

Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons

IATL Festival Bursary Award Project Report



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A new play by Sam Steiner

The Festival

In January 2015, *Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons* - the first show from new theatre company Walrus - premiered in the Helen Martin Studio at the Warwick Arts Centre. Directed by finalist Ed Franklin, and produced by second-year students Oscar Owen and Josie Davies, it was an exciting collaboration between current Warwick students and exciting alumni talent; namely, writer Sam Steiner, and actors Beth Holmes and Euan Kitson, who all graduated in the summer of 2014.



On the final night of the run in Warwick, a selector from the National Student Drama Festival (NSDF) came to see the production and offered us invaluable advice about the show, and regarding our plans to take the project forward to Edinburgh and beyond. Several weeks later we were delighted to learn that *Lemons* had been selected for the festival from over 100 selected shows - an opportunity for us to represent the university that had brought us together, and to stand as testament to the benefits of collaboration across year groups, and with alumni.

The festival runs annually in Scarborough, and showcases some of the best student theatre from across the country. In addition to performances of the selected shows, the Festival also invites industry professionals to lead workshops throughout the week, as well as chairing discussion forums which operate as a way for attendees to talk not only about the selected shows, but wider questions pertaining to the state of British theatre at the moment. If this wasn't enough, the week is also supplemented by the daily publication of *Noises Off* magazine, which features reviews and opinion pieces from an editorial team and anyone else at the festival with something to say. The effect is to create, for one week, in one town, a community of young people who make, love, write and talk about theatre, and to introduce them both to one another, and to a host of professionals happy and keen to offer their advice and expertise.

For all of us, the experience was one which has not only confirmed our dedication to pursuing a career in the theatre, but one which has begun to make such a career feel possible.



New Opportunities

Transferring *Lemons* to the Festival, we were incredibly grateful that the show is so light on set and tech: all it requires to perform is an in-the-round audience configuration and two microphones. It was partly with this simplicity in mind that the show was programmed to open on the first day of the festival, which required arriving a day earlier than most companies in order to settle in, and to complete a technical rehearsal and dress run of the show in the new space before the first audience poured in.



One particular issue we did face was a conflict between the necessary intimacy of the show - being only a two-hander we were keen that it not be overwhelmed with massive audiences - and NSDF's obligation to give everyone at the festival the chance to see the show. The only compromise it was possible to reach to resolve this issue is that the show would perform eight times in just three days, in order for everyone to have the chance to see it. We went to the festival excited to do the show again, but I don't think any of us could have foreseen it being this intense. On two of the performance days, the show performed at



4:30pm, 7:30pm and 9:30pm - a tough ask of two actors required to carry a very dialogue-heavy show for a full hour. That said, it was a challenge the performers rose to, and the solving of which gave the creative team a useful insight into the process of transferring a show.

We also benefited hugely from conversations with other people at the festival. There were eleven schools groups in attendance, and after many of our performances we found ourselves engaged in impromptu Q&As with the students, who we found to be among the most engaged audience members; many of them contributed to the clutch of reviews which *Lemons* received in Noises Off - some of which can be found below. In addition to these, we had a brilliant forum discussion which encouraged us to think deeply and interrogatively about the creative process which made the show; there is no doubt that our future work will benefit from the rigour encouraged by conversations such as these.

As a result of professional contacts made at the festival, Ed has already completed two days observing director Tamara Harvey rehearsing *Pride and Prejudice* at the Sheffield Crucible. Oscar and Josie have attained a range of contacts in the industry that will be helpful not only in planning the future of *Lemons*, but also their own careers as theatre producers.

Feedback and Recognition

Find below extracts from some of the reviews we received in Noises Off over the week:

“The writing in *Lemons* was undoubtedly clever and witty as well as incredibly refreshing. It had me questioning some important things in terms of how as people we communicate with each other: the way in which we talk to people and how hard it is to communicate effectively, as well as how easy it is to take things the wrong way. These were issues I hadn’t given much thought to before watching this play and I found it rather overwhelming to think of how much we take freedom of speech and communication for granted.”

- Megan Farnfield, April 1st

“The play juxtaposes two different worlds, examining society before and after the implementation of the Hush Law. Sadly, even when words are unrestricted, communication is often inhibited by more nebulous forces. We insist that everything can be dealt with “later”: quarrels, declarations of love – moments of genuine communication – are consigned to to-do lists, postponed owing to tiredness or cowardice. A particularly powerful scene in which Holmes and Kitson walked in opposite directions, avoiding all eye-contact, illustrated the withdrawn approach to communication which infects too many relationships, and demonstrated Ed Franklin’s compelling precision of direction. Comforted by his familiar habit of eloquence and verbosity, Oliver fails to recognise the importance of what he struggles to communicate to Bernadette. It was fascinating to see represented on stage how little we too often say; to see how much we almost – but never quite – say to the most important people in our lives.”

- Jamie Robson, April 1st

“A bare stage flanked by microphones feels the right place to foreground attention onto words therefore. Onto the bodies of those involved in the relationship with no excess. But we do get more than the strictly necessary to tell the story. This is not Pinter or Crimp’s terse precision. The quirky is here in force to provide a foil to the strict rules at play: the couple meet in a pet cemetery; crouched down low they try to communicate purely with their eyes; Oliver’s artistic nature is a self-knowing one. “

- Phil King, March 30th

Feedback and Recognition (Cont.)

Though there is undoubtedly a case to be made for disposing of the awards ceremony that closes the Festival, we were grateful to be acknowledged with the following recognition:

Judges' Commendation for Writing

Sam Steiner

Judges' Commendation for Direction

Ed Franklin

Judges' Commendation for Performance

Euan Kitson



The Future

Since we first conceived of *Lemons*, it has been the plan to take the production to the Edinburgh Fringe. Our success at NSDF made it possible to convince Zoo Venues to give us a slot in their Southside Studio space from August 7th - 22nd. This run will allow us to capitalise on the momentum we have begun to build at NSDF and hopefully to secure a future life for the show: a London run and a national tour are both options which we are actively considering. Before that, we are excited to have been invited to perform *Lemons* at the Latitude Festival, which will take place in Henham Park, Suffolk, from July 16th - 19th. This will be another opportunity to showcase the production to potential programmers, and to develop further on the road to Edinburgh.



Thank You

The support of IATL has hugely relieved the financial burden of attending the festival, and allowed us to enjoy the experience of the week without excessive worry regarding the cost of the week in terms of travel, accommodation and other expenses associated with the production. We all hope that student companies bound for NSDF continue to apply for the IATL Festival Bursary, and hope that Walrus as a company can maintain a fruitful relationship with the institute; its objectives, ideals and support have been invaluable in the facilitation of our development so far.