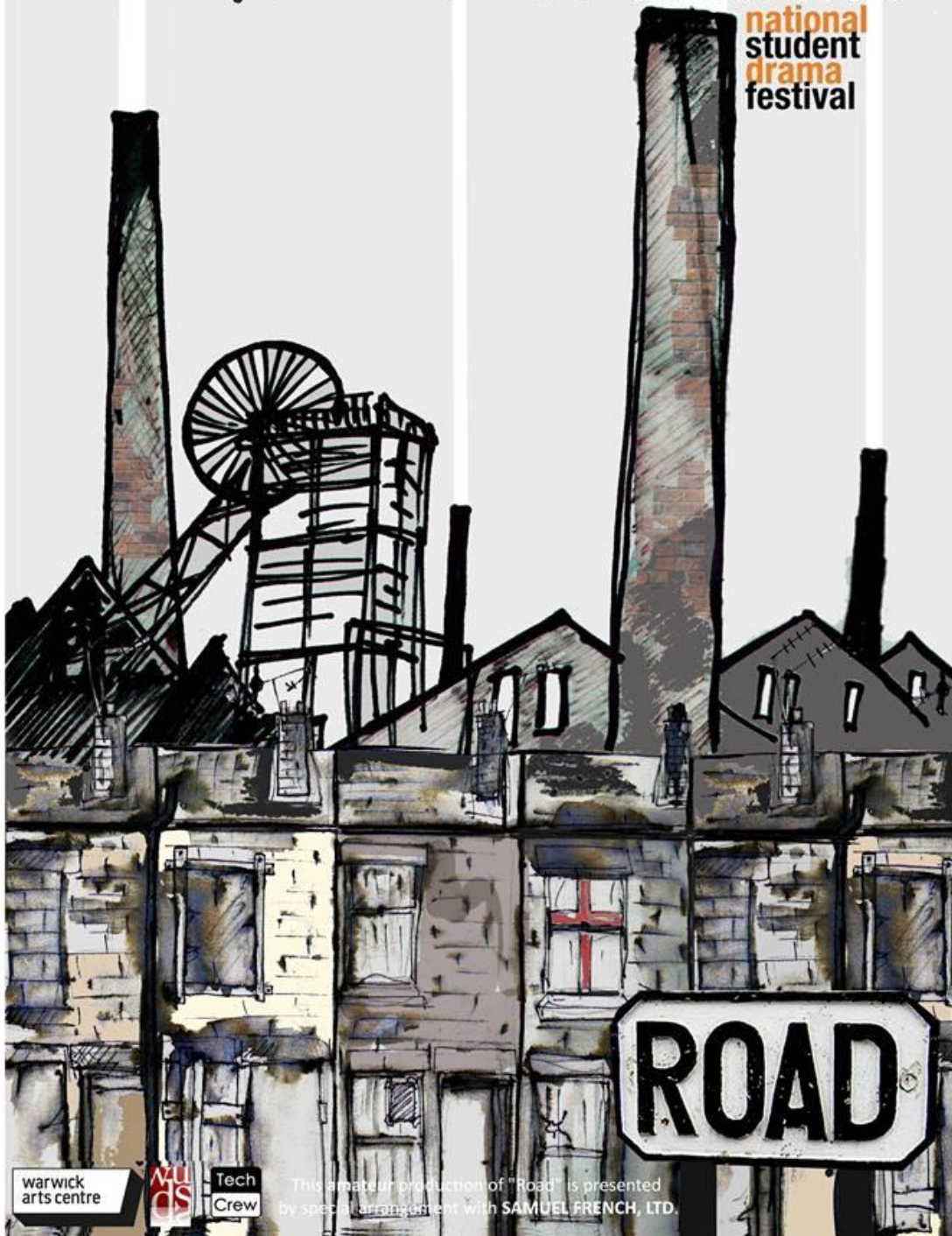


'Road' at NSDF 2014

IATL Festival Bursary Award Project Report

ROAD, BY JIM CARTWRIGHT

**national
student
drama
festival**



warwick
arts centre

WU
DS

Tech
Crew

This amateur production of "Road" is presented
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The Festival

In November 2013, Warwick University Drama Society performed Jim Cartwright's 1986 play 'Road' in the Warwick Arts Centre Studio. The production ran from 13th-16th November, and on the Friday evening performance, Michael Brazier from the National Student Drama Festival (NSDF) came to see it. We were very grateful for his time and feedback, which is integral to the ethos of NSDF.

On 2nd March 2014, the 11 shows selected to transfer to the festival were announced, and we were delighted to be amongst the top 11 student productions out of the 93 they had seen in the last year to go and represent WUDS and the University of Warwick at this year's Festival.

NSDF is an annual festival, taking place each spring in Scarborough, which celebrates and showcases the highest calibre of student theatre from societies and groups across the country. The selected companies have the opportunity to perform their production to peers from around the country, as well as the multitude of industry professionals who go each year to assist in the running of the Festival. The Festival includes a discussion on each production, where the company field questions from their audiences and discuss the talking points of each production. What is more, the Festival runs workshops throughout the week on all aspects of theatrical production, enabling attendees to hone their practical and creative skills, gather some experience and network with the various industry professionals. As such, the Festival is seen as a wonderful opportunity from which to launch professional careers in to the theatre industry.

I can safely say that all of us who went with 'Road' had a wonderful time and learnt an awful lot.

New Opportunities

Transferring our production 'Road' to a new venue, in a completely new environment offered us an exceptionally exciting challenge. Performing originally at Warwick Arts Centre had been one challenge, and had been wonderfully rewarding and instructive, but whereas there are certain links and pathways through the staging of a production in the Arts Centre that make for a seamless process (not least geographical ease!), transferring to Scarborough was a completely new challenge. The creative team had a lot of liaising with the venue and administrative staff at the Festival to do, and given that we were in a new space, with different dimensions etc, we also had to quite radically re-design the show. Our production was staged in promenade, and there has always been a real emphasis on us taking ownership over the space in which we're performing, so the change of venue was of particular significance for a production like ours. The cast and team managed admirably however, and if anything we got better at adapting to the space around us. The short turn-around between finding out about the Festival and getting there probably aided us in terms of efficiency, and the cast thrived off having new audiences in a new space. Returning to the production enabled the creative team to iron-out a few staging and technical issues we had had during the original run, as well as us being able to spend an extra two weeks rehearsing, add new layers of depth to the performances. The production was undoubtedly an improvement on what had been a very successful original run at Warwick. Furthermore, the raising of necessary funds to get the production to Scarborough gave us the invaluable experience of applying for funding and such like.

Once at the Festival, we all got an awful lot from it. Experiencing a get-in in a new venue, with professional technical staff who we had just met on the day gave us a taste of the fast-paced turn-around necessary in some professional environments. Performing to our peers, people we were getting to know and seeing in their own productions was invaluable, and meant that we all became utterly immersed in the whole experience. Similarly, the feedback we were exposed to was most constructive; being able to talk to fellow students and industry professionals in the bar after each performance was useful and instructive for each of us individually, and as a team. The production got stronger as the run went on as a result.

The discussion at the end of our run was an excellent experience, as it meant we were able to engage in a formal discourse about the play, and our production of it. Generally we were pleased to hear how people had

responded to it, and the experience of having to openly justify your artistic choices is an experience you don't really get performing at University. Similarly, it was nice to see the positive feedback we got in the Festival's magazine – Noise's Off (see reviews below) – a magazine which is contributed to both by professional theatre critics and student writers. As mentioned, we were all able to benefit from the many workshops and networking opportunities also. Two of our company also got parts in a production with SlungLow Theatre (they were the only two at the whole Festival to be offered parts!) which is wonderful as it offers them professional experience beyond the Festival.

Awards

Although I want to emphasise that the Festival is not in any way about the winning of awards, we were very honoured to receive 4 awards at the end of the week. We were blown away by the level of support and enthusiasm we received for our production, and are grateful to everyone who saw the show in Scarborough.

The awards we received are as follows:

The Buzz Goodbody Award for Best Student Director

Ali Pidsley

Best Ensemble

The Spotlight Award for Most Promising Actor

Angus Imrie

Best All-round Performance

Beth Holmes



Reviews

See below a selection of/ quotes from reviews. For more/ full reviews please go to <http://noff.nsd.org.uk/>

“Talent spot” – Robert Hewison, The Sunday Times

<<http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/arts/article1402632.ece>> -

“Warwick University Drama Society’s revival of Road, Jim Cartwright’s 1986 portrait of urban deprivation, feels as though it was written for today. In this masterpiece of social surrealism, the inhabitants of a northern town display their lives of noisy desperation. The audience stumbles from house to house, meeting those lost to a tragic hedonism, and those who have given up altogether. Skilfully morphing through multiple roles, the cast of nine won a Judges’ award for superb ensemble acting.”

“Sheer, Undiluted Pleasure” – Catherine Love, Noises Off

<<http://noff.nsd.org.uk/sheer-undiluted-pleasure/>>

“the performances are, without exception, stunning. And I mean heart-thumping, kick-in-the-guts, jaw-grazing-the-floor stunning – plus any other clichés you fancy throwing into the mix.”

“There is the danger, when a group of (mostly) middle class Southerners get together to do a play like this, that it becomes a queasily patronising imitation, verging on poverty porn. Warwick’s performers escape any such charges, however, with an approach that is simple and understated, yet cumulatively devastating. In this version, it is not the characters’ social class that is striking so much as their tangible desperation. The delicacy of the handling is such that the play manages to remain rooted in a particular time, location and class, at the same time as resonating deeply with present-day austerity Britain.”

“joining their voices in a determined yet tentative statement of hope: “somehow I somehow I somehow might escape”. The moment is charged – magical, almost. And it is that rhythmic chant that echoes in the ears long after the lights have come up, its spirit thrillingly and movingly animated by Warwick’s outstanding ensemble.

“Somehow I somehow I somehow might escape”.”

“Urgent, Necessary, Great” - Andrew Haydon, Noises Off

< <http://noff.nsd.org.uk/urgent-necessary-great/>>

“an enviably fluid production, filled with fully realised performances and an ease of relationship with the audience that still eludes many professional companies with decades of experience.”

“It’s not “about the North” (although it is), it’s not just a compelling portrait of an historical moment (although it does that too), it’s not *just* a stark, frightening, horrible warning from the past which resonates appallingly with David Cameron’s calculated ideological campaign against Britain’s poor (which, again, it does). What it really is is somehow an incantation, a ritual, a suicide, a howl of human pain, and a startling revelation of the human capacity for hope and change. That the play is now 28 years old and that hope and change still feels like it has yet to fully manifest itself is perhaps the thing which ultimately makes this production so affecting. But also what makes the production feel absolutely vital and absolutely contemporary. A stunning achievement.”

The Future & Thank You

Almost a full year after getting through the submissions process to perform at the Arts Centre, 'Road' has now come to an end. But it has been a long, emotional and exceptionally educative process. Many of the team have worked on other projects together since, and shall go on to do more together in the future. Many of us are now looking at pursuing professional careers in the theatre, whether that be via Drama School, MA's, or through working with the contacts we made at NSDF.

Finally, and most importantly, we want to thank IATL for your generous support, and helping WUDS take 'Road' to NSDF 2014. Without your support, it would not have been possible, and we all, individually and collectively owe you a great deal. You have helped all of learn and grow so much. We hope that this pack is instructive for you, and that we and IATL are able to continue our generous and instructive relationship together.

