairs. All departments of the building are invited – it's an opportunity for the staff to become better acquainted with both the acting company and the play itself. In the afternoon the director and designer give the company a tour of the scale model which by now has been finalised. On our first day for *The Deep Blue Sea*, Sarah used the rest of the afternoon to talk about why she chose to direct the play and how her interpretations might be realised in production. She also took the actors through her working process to give everyone a sense of what the next few weeks would hold.



The Rehearsal Process



Rehearsals Text Work

The first week and a half of rehearsal was mainly spent around a table in the spacious and airy Rehearsal Room 1. This time was split roughly evenly between text work and character work. The first and most basic function of the text work is that it breaks the play up into manageable chunks, which we call units. Units are broken down mainly in terms of the entrances and exits of the various characters. This helps us to see what the key narrative events are in each section. We come to a shared understanding about what this is by taking a group decision on what to name the unit.

Otherwise text work is about delving into the inner meaning of the play. After reading each unit, there are in-depth discussions about subtext, or in other words what the characters really want in each moment; what it is they're trying to do in saying the lines that are available to them. There are also conversations about the world of the play, by which I mean how the historical context of the time in which the play is written will inform our choices. This might be about how the social values of the time are different or simply practical questions about day to day life in the 1950s. My contribution to this process was largely about feeding back pieces of research. There were certain things that Sarah knew we would be interested in discussing and therefore asked me to carry out background research on before rehearsals began.

Some key questions for research and discussion were:

What was it like for RAF fighter pilots to adjust to civilian life after the war

How did the role of women in society change in these years

What was the impact of rationing and the austerity years?

Naturally things also came up in rehearsal that needed looking into. In the play there is a reference to Shakespeare's poem 'Venus and Adonis'. It is during an argument between Hester and her former husband William Collyer about the nature of her feelings for her new lover Freddie Page. Collyer quotes the poem to her to suggest that their relationship is based purely on lust and nothing more substantial. The more I read of the poem though the more I realised it was a useful reference point to various themes within the play and that Rattigan was positioning it quite deliberately in the heart of one of the most significant scenes of the play.

The text work is an opportunity to get to the bottom of the bread and butter questions that inform the 'given circumstances' of the way each scene is played. For example

What time of day is it?

What's the weather like outside?

What offstage journey has the character been on since the last time we saw them on stage?

The Rehearsal Process



Rehearsals Character Work

The other part of the early rehearsal process was taken up with character work. In the first instance the actors feedback to the rest of the company the 'homework' that they have been set before rehearsals by the director. They are asked to use the text as evidence and lifting words directly from the script to make lists about their character on the following topics:

Everything your character says about themselves.

Everything your character says about other people.

Everything other people say about your character.

Stage directions that relate to your character.

Biographical facts from the text about your character.

These are read out aloud in a long list. They are then asked to feedback their answers to questions that rely on a more imaginative leap on their part – still using the text as back up but applying their own interpretation of their character:

What colour best describes your character?

Where is their physical centre?

What animal would they be?

Is there a piece of music that either makes you think of your character or that your character listens to?

What is your imaginative life history for your character?

Is there an object that is important to your character?

What secret could your character share with other people in the play?

What secret could your character not share with other people in the play? (obviously this one remains a secret!)

Once this information has been shared, the character in question is 'hot-seated'. This 'in-character' Q&A can last up to an hour and covers everything from their daily routine, to their relationships with other characters, to the darkest corners of their psyche.

After this slightly exhausting but fascinating process all the other actors in the company, underscored by the piece of music that the character in question has chosen, plays at being the character. This process enables the actor to witness a whole palette of facets to the character that they are playing. It is a beautiful and often very moving thing to witness, particularly in a play like *The Deep Blue Sea* in which all of the characters hide away a good deal of pain under a rather repressed 1950s exterior.

The huge advantage to all of this preparation work is that it encourages actors to make early and instinctive decisions about their character that is informed and supported by evidence from the text. It is the marrying together of the script and the actor's imagination. Sharing this work ensures that once we get to rehearsing specific scenes, the actors' performances are already rich with the personal histories and relationships that they have discovered.

The Rehearsal Process

Drafting, Running and Noting

The middle chunk of the rehearsal process is devoted to a 'first draft' of staging. So based on the background work on the text and the characters, each unit is rehearsed so that it has a basic shape of movement that tells the story in an effective way. It's the first time the actors can get used to playing across from each other up on their feet, using rehearsal props and set furniture, all of which is provided by the props and stage management team. Also provided in the rehearsal room was a raked stage that was set at the same angle as the slope of the stage on the actual set. This was very useful for the actors because it can get a bit of getting used to. The remainder of rehearsals before going into the theatre to begin tech was spent going back over the first draft and adding detail, running longer sections, whole acts and ultimately the whole play. Each time a new draft of the unit is added the dynamic between the characters becomes stronger, richer, more detailed – in terms both of what they're saying and how they're moving. Once into running whole sections the director schedules notes sessions where they feedback suggestions for how moments can be improved. Sometimes a note can be enough to achieve the desired effect and sometimes it's necessary to rework sections in the rehearsal room. As time gets shorter the days get longer. It was usual in rehearsal for *The Deep Blue Sea* to begin at 10am and work until after 9pm.

Meanwhile, in the theatre, after four week's work that has coincided with our rehearsal period, set construction and dressing is just about complete and the Creative Team have arrived to plot the technical requirements of the show.

After our two days of 'tech' are complete we will squeeze in two dress rehearsals, where everything is as it will be for public performances (apart from the presence of the public of course!) and then the first preview, our first taste of a paying audience. We will work in the days during the previews, responding to how audiences receive the show and tweaking elements of staging and tech right up until the opening of the show next Tuesday, when local and national press will be here to write reviews. And then the performance run officially begins.



Interview

Sarah Esdaile – Director Maxine Peake – Hester

Sarah Esdaile returns to the West Yorkshire Playhouse for the fifth time to direct this revival of *The Deep Blue Sea*, one of the first major productions marking the Terence Rattigan centenary. 'I'd like to think that he's up there somewhere, finally enjoying all the attention and fuss of this year's celebrations.' Sarah is referring to the fact that, at the height of his commercial success, Rattigan had fallen out of grace with the theatrical establishment. His observations about the so called Angry Young Men emerging from The Royal Court were interpreted as disparaging and superior and a vicious backlash ensued, from which Rattigan's reputation took decades to recover. A recovery that was not to happen in his lifetime. He was marginalised, his work branded antiquated and derivative and his astonishing commercial and financial success was truncated, almost overnight. It is only now that his writing is being recognised for its universal and timeless themes and for packing an emotional punch that rivals anything penned by Osborne or Pinter.

For many *The Deep Blue Sea* is Rattigan at his most powerful. The play tells the story of Hester Collyer who walks out on her respectable, society marriage for the chance of fulfilment with her lover, ex RAF pilot Freddie Page. The disappointment of that relationship drives her to attempt suicide.

'Hester Collyer's plight represents that of many women of the day' Sarah explains, 'empowered by and used as workforce during the war, they were pushed back into their constrained social box during the challenging post war years. In 1952 women were still not allowed to drive buses, having flown Spitfires during the war. If you transported me back to the fifties I feel sure I'd be driven to putting my head in the oven!'

Of course, the play's themes transcend historical context. Hester Collyer's experiences could easily have been written about a woman living in 2011.

'Women today are sold the idea that a single relationship is the holy grail,' Esdaile explains. 'We're bombarded with this as fact and if we don't find that person then we've failed. It's a very modern thing for someone to say that they deserve the right to happiness. In 1952 most women knuckled down and got on with it. The concept of a quest for fulfillment seems to have been an alien one.'

We first meet Hester with her relationship in crisis and a failed suicide attempt behind her. The play defies convention from this point on, with what Esdaile describes as 'A murder mystery flavour' as we explore how and why Hester has been driven to such drastic action and whether or not she will find a future and with whom.

'Ultimately her journey is about realising that until you know and love yourself you can't really have a successful relationship with anybody.'

In Esdaile's revival Hester is played by Maxine Peake. This is the actor's first Rattigan play and she's found his work a revelation.

'Coming from my background I thought I'd be a bit intimidated by it' Maxine laughs. 'I thought he only wrote about the upper classes drinking cocktails and when Sarah first sent me the play I thought 'why me?'. Of course that's how I usually end up doing parts anyway, so I read it and I became a convert. The characters are just normal fully formed people. You know them and relate to them. And he doesn't hit you over the head with what he's doing. It's beautiful and it's bubbling over with life.'

Interview

Sarah Esdaile – Director Maxine Peake – Hester (contd)

The character of Hester is initially defined by her desperate actions. Both Maxine and Sarah feel that this generates empathy for her. It is ultimately intended to be a selfless rather than selfish act and it is certainly not a cry for help.

'She meant to do it and she's mortified when she comes round' says Maxine. 'She does tussle with herself as to whether or not she is being selfish, and the pain of the piece lies in that tussle, but she certainly believes that she is making the ultimate sacrifice.'

'She wants to liberate Freddie from a destructive relationship,' Sarah continues. 'They both acknowledge that they are death to each other. She wants to set him free, however misguided that is as an agenda.'

The death by suicide of a young actor and former lover of Rattigan's, Kenneth Morgan, profoundly affected Rattigan and was the catalyst for him to write *The Deep Blue Sea*. Many have gone on to claim that the play is ultimately about the gay experience, with Hester masquerading as a Kenneth Morgan figure, something that Esdaile strongly refutes.

'He has written a fully rounded and beautifully observed female character.' She says 'To say that the play is a portrait of a homosexual relationship is to downgrade Rattigan's capacity for empathy and imagination. That said, of course, like all great writers, he writes a lot of himself into his work and I think that he's there in the characters across the board in this one.'

One of the challenges of the play is dealing with the distinct linguistic style of the period. Again, the key to addressing this is to put your trust in Rattigan.

'There's a rhythm in his language that demands some consideration of the way in which people used to speak. Whilst it feels important to capture the heartbeat of the writing, the last thing that we want to do is to alienate our audience, so the key has been to navigate the waters and to find our own level.'

Philip Meeks © John Good. Reproduced with kind permission.



Interview

Suzi Cabbage – Production Manager

What is a Production Manager?

The Production Managers at West Yorkshire Playhouse are responsible for realising the design on stage. That involves assessing the physical requirements of each production to achieve the highest possible standards within agreed budgets, deadlines and available resources. There are two production managers at the Playhouse. We both have responsibility for a certain number of shows throughout the year and additional specific areas of responsibility. For example, I am the line manager for all the production and technical staff (excluding Stage Management) and that includes recruitment, assessments, training, work experience placements and managing core salary budgets. The other Production Manager is responsible for Health and Safety within the technical areas of the building and building resources e.g. annual maintenance schedules.

What does your role involve specifically for The Deep Blue Sea?

As with any show, I start the process by reading the script so I have an understanding of the play, period, number of actors, scene changes and any specific technical requirements. It's essential to have an overview of the physical requirements of the show at the start of the process and incredibly important to establish a good working relationship with the Creative Team and establish clear communication with theatre staff. I schedule weekly production meetings to discuss rehearsal requirements and any changes to the design. Thereafter, it's about working closely with the Creative Team, co-ordinating information, preparing schedules, quality control and budget management.

What is the process that you go through to make this happen?

The first thing to happen is a meeting with the director and designer to discuss the concept for the show. The next stage is the preliminary design meeting, an opportunity for the director and designer to meet the production team and present the white card model, costume drawings/sketches and any reference materials. The discussions are about the physical elements of the show to enable heads of departments prepare estimates. An important part of my job is to make sure the figures work and I would not authorise the build to start until I am confident it can be realised within allocated budgets and timescales. The final design meeting (or production meeting) is the presentation of the finished model box, costume drawings, props lists and reference material to WYP staff.

What have been the main design considerations or challenges for The Deep Blue Sea?

The play begins with two actors discovering the lead Actress (Hester Collyer) unconscious in front of the gas fire. The director and designer were keen to explore ways of getting her into position for the start of the show. However, we felt that having Hester simply walking onto stage and lying down would not work effectively for the show so we have engineered a device in which a section of the floor (under the rug in front of the fire – see model box pictures) actually lowers, enabling Maxine (the actor playing Hester) to move into position discreetly.

Another consideration of the design was the use of access equipment for the focus and rigging of the set. The performance floor is at height, from one metre (lowest point) through to 1.6m and is raked (1:15 incline) so the use of ladders, tallscopes and genie hoists is difficult. The raked floor is also challenging for the actors but we were able to provide a raked rehearsal set for the director and actors to work on prior to the show opening.

Interview

Suzi Cabbage – Production Manager (contd)

What has been the most interesting production you have worked on and why?

In terms of problem solving it would have to be a show we did some years ago called *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. I travelled to London for the preliminary design meeting with the director and designer and was presented with the white card model featuring a 1930s American diner as the set with a car suspended on the diner roof. There is a very dramatic moment at the end of Act 1 in which a car careens off the edge of a cliff. The designer and director wanted this moment recreated on stage with a car above the diner falling through the roof! Clearly, there were a number of challenges with such an ambitious project – technical feasibility, safety measures, stage resets before each performance and cost. Various ideas were trialled in the workshop before finally deciding which method to use on stage. The final effect was spectacular and a credit to the workshop team who engineered it by using electric hoists, winches and fall arrest systems we were able to create the effect on stage for every performance.

A personal favourite production of mine would have to be *'When We Are Married'* by J. B. Priestley. The show was a co-production with Liverpool Playhouse and opened in the Quarry Theatre in April 2009. The production was fabulous on every level – directed by Ian Brown, designed by Colin Richmond, lighting design Tim Mitchell and sound design by Mic Pool with a brilliant cast, great direction and a stunning design. The experience of transferring the show to Liverpool was an extremely enjoyable experience.

Have you always wanted to work in theatre?

Actually no! I wanted to be a prima ballerina, a gymnast, a vet before deciding that I really wanted to be a sort of Kate Adie with a Yorkshire accent, reporting from the world's troubled hotspots. I started out working in Advertising in Leeds and London before moving to Norwich to work as a Personnel and Training Officer. I moved back to Leeds and got a job working at Leeds Playhouse (as it was then) in an administration role, moving into my current role as Production Manager 18 years ago. I think all my previous jobs have been valuable but working for a national company in personnel and training links directly into my role as line manager for the production departments.

Do you have any advice for students who are considering a career in the offstage areas of theatre?

The most important thing is to get as much experience as you possibly can – from school, youth theatre, amateur dramatics and your local theatre. Working as a crew member backstage is a great way to learn about all of the different elements that make up a production team and will give you an understanding of how it all works.

You can also find information from the Get Into Theatre website www.getintothetheatre.org about the diverse range of jobs in theatre and what sort of training and qualifications you need.

The Design

Ruari Murchison –
Set Design and Model Box

