



Such Stuff podcast
Season 7, Episode 1: She's behind you!

[Music plays]

Imogen Greenberg: Hello and welcome to another episode of Such Stuff the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe.

Now that it's officially December the festive season can truly begin. With all the promise of a new year and the renewal it brings on the horizon we wanted to spend a few weeks cosying up against the dark nights and the frosty mornings and take a look at some of the theatre and the storytelling that brings us together at this time of year.

So this week on the podcast we'll be turning our attention to that great theatrical festive tradition panto. With the return of our very own festive show **Christmas at the (Snow) Globe**, we decided to delve into the rich history and contemporary stylings of panto in all of its many forms.

So we chatted to artists and theatre-makers creating panto today, about why this convivial form is so important this year of all years. We reminisced about pantos of Christmas past and discussed the joys and the pitfalls of tradition.

So stay tuned for the first of our advent offerings here on Such Stuff.

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First up **Christmas at the (Snow) Globe**.

Last year Sandi and Jenifer Toksvig created this extraordinary festive show bespoke for the Globe Theatre to celebrate all the joyous wonders of the season. This year we're bringing it back, though with some substantial changes due to current restrictions. So we caught up with Jen and Ess Grange who was part of the



company for **Christmas at the (Snow) Globe** last year as an audience elf, ushering the Christmas spirit into the yard, to talk about audience participation and how we're ushering the warm embrace of the Globe Theatre into people's homes this year.

Jen and Ess could you tell me a little bit about **Christmas at the (Snow) Globe**, and what the idea is behind that were when you created it and staged it at the Globe last winter, and what you were really trying to distil about the festive season in the show?

Jenifer Toksvig: The really important thing that we wanted was to celebrate the Globe and the magic of it, to celebrate the magic of Christmas, and the coming together of lots of people to festivities that you celebrate in big groups, I mean it's, it's ironic isn't it that now we're having this conversation we can't do that. So the whole point was to just come together and celebrate in ways that only the Globe can really facilitate which is that it is this wonderful space that allows for a conversation between the stage and the audience, you know a sort of unique way that other venues don't quite manage. So that was the plan, the plan was to do something Christmassy and hygge that Danish thing of hygge which is sort of getting together and being cosy together and celebrating together, and then we certainly wanted to try and enhance that conversation between stage and audience, in the same way that Shakespeare's plays invite response, we wanted to invite response and certainly wanted people to sing along. And then we did other things to enhance that so I have a practice whereby sometimes people come and accompany the audience in their experience, in this case, we had audience elves who started the singing off and were just generally out in the audience being jolly and chatting to people and Ess was one of those, so do you wanna talk about audience elfing a bit?

Ess Grange: Yeah it was really, it was just a really sweet and lovely and fun experience and, so yeah my job was to hang out in the, with the groundlings and just make friends with people basically, so if anyone looked a bit sort of lost, and then there was a whole kind of paper chain making kind of exercise in the interval, so there was a



lot of paper chain coordinating and excitement going on there, and singing along and just starting conversations with people, and I guess building, cultivating that idea that we were all there as a community for that show and that it was a conversation between the actors doing their thing and the audience doing their thing, and the audience were just a hugely important ingredient in the show.

JT: Yeah absolutely. It's really like inviting people over to your house for a big party and there's so many people that you can't personally say hello to all of them, so there's some people out in the audience who make everyone know that they're welcome and help them out and tell them where the loos are, but also just have a nice chat and make it a lovely atmosphere, it's just so hugely important and so often in theatres, it's certainly in our traditional proscenium arch theatres, you come and you sit in a seat where you're not facing anyone else who's in the audience other than the back of the head of the person in front of you and it doesn't facilitate conversation, it doesn't invite conversation, it's not conducive to that kind of collective experience and we really wanted that.

IG: When you were creating it how much were you conceiving of it as being a panto? Aside from it being, you know, a Christmas show.

JT: So Sandi, my sister Sandi Toksvig and I wrote it together and we both love panto, it's proper British traditional theatre and we both grew up going to see panto every year so it's very much a part of us, and because it's the only theatre that I experienced as a young person where I was allowed to interact with the stage, it's always been my favourite. There is a sense, as with everything that it starts out with intentions or purposes that sort of get slightly lost in the commercialization of it, so there is a sense that panto becomes a very fixed thing that you're only allowed to say certain responses, and there's a wonderful thing about traditional call and response in that you know what to say so you're confident about joining in, but there's also the fact that it's, it can be limiting in that way, and



there's a sense of anarchy in Shakespeare that we really wanted to also embrace, so if we had just put in 'oh no he didn't' 'oh yes he did' if we would have just put in those 'it's behind you' responses there's no anarchy in that, and actually the wonderful thing about the groundlings, and the yard as a space is that it really begs for people to shout out at me, and just be moved and be motivated to respond and to engage, rather than waiting for a cue to come in with a fixed line, so we didn't make a specific decision that it wasn't gonna be strict panto but as we went along it just made more sense to us to invite the kind of engagement that people wanted to do, also there's a weird sort of sense of, if you're sitting in the auditorium or panto and you're not saying the thing that everyone around you is saying there's a slight sort of shaming about that, that some people don't want to say these things, don't want to shout out, still feel awkward and that's fine, we don't want anybody to feel obliged to play, so there was also an intention to have a lovely freedom, so that people who want engage can whenever they are moved to do so, and that's, and if they don't want to that's also fine. So we didn't invite, we invited them to sing along, we gave people the words if they wanted to sing along, but didn't invite any specific response other than that, we encouraged booing [laughs] at times we encouraged cheering at times and we welcomed all heckling, all heckling was welcome, and my favourite thing is at one point one of the choir heckled [laughs] very loudly. It's just lovely when you know that the company itself feel that they have the freedom to just play that's a really lovely thing.

IG: This year sadly we cannot have that in-person interaction because of everything that's going on, but we are gonna do a, stream a filmed version of **Christmas at the (Snow) Globe** which is a new and different endeavour for us, can you talk a little bit about what that will be like both for you guys putting it together but also for audiences.

JT: I mean it will be a film so it will be non-engaging in that same, in that panto-y way. We hope people will sing along at home, I think



people tend to do that anyway, they tend to sort of, if there's something you know on the telly you tend to sing along, so that's nice. But it's, it's weird for me especially because I'm an interactive person so I want to reach out and give everybody a hug so lockdown has been tricky [laughs] for that, we hope that the story will still reach out and give everybody a hug, we are inviting people to have a watch party with us when it's released on the 21st, and to join us on Twitter and interact with us and that will be a lovely thing that we hope people will engage with, and so in that way it would be good to connect, to connect up with people. The only interaction that we will get is through the Twitter, and I hope that people will come and engage with us because it's super important to us, especially as theatre-makers the thing that, the other intimacy that you miss which you get live is applause which is such an important part of the conversation, you don't get to hear gasps, you don't get to hear laughs and you don't get to hear the applause, so all of that part of it goes away. So yeah it's going to be interesting for us to see how the set up of the story, which is changed because it's now a film script, so how the set up of the narrative works differently in the film, how it engages differently in the storytelling and yeah how it affects that intimacy, whether people still feel that they are intimately connected to the storytelling. And I think that's been true in the past of things like Morecombe and Wise Christmas special, things that we really know and love, that we recognize and again that's the thing about panto isn't it, we know and love and recognise those call and responses, and everything familiar about Christmas is what makes us love Christmas, the music and the lights, and the tree, and you know, and seeing each other, the familiarity. So hopefully there's enough of the familiarity aspect of it in the film for people to still feel that we are reaching out to them because we are, that's what we want to do, we want to send people a hug, in that way that the theatre hugs people as a big O we're sending out a hug so hopefully, it reaches people.

IG: And more broadly, what is your relationship with panto? What for you are the familiar things that you love and come back to again and again?



EG: So the panto that I went to as a child was actually, I grew up near Ford Open Prison and every year Ford Open Prison put on a panto, and that was the panto we went to. So my panto experience was going into a prison and watching, watching a panto performed by a lot of prisoners. For a while there was a guy from, I'm terrible at names, but there was someone who used to be on EastEnders was in Ford Open Prison doing time, so for a few years Dot Cotton would come and be in the audience of the Ford Open Prison panto [laughs] it's a strange way to experience pantomime, but I really loved it, it added an element of danger that I [laughs] anarchy, anarchy yeah, but it was also, yeah they did it, I think it was done to kind of raise money for community projects and stuff, so it was also, there something kind of deeply redemptive about it which I probably didn't totally grasp the nuances of that as a seven year old but it always felt really lovely, it always felt incredibly welcoming and kind of convivial I think is the word and I think that conviviality is a really important word I think for panto and for the **Snow Globe**.

JT: Yeah. I don't know how to follow that story [laughs]. For me panto is about the stories that get told because it's usually the sort of the same handful of stories isn't it. What do we have, **Cinderella**, **Snow White**, **Sleeping Beauty**, I mean there's, there's not many of them they're just done over and over, and I started working backstage in theatre a long time ago because I got a job follow spotting on **Jack and the Beanstalk** when I was sixteen, and in those days because it was a very long time ago you could just rock up to the theatre and ask to see the production manager and say please can I have a job, and they would say yes come here on Monday and we'll teach you how to use a light. And so I learned everything that I knew about backstage from **Jack and the Beanstalk** so I have very fond memories of that. One day the giant fell over and it was two guys on stilts tied together so it was impossible to get them back up and hearing the stage manager deal with that on the headset, hearing them say bring this cloth in, change to this lighting state, send these actors on, hearing all of that happen like swans paddling like crazy under the water and



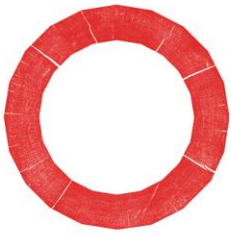
gliding across the surface all I could see from the Front of House was the audience watching the show just carrying on and it was amazing and nobody realised, and then everybody's paddling like mad underneath the water. And it made me fall in love with the magic of theatre that is all of that work that goes on to keep the story rolling and keep the magic happening. And then Cinderella is my other connection to panto which I love so much because I think Buttons should get the girl [laughs] every year I go and see Cinderella and I hope Buttons is going to get the girl and he never does but I'm holding out hope that he will one day.

IG: It's really interesting to see the way that panto changes and modernizes, but also keeps those familiar elements that, maybe there will be a panto where Buttons gets the girl.

JT: Or the guy, I don't care you know whatever Buttons wants, I'd just like him to not be like oh I'm alone and it's sad again [laughs].

IG: How do you see panto changing, and what would you like to see, yeah keep developing in the form.

JT: I don't know, I wish I could, I wish I had some really clever innovation but I think actually it is a traditional, it's a very British traditional art form, it is our theatre, and the change I would like to see is we always treat it with a little bit of disdain, or as if it's not as proper art in some way as everything else that we make, as if it's not proper theatre, it's just panto, but actually a lot of regional theatres in this country manage to keep going because of the money that pantomime brings in, and there are a lot of theatre for whom the only theatre they will have seen is panto, and do you know what I think that's fine, I'm good with that because it's good clear storytelling, it's good fun stuff, it's got singing and dancing in it, and musicals are a big thing for me I think they're very important, it does engage the audience in a way that they can join in if they want



and I just think there's nothing not to love about it I think, I think it is the finest form of theatre that we have with apologies to Shakespeare I really do, and actually I think it's really akin to Shakespeare I think they have more in common than people realise. So I have huge respect for it and the change I would like to see is that more people acknowledge it as the important form of theatre that it is actually to this country. So now you have to say something really clever and creative and innovative because I didn't manage it.

EG: [laughs] So I think like, I'm not great with tradition I'm a bit allergic to tradition and I think there's a lot of stuff in panto that people do because it's like that's the tradition and that's how it has to be done, I think panto is a really untapped source of deep subversion and radical creativity and I think I want a little bit jettison some of the drab storylines, and I wanna like dig a bit more into the kind of crossdressing and the characters you sort of get round the edge of pantos right, what I loved about the **Snow Globe** is that it does some of that, it kind of does away with trying to tell a traditional fairy story plotline, it kind of harnessed all that subversive, radical, queer, exciting stuff and had a conversation with the audience, and the anarchic energy of that conversation with the audience that Jen was talking about earlier, and I want more of that, I want less tradition and I want more subversion because it's in there.

JT: It really is already in there isn't it, it really is, I mean drag you can't do panto without drag, without queer you know, you have to have a dame who's got fried eggs all over her skirt in order to [laughs] in order to have panto.

EG: [laughs] and also you know a very hot masc female often in the prince role as well, there's just so much interesting stuff going on in there but again it kind of gets a little bit lost sometimes, I would argue in sort of some, quite a lot of panto also ends up just being a



bit racist doesn't it and a bit disablist, people get all upset because they're like oh it's traditional, they're like 'oh it's always been that way so there's nothing wrong with it', you know if you allow it to change and progress a little bit what you've got under there, like the core of panto tradition is super exciting and radical and progressive potentially, more subversive panto please.

JT: Yeah more anarchy.

EG: More anarchy [laughs].

[Music plays]

IG: Like many artists and theatre makers in this country Artistic Director Michelle Terry's journey to theatre started with panto. So Michelle chatted to Director, Writer and all-round theatre extraordinaire Jude Christian who first started creating panto at the Lyric Hammersmith with our very own Associate Artistic Director Sean Holmes. Michelle and Jude discussed the enduring influence panto has had on their careers and their love for theatre, they talked about how to write a contemporary panto, ownership and engaging with audiences, and the joy and catharsis of this malleable form. Here's Michelle and Jude.

Michelle Terry: I have really early experiences of panto partly because I grew up in a really small town and that was my first way into theatre, so I grew in Weston-Super-Mare, Weston Playhouse panto was something that every family in Weston did every single year, and then you have Bristol Hippodrome do a panto which was like that was the bells the whistles, you knew that was special and that wasn't every year that was like if you could get there, it literally has been in my DNA forever, so I'd love to know sort of your journey to panto and when you talk about panto craft what you mean, what



that is to you now?

Jude Christian: I, for me, the question about my journey to panto and about panto craft, so I would say I wasn't one of those people who grew up always always going to panto which I think is partly that going to the theatre wasn't like a big tradition in my house, the one thing we did go and see quite a lot of was musicals, but probably the bigger comparison point in my head is in the village I grew up in is called Mursley and it's a little way outside of Milton Keynes, and they had, I think they still have the village show that they did every single year in the village hall and it was just written by people from the local community, it was basically like SNL but for the Royal Home Counties like there's a lot of cross-dressing, people would sort of take the mick out of things that had been on telly that year, and me and my next-door neighbour, when we thought we were super talented, would like get up and sing loads of duets and everyone would have to pretend they thought it was good [laughs] and er, as we got older we'd all write our own sketches and the adults would all sort of politely clap and then they'd go back to like just dressing up and doing riffs on Titanic. It absolutely belonged to the people who made it and it felt like a moment where within our community we had our own celebrities and our own superstars. So then my journey to making panto really came through a relationship with the Lyric Hammersmith and with Sean who was running it at the time with Ella McDougal who was directing **Aladdin** I was asked to be the Associate. What really got me hooked was that the philosophy towards making it, felt very much like the philosophy that I'd always wanted to have towards making all theatre. So **Aladdin** was written by Joel Horwood, Joel had this brilliant way of articulating just the political importance of panto in this country, the fact that it is an art form that was sort of developed and created by somebody who themselves was an immigrant to Britain, the fact that like you say it's rooted in Shakespeare and being able to take old stories, whether they're myths or whether they're real, and just to constantly update them for who's in the room in the here and now, I found it so exciting. It feels like the closest thing you're allowed to do in England to making German theatre because for



some bizarre reason suddenly with panto, and I think a bit with Shakespeare, you're allowed to have people shout to the audience, you're allowed to cut and paste the text and run all over the place, you're allowed to smash together contemporary references, random things from the news, to acknowledge the time and the place that we're all living in to chat away with people and to do ridiculous stuff just because and to put in lots of songs and dances at what seems like the weirdest possible moments, in a way that for some reason we don't allow ourselves to do with much existing text. And so I just found that creation process really exciting and I guess it also tapped what feels like a huge debate in this, particularly this year I suppose with, you know big big conversations again around Black Lives Matter and looking at kind of the colonialist legacy of theatre in this country with and the patriarchal structure that we work in, what panto as a form allows you to do is to go what do we want to continue that we've inherited from a different time when people had different sensibilities and priorities, and what do we want to either actively challenge and subvert in order to celebrate that as a society we've moved forward to a more inclusive place or what do we want to quietly jettison because it just doesn't feel fun anymore and to put something else into that room instead. So it just felt like endless possibility to play and then I suppose from a very very technical perspective, you have to do some very technical stuff, partly the scale of it, you know making panto in the Lyric was my first main house directing that sort of scale of work and you're having to say things like, I need that character to suddenly appear in a different scene and therefore we need to write another extra bit of text here, or if that person's going to fly through the air they need to disappear at this point. It's also a joyous thing to write linguistically, puns and getting to write things in not quite iambic pentameter necessarily, but definitely getting to write a rhyme and getting to play with song lyrics and stuff is just joyful.

MT: You talk about the sort of things you wouldn't be able to get away with now but I remember so vividly going to Bristol Hippodrome to watch **Cinderella**, part of the reason at Weston that I would hate going is because I never wanted to be on the end of



the row because it was so much about the audience and I was so terrified that I would be made to be part of the conversation but as long as I was middle of the row I knew I'd have a really good time because it was still about me but I didn't have to participate, and I remember going to watch this version of **Cinderella** at Bristol and A) Being relieved because I knew I was in the middle of the row so I knew that I wouldn't get bothered, I could just be free to have my own experience and this bit where Buttons is eating this apple and I remember being on the floor because it felt like he was making it up for me, of course now I know that there are those moments that are made up and there are those moments that are just repeated night after night after night, but it's so, like when Shakespeare talks about the clowns in **Hamlet** he says can you just say what's written down for you, but you know that part of it is being able to riff and trust in the people that are gonna be able to do that but it's, it's so about the audience as well like it's a such a beautiful participatory thing for the audience to be part of, which again I suppose when Shakespeare really works at The Globe it's because you know that they are genuinely asking you a question and most of the time you want them to respond, it is sort of the equivalent of 'he's behind you' or 'oh no he isn't', but tell me about making it for the National.

JC: Basically what I'm working on is **Dick Whittington** which is going on at the National this Christmas, it's a script which I co-wrote with Ciriad Lloyd two years ago for the Lyric Hammersmith where I had sort of been learning my panto craft over several years, and Ciriad and I wrote **Dick Whittington**, so back in what seems like a lifetime ago in 2018 and we had a really really brilliant time making it, it felt really exciting, panto has always appealed to tons of the things that I love but very seldom get to do in my professional job like taking pop songs and changing the lyrics of them and making stupid rhymes and making terrible dad puns and sort of really really shamelessly partisan political jokes. What happened was that this Christmas the National decided with everything that's going on that it felt really really important not only to try and put something on for people at Christmas, but also to honour the fact that at that point and this is about August of this year, it looked like panto around the



country was going to be a real sort of victim to coronavirus, and actually what's happening brilliantly is that there are tons and tons of theatres that are finding ways to put on Christmas shows, finding ways to do panto if that's their thing, there is a real desire to provide for audiences but particularly, at that point I think generally for the National, the National don't usually do panto, this is the second one they've ever done, but they really understand what it is as an art form, they understand how particular it is to Britain. I think it felt like a platform for obviously bringing joy and a sense of community and togetherness but also for bringing a sense of catharsis, I think there's something really particular that the form does, it sits so weirdly between music hall and soapboxing and cabaret and farce and musicals and a play, it feels like a space where you can unashamedly talk very much about what's happening in the world right now. And they read Dick and I think they connected with it for lots of reasons. **Dick Whittington** is basically a story about some bloke who rocks up in London and then he goes on a wild adventure and wins loads of treasure and then the spirit of London is like you are predestined to become the Mayor of this city, given that it's like now maybe there should be an election and maybe Dick should have to do something in order to be made Mayor of London, more than just like be a man who finds the money, so you know, two years ago we wrote it, it became this election campaign between Queen Rat who is this kind of Twitter obsessed Russian bot buoyed up, you know popularity junkie who doesn't really care about people just has vast amounts of money, just sort of wants to have a lovely time with all her and her friends and trample the joy out of everyone else, and Dick who is this young hopeful slightly naive boy who has always loved London with all of his heart and soul and has always wanted to come to this city and he sort of arrives and London really kicks him in the face and it's a really hard place to live, but he finds some friends and he finds his feet and he slowly starts to realise that everyone else is too jaded and sad and tired to stand up to queen rat, so he's gonna have to have courage in his convictions and go for it, and eventually he stands against her and there's an election and then, this is a massive spoiler, but he wins and everything's fine and there's a happy ending.



MT: It's 50, whatever it is now, three years, four years, this is only the second time it's done what is arguably, and I'm sort of saying this to you with sort of Shakespeare in mind, it's arguably one of our most favourite forms, it's such a theatrical tradition, so I'm interested because it does, there is something pejorative about panto, there is pejorative connotations, so I'd love to know if you have felt that, whether our national theatre endorsing that as an art form is, is sort of what we need right now and what your experience of the kind of connotations around panto are, and why maybe our National Theatre has only ever done it twice.

JC: What's felt interesting about it and also what I think does unlock that question of why don't the National Theatre always do a panto and what does it mean for them to do it, is that it suddenly has to belong to an entirely different group of people and I think it has to speak on behalf on an entirely different group of people, or it has to speak from the mouths of the National Theatre rather than the Lyric in Hammersmith to an audience that you then go who is that audience, is that, and I think that one of the reasons that they probably don't do it every year is partly out of a sense of responsibility constantly be serving the broadest possible audience, the broadest possible canon and variety of work, and I think that this year's panto will be really joyous, I mean it's gonna be bizarre, making it under COVID restrictions is really nuts the way in which we're constantly going, I dunno is there a lockdown, is it cancelled, what happens, you know. It's all very crazy and I think there's such a we're all in this togetherness about this year, there is such a commonality of experience for every single person in the country that I think that particularly in the UK it's felt like there has been some very sharp divide in the population for a long time, like coronavirus in all its different forms is happening to all of us, there's a much stronger sense of we that I think makes it appropriate for the National to hold that kind of 'this is a play by the nation for the nation'. I think there's also something massive and profound that happened to theatre and to the sector and I think it has a, it has a



sort of broader mission and it also has a bit of a mayfly mission it's a kind of we're doing this this year because we all need to react to the fact that our industry has been brought to it's knees, you know that we're seeing the careers of so many talented people put on ice, feeling like they've been hugely derailed, I think part of it was wanting to go what is the ultimate form of theatre at Christmas, duh it's panto let's do it, and I think part of it is also the National going what is the most eclectic possible show we can put on, like what is one that feels like it celebrates this huge variety of creative team and performers and skills of the building and things that our audiences come to us for, they're sort of all under one roof in any pantomime, and I think that was a lot of the impetus for doing it this year.

MT: It's just the most beautiful gesture, like there is this very real virus, but then anxiety is also contagious but so is joy and it's not a word to be underestimated right now, I think we've gone through a period of theatre that's been sort of apocalyptic, and now it's an amazing recalibration of what the purpose of theatre is now and how we reclaim the word community and how we reclaim the word joy, like what is our job as theatre makers, because again like, I think that's what lockdown's exposed, hasn't it, that actually as a sector we're really bad at owning and articulating what we do beyond going we contribute billions of pounds to the economy, it's so much more than that that we actually contribute to the national psyche, and it can't be an accident that this art form every year is something that as a country, we do that as you say, whether it's in your local village hall or you go to your local city, or you go to your national theatre, there is a sort of galvanizing around something that isn't saccharine, it's not, it's not simplistic, it's as you say it's actually really journalistic but it is satirical, so it's taking something a moment in time and sort of flipping it going we're all in this together and sharing it, it's so important.`

JC: It is and it feels like this affirmation of human survival capacity. We talked tons and tons about how many Covid jokes to



have in the show, basically and the way that we're staging it is that everybody's going to be distanced on stage so there's not gonna be tons and tons of PPE and facemasks, there's probably, there's gonna have to be bits of it, there's obviously stuff that the audience will have to do, there are huge constraints on audience interaction which again will make it feel very different again to a panto in other times and we made a lot of decisions about the moments where we would acknowledge that and there are moments where we would just not talk about the moments that we can't do and celebrate what we could do, but in the conversation about to Covid or not to Covid I was quite like look it's so present and what's nice about this show is it predates Covid so it's not like we've wrote in a Covid plot, updating the politics is complex enough, let's just do it, and then there was one really particular song that Cariad and I were just listening to and we thought it would be really really funny to write an entire song about how confusing the Covid restrictions were and it's turned into a sort of Act 2 opening number, and what was interesting we did a version of it in a read through and actually Lindsey Turner afterwards really specifically talked about that and said it felt very cathartic to acknowledge how mad and rubbish it's all been, and I think particularly there's so much tension I think for people who work in the arts and people who make art, there's such dialogue about what the relationship is between artists and the present government in this country and obviously that's been an incredibly complicated thing during the pandemic because we've been hugely reliant on being able to speak to the government, being able to try and get across to the people who are listening to us as clearly and as comprehensively as we can what we believe the value of the arts is, and also what we believe our values are as people who make the arts. I'm trying to find a space in a show like this to criticize things that we think are problematic and also to give space for everyone to have a bit of laugh about the things that have become farcically mad, it's been a really really delicate balancing act, but again I think it's, there's something that feels really profound about lots of people being able to gather in a space and just sort of look back at the sort of wreckage of the last 12 months and go ok we're still here and we're doing things, and that's not in any way to downplay the incredible loss and hardship that people have suffered



and they're still suffering but there's got to be space I think for humans to gather and go we don't run out of optimism and we don't run out of the ability to keep being creative and liking each other as people, and wanting to get to get together and enjoy ourselves.

MT: We talk about the economic crisis but really early on I think people were starting to recognise, and still I don't think we're really aware of the psychological fallout. I think I now understand better where stiff upper lip comes from, that actually when you're so full of feeling where do you go with it, and you're suddenly again realise the value of catharsis, where are we going to theatre to have that, it's not like you can just call a friend and go this is how I'm feeling because you don't know where they're at, and I don't know about you but I sort of know more people that are struggling with a psychological epidemic than they are with Covid and actually where do we go to just acknowledge that and if you can't acknowledge that now through theatre and through panto, you sort of miss the boat on being able to, do you, it's not the sort of thing you can, it will always be in memorium retrospectively as oppose to living now like we're all, as you say, so rarely do we get the chances where you go we're all going through this together, but also that psychological thing of just having someone say yeah we see you, that satirical sort of comment on who we are, we need that because it's really hard to do it with out permission, and panto sort of gives you permission because you can go 'don't worry it's just panto, it'll all be over and no one's gonna get into trouble for saying it' and do you know it's kind of the most amazing permission to talk about this stuff.

JC: I agree I think there's something about having that space for emotional engagement and outlet while things are happening, but I do, I think we're gonna massively need it in retrospect as well. Even basic things like the amount of people that have not been able to have funerals for people that they've lost during this time, or they've not been able to go, I know lots of people who have just gone for it and had weddings with seven people there, those things that feel like rituals that we have created in order to be able to process the



biggest feelings and the biggest things that happen to us as humans, a lot of those have been sort of weirdly neutered during this time and I think that we're gonna need big, big ass tragedy as well as a way of processing what's happened, and what's weird with panto is, there's something really particular in panto, partly that some of the time it isn't pretending to be comedy, some of the time out on out, heart on sleeve Disney idealistic fairy-tale, but also I think there's something about the way that music functions, and there are some numbers in there that you're like that is in there because when that person belts she is screaming on all of our behalves, and I need a bit of that as well and as someone who has always I think been interested in theatre that deals with stuff that is incredibly difficult and painful and sad, I think I don't tend to make work that feels like it's got a lot of screaming in it but at the moment I'm really feeling the need for stuff that screams in whatever way and I think panto is a form of screaming which is needed for now.

MT: And also just when you were saying that then making me think about the permission to mash-up form, like I think those playwrights that really mash-up form, where a character breaks the fourth wall and sings at you, or a character suddenly is naked and screaming, that seems avant-garde and then you go back to panto and you go, no that's theatre that's what theatre could do, it's so in our culture to mash-up form, and as you say we've sort of handed that over to a sort of Eastern-European tradition but actually so versed in it, and so adept at it

JC: And maybe this comes back to your question about where panto sits within a sort of status hierarchy of theatre in this country because I think the obvious reason for why mash-up forms, I have laughed harder at most funerals than I have in other places, I have been the most devastated of bits of my life at weddings like it's always a mixture. Like the membrane between the two things is always really thin, it just feels much more true to life than something which is forcing itself to sit within a much narrower set of constraints about what mood it's in and how it's choosing to express itself. For a



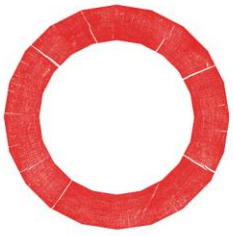
lot of other kinds of theatre there seems to be this constant demand that it presents itself in a much more streamlined way, that it is much clearer about who it's for and how you're gonna feel when you come and see it, and what we try to take away from it in a way that feels incredibly reductive, which it's interesting that sort of panto has been able to kind of slip under the net in that regard because it feels like lots of people who are quite serious and sensible about theatre have just gone 'oh well that's panto' and they don't really know what they're doing, but now we want proper theatre that has a continuity of concept and really sees it through, and I'm like no can we all just mess around and have less continuity.

MT: Can we just mess around and have less continuity feels sort of, well my God if this time has taught us anything it's like we have no idea what's coming tomorrow so let's just mess around while we're here [laughs]. You're amazing, what you're doing is amazing, it's so important. Thanks for chatting about it.

[Music plays]

IG: That's it from us but we'll be back next week with another advent offering. Don't forget you can watch our film of **Christmas at the (Snow) Globe** online from Monday 21 December at 7.00pm when we're encouraging people to join us for a watch party, the film will be available online until Tuesday 5 January and you can watch the film as many time as you wish during this period, so keep the festive fun rolling over and over and over.

And do check out what theatre, panto or offering might be going on in your local area, lots of theatres, community centres and halls up and down the country are working within the restrictions to bring local audiences together for the festive season, so if you're missing your usual dose of festive cheer head on down and support local theatres. No theatre is complete without you, our wonderful audiences.



You've been listening to Such Stuff with me Imogen Greenberg and Michelle Terry.

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