

Pound of Flesh Presents: Yen by Anna Jordan

16th May 2019

Supervised by Dr Matthew Franks

Funded by the IATL Student as Producer Fund



POUND OF FLESH

YEN
BY ANNA JORDAN

**national
student
drama
festival**

Fundraiser Performances (Leamington Spa):
Monday 11th March 18:00 & 21:00
Wednesday 13th March 18:00 & 21:00
Tickets available soon

NSDF Performances (Leicester):
Saturday 13th - Friday 19th April
Exact performance dates/times TBC

Abstract

Bridging the gap between student and professional theatre is always hard. Something which is especially hard is coming to terms with the difference between the support and comfort which is provided by a theatre department at a university and the reality of the theatre industry. The National Student Drama Festival exists to offer insight into this huge change for students across the nation and is a special and unique place which encourages the production of student theatre to a professional standard. An invaluable experience to any student wishing to gain experience in the theatre industry, NSDF offers workshops, showcases of work and endless networking opportunities. Any theatre company who is given the opportunity to perform at the festival is given a special platform to perform and show their work to industry professionals – an outstanding experience for any student interested in a career in the theatre industry and one which we jumped at the chance of.

Company Background

Pound of Flesh is an emerging theatre company from the University of Warwick who aim to bring storytelling into the twenty-first century. We are young, playful and chaotic: we constantly experiment, pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone with new styles, forms and challenges. We try and make our work as collaborative as possible so that we can gain experience working with as many creative people and challenging disciplines as possible. Our first production, *Misterman* by Enda Walsh, was a high-concept, tech-heavy reworking of an existing script which we first performed in Warwick Arts Centre and was later scouted and funded to perform at Nanshan Theatre Festival in Shenzhen, China. We've been invited back to perform again in 2019. The contacts we made during our time in China, helped to shape another of our shows – *The Pillowman* by Martin McDonagh. This show was arguably our biggest challenge to date as we set ourselves the challenge of combining musical composition, lyrical and contemporary dance and intense stylised acting. Also performed at the Warwick Arts Centre, this show was a second chance to perform in a professional space whilst using resources to experiment with a creative vision.

Yen 1.0

In October 2018 we held open auditions at the University of Warwick to cast three of the roles in *Yen*: Bobbie, Jennifer and Maggie. At this point the company consisted of Matt Owen (who would direct the show) and Oscar Sadler (who was precast in the role of Hench). Through holding open auditions, we were able to see a wide range of the talent at Warwick, which made our decision very difficult. After casting, we proceeded to rehearse the show in preparation for a run of performances in the last week of term. Something which Matt was keen to focus on was the intensity and intimacy in the script, and so decided that the show would be performed in a basement space in Leamington Spa. Adapting to this unconventional space was a challenge for everyone involved. Pushing the space to its limits, we used two rooms to have a directional speaker and borrowed a projector from the theatre department in order to display pop culture clips on the wall - truly immersing the actors and audience in the world of the characters. These technical elements paired with honest, naturalistic acting proved to get across the message of the play which we wanted to portray. During this performance run we had been visited by our NSDF selector, Sean Linnen, and had a feedback conversation about his experience of the

show. After his visit, we would have to wait two months to hear whether we were successful in our application to perform at the festival.

In Preparation for NSDF

In February 2019 we received news that we were selected as one of the eleven shows being performed at NSDF this year. Immediately we went back into the rehearsal room to prepare for the festival. We knew that, as an emerging company, we would need more financial help with reaching the costs the festival demands and so, as well as applying for IATL funding we held fundraising performances, back in the original performance space. Re-rehearsing for these shows was relatively simple, with just a recapping of the blocking and character work needed. However, when we learnt that our new performance space was to be in a studio at The Curve Theatre in Leicester we needed to rethink the staging. Our director converted the staging from end on to in the round in a hope to keep the intimacy and ferociousness of emotion the basement allowed us. We, as a company felt an immense pressure to do not only the text, but the original performance justice as that is what had earned us a space at the festival. With many long days of rehearsing in preparation to travel to the festival, we bonded over our anticipation and excitement to be spending a week in the company of so many talented students and theatre professionals.

NSDF

On first arrival at The Curve Theatre, it is fair to say that we all felt like fish out of water. The thought that the next person you could have a conversation with could be someone we so respected and admired was a shocking and surreal one. Our week was to be split between workshops, seeing others' performances, discussions and networking in the evenings. As well as this we had to tech and perform our own show twice. During this week we were able to meet people such as Mark Graham (from the theatre company Middle Child) and Donna Munday (executive producer of Trafalgar Entertainment) as well as Warwick alumni Ali Pidsley and Nima Taleghani. Our producer was also a part of the Management Team for the week and worked closely with Ellie Fitzgerald and Lizzie Melbourne (both Warwick graduates) who work as the festival co-ordinator and administrator respectively. The experience gained from the workshops and conversations with professionals throughout the week was invaluable, not only for the company, but for us as creative individuals. We were allowed to ask questions, be curious and get a taste of what the theatre industry is really like. After our performances we were able to enjoy the talent at the festival and take part in discussions about others' work. We were honoured at the end of the week to receive three awards – The Buzz Goodbody Director Award, Spotlight Most Promising Actor, **company**

Post-NSDF

Coming back to university after that week was a shock for all of us. Not only had we become used to the intensity of the schedule that week and constant absorbing of information and theatre, but we also felt a massive pressure to come back and prove our time at the festival was worth it. We all felt lucky to be a part of such an amazing opportunity and immediately wanted to get back in the rehearsal room and start creating something new and exciting – to prove our success was not a fluke. We recognise this as a feeling many creatives must get after success – the pressure to better yourself and appear as if you are always improving. We knew that to quell this we needed to find new inspiration and collaborators and we quickly started

developing two new projects. As well as these new ventures, the company gained two new members – a producer and a PR and Marketing Manager. With a newly balanced and cohesive company we were able to take the best advice given to us at NSDF – you only become a professional theatre maker once you see yourself as one. Following this, we gained the confidence to register ourselves as a licensed company and are currently in the process of getting a bank account, so that we can function as a professional business. The opportunity which was given to us to perform at NSDF has helped us to see making theatre – what we love doing – as more than a hobby.

The Future of Pound of Flesh

Always ready for a new challenge, and always eager to make new work, we have set our sights on two new projects to focus on. The first is an original song cycle, composed and written by three Warwick University students. Currently still writing and refining, we will be auditioning this show to be performed at the end of the term. We believe that in order to be collaborative we must be original and jump at the chance to branch out of our comfort zone. Working with the writers and composers, we are pushing ourselves to create a concept for a piece when we are not the most knowledgeable about the discipline in the room and we are enjoying learning from our collaborators. The second project is an original piece of gig-theatre mixed with live foley and hip-hop inspired slam poetry. We will be performing this piece at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this summer. Again, auditioned within the university, we are excited to be working with talented students create a challenging piece of interdisciplinary work. Our time at NSDF has allowed us to make contacts which we have utilised in gaining feedback on our script and we have been given the chance to perform a preview of the piece in Leeds at The Holbeck (Slung Low's performance space). We hope that during our time at the Fringe we can solidify the relationships we made at NSDF in order to get as much support for our company as possible in the hope to keep making professional theatre.