

FROZEN REVIEWS

Evening Standard; Fiona Mountford:

Take note — and banish all thoughts of animated Disney films — for this is the sort of small-scale gem that could easily slip under the radar in the face of noisier shows with better publicity budgets. Blueprint Theatre Company offers a scintillating revival of Bryony Lavery's grimly compelling and multi-award-winning drama about the after-effects of the murder of a child.

There are just three characters on offer in a piece that digs into personal and psychological motivations: Nancy (Sally Grey), the mother of 10-year-old Rhona raped and murdered en route to her grandmother's house; Ralph (Mark Rose), the murderer and Agnetha (Helen Schlesinger), a psychiatrist conducting research "into the frozen Arctic sea that is the criminal brain". The work begins with monologues, which gradually elide into dialogues as the characters come into uneasy contact with each other.

There's no knee-jerk hysteria about paedophilia here and Frozen is immeasurably the better for it. Instead Lavery lets the action unfurl sadly but elegantly down the years, detailing the quiet devastation of Nancy's family and her troubled relationship with her elder daughter. A constant nagging question ripples the surface of the play: is justice less satisfying than revenge?

The piece strikes only one false note and that's with its odd forays into the psychiatrist's personal life. Otherwise, all is first-rate and it's easy to see why the US recognised Frozen with multiple Tony Award nominations. Grey gives a notable performance as a bundle of resilience against all odds; it would be pleasing to hear more from this actress. Ian Brown makes up for the horrors of the recent [Contact.com](#), his last show at this venue, with a still and chilling production that pitches its tone just right. Evidence of a slight thaw at the end is hugely welcome.

Daily Express; Michael Arditti:

Darker and more dangerous issues are explored in Bryony Lavery's **Frozen**, which bravely challenges our preconceptions about child abuse in its portrait of Ralph (Mark Rose), a rapist and murderer; Nancy (Sally Grey), the mother of one of his victims; and Agnetha (Helen Schlesinger), a consultant psychiatrist. All three are played with conviction and authenticity in Ian Brown's sober production.

In addition to the harrowing human drama, Lavery asks urgent questions about crime and punishment. If a child abuser is himself the victim of childhood abuse, which not only warps his mind but alters his brain chemistry, how far is he responsible for his acts? And, without moral responsibility, where to draw the line between good and evil?

The Stage; Tom Wicker:

Can we bear the unbearable? That question is at the heart of Bryony Lavery's 1998 play, here being revived in the Park Theatre's studio space, about the decades-long fallout from a child's disappearance. It's about grief caught in a moment – in the agonising possibility of hope.

Set in modern-day England, the play follows Nancy, whose daughter Rhona vanishes on her way to visit her grandmother; Ralph, a serial molester and killer of young girls; and Agnetha, an American psychiatrist who crosses the Atlantic to study Ralph as part of her attempt to understand what drives those deemed to be 'evil' to commit atrocities.

The three characters spend the play isolated in monologue and stranded on an effectively bare stage, only occasionally intersecting in the prison in which Ralph is incarcerated. They're trapped in their private worlds of loss and denial. While Agnetha categorises and defines Ralph through cerebral abnormalities, Nancy traces her daughter's outline in memories and mementos.

Lavery's writing is vivid and humane, tackling our impulse to understand while acknowledging that moving on takes more than this. Here, each scene is like the brief flaring of an exposed nerve. As Nancy, Sally Grey is defensive and angry, worn down by grief. Meanwhile, Helen Schlesinger's tautly strung Agnetha struggles with her own tragedy.

While the quiet sadness of Ian Brown's production occasionally plays in too minor a key, Mark Rose stands out as Ralph, shouting at the world in a way that is self-aggrandising, pathetic and vulnerable, without ever softening the impact of his character's crimes.

A Younger Theatre; Rebecca Jones:

When I picked up my ticket for *Frozen* the lovely girl on the box office made sure that I wasn't expecting a sing-along tale of princesses in snow, anecdotally recalling that a mother had brought her two children the day before and had to leave – because this *Frozen* couldn't be further from fairy tale. This *Frozen* tells of a criminal act so unfathomable that it leaves all in its wake frozen in time by its cruelty, and its perpetrator frozen in a cycle of abuse that began when he was a child. Bryony Lavery's chilling 1998 play feels as current as ever, exploring the abduction, molestation and murder of a child from the perspective of the mother, the offender and a psychiatrist.

The subject is chilling all on its own – something we read and hear about far too frequently, but always absorb with the notion that it'll never happen to us. Lavery presents us with three characters that all question that: a mother, Nancy

(Sally Grey), like any other, and a paedophile, Ralph (Mark Rose), who appears on the surface to be like any guy walking down the street. The psychiatrist, Agnetha (Helen Schlesinger) is the most interesting of all; having studied the psychological patterns of serial killers and paedophiles for years on end she naturally and intelligently bombards us with information. Managing to show that she is just as vulnerably human as the rest of us, we see her cope with her own tragedy.

Written as a series of monologues, the angles of the plot appear over a period of twenty years. Mentioning no names, I was told once that the pitfall of a monologue is that there has to be a build-up – the audience has to really care about a character before we can focus on them, alone, speaking at us. Lavery and director Ian Brown blow this shaky (at best) opinion out of the water by drawing us in immediately and abruptly with no words at all. The opening minutes consist of Schlesinger having an emotional breakdown, recklessly wailing and sobbing until there is absolutely no doubt that we care.

Conversely, Grey's Nancy isn't a 'woe is me' mother who has lost her child; she fights and breaks, then fights and breaks again. This is kind of the buoy that keeps *Frozen* on the surface instead of drowning deeper into an indulgent, despair-ridden play. It is real and it is sharply moving. Nancy goes through so many natural reactions: unfounded hope, an inability to favour her remaining child, wallowing, rebellion and ultimately forgiveness. Grey does this with such normality that it is completely harrowing.

On the other end of the spectrum, Rose's Ralph is far from normal and yet dangerously alluring, clutching at our sympathies. He talks and thinks in a beguiling rhythm that gave me the shudders. He invests Ralph with the odd combination of being intensely thoughtful and yet emotionless. He is captivatingly good, but at the same time I hated him.

If I had any criticism it would be of the staging. Though it is necessarily simple, the spacing and angles make it difficult for everything to be seen at one time, or to be seen at all, depending on where you were sat. Other than that, *Frozen* is deeply affecting and multifaceted. Just don't expect to be skipping back down to Finsbury Park Station.

Theatre Bubble; Verity Healey:

What is forgiveness? This play will challenge, provoke, disturb and lead you into great darkness and back again.

"Serial killing? A forgivable act?.. the differences between crimes of evil and crimes of illness". So proclaims Dr Agnetha Gottmundsdottir, a 'psychiatric' explorer of a metaphorical Arctic wilderness who has come to England to examine Ralph, a serial killer and abuser of little girls and test drive her theory that such killers are ill- rather than being particularly evil- and suffer frontal lobe disfunction, an illness that prevents the brain from functioning properly and adhering to moral universal laws. In Bryony Lavery's play, directed by Ian

Brown, we focus on three characters- Nancy, whose 10 year old daughter Rhona becomes one of Ralph's many victims, Ralph In Wantage as he proceeds from being pedophile on the loose to eternal resident inmate of Long Larton Maximum Security Prison and Agnetha, fresh from tragedy in the US which bring on instances of her own trauma and panic attacks.



Sally Grey as Nancy- photo credit Gareth McLeod

The play *Frozen* refers in particular however, to *Salvaging the Sacred* written by Marian Partington, sister of Lucy Partington, victim of Fred West and whose remains were not found for 20 years. Marian Partington in particular writes that "It is very difficult to find the words or an image to describe the pain and disorientation of one's sister simply disappearing without trace, for 20 years. It is a bit like trying to search for a body that is trapped somewhere beneath the frozen Arctic ocean, as the freeze continues and the ice thickens and there is no sign of a thaw, no sign of a seal hole." She then goes onto describe what happened to her own life, frozen in time, 'disconnected from the past' and 'disabled by the future'. Although the title for the play was conceived before Bryony Lavery read Marian Partington's pamphlet, the scene where Ingrid, Nancy's remaining daughter, says goodbye to what is left of Rhona, draws parallels with Marian Partington's own experience of burying and accounting for her own sister's remains.

Thus the play draws on real experience and psychiatric research but manages to pull off a great sense of catharsis, rather than a dry lecture. And *Frozen* is not just metaphor for Nancy (Sally Grey convinces us she is a woman who tries to forgive but challenges our very notion of what that is- she does forgive Ralph, yet she cannot stop the outpouring of anger, the joy she feels at the end of the play)

or her surviving daughter Ingrid. It is also a metaphor for Agnetha- who at one point laments that although she is an explorer of the 'Arctic', what happens when one gets back "and you're freezing yourself, you've got snow in your head"? In fact, we realise, the play is about these three people who are directly affected by tragedy. Their own and that caused by others. Nancy's tragedy is already beginning before Rhona is snatched- her own marriage is breaking up and the child going missing only sustains the time for the break to take place. Agnetha is in love with her psychiatrist partner David. And the distress of what happens to him shuts her down. And Ralph's tragedy, which becomes all too apparent, is that he never experienced love in the first place, and has been forever shut down. Cliched perhaps, simplistic yes, but also true. Ironically it is only when Nancy comes to forgive Ralph that he can open up- his brain is re wired? through a supposed act of love which is forgiveness? It is the opposite perhaps of what Nancy wants and Oscar Wilde quotes 'Always forgive your enemies, nothing annoys them quite as much'. Well, Ralph is not annoyed, he is actually freed from his frozenness into feeling, and as we all know, when hands have been cold for a long time and the blood runs in them again, they begin to hurt terribly. And Ralph hurts, which is his salvation.

In fact, in this production, the sense of hurt is palpable. Sally Grey, Mark Rose and Helen Schlesinger all dazzle with an intensity that increases notch by notch as Lavery brings the three of them ever closer together in a triangle of tragedy. Mark Rose's Ralph is a conundrum, his is a scary character, someone you cannot trust. Yet Mark Rose gets across the real sense of aloneness, isolation and terrible darkness that comes with not being loved, even if Ralph cannot analyse it this way himself. In fact, Ralph's real tragedy is to not realise that this is what is wrong with him. And it is always those who need love the most that never get it. Sally Grey as Nancy seethes hurt, anger alternating with a forgiveness she does not feel but knows she must enact. Agnetha feels the most lost. Helen Schlesinger gives a remarkable portrait of a woman whose job consumes her, whose morals and faiths in life could destroy her- she is driven by a love that is yet to be personally tested. Liam Tims as the Guard, is excellent as the mute voice of the law, silenced and watchful as Agnetha goes about her work. The question here though, which is never fully brought out, never fully voiced or answered completely- is whether Ralph is actually evil. If evil exists. You have to know which side of the fence you sit on here. Like Agnetha, I don't believe people are born evil or become it. I can believe that evil acts are perpetuated. But not that people are evil. Like Ray Wyre in his book *The Murder of Childhood*, which formed a huge part of Bryony Lavery's research, I believe that "even in the people who are hated by society, there is a good person lurking in there somewhere"

There is not a discussion of what evil is- whether it is as transient and as flirtatious as love and forgiveness and therefore not sustainable (the act of love is unsustainable, just as is the act of killing and abusing) or whether it is some horrid, dark immobile thing that does not move, like ice itself. I think the former. All ice thaws, as we see and somewhere, somehow 'the cycle of abuse must be broken' by someone, as producing Blueprint Theatre Company believes. Frozen still is as contentious now as it was when it was first performed in 1998.

Now though, we can go further, now we live in a world quickly realising that child abuse has been around us and ignored for a long time. What would happen if the offender was so rehabilitated he was allowed back into the community and as a reformed man, became a champion of good works? A different person others now had to accept as being good? This would also now be the contention. Another leap forward for human evolution. Complex, challenging and disturbing, *Frozen* continues at the Park Theatre until 11th April

London Theatre 1; Roz Wylie:

It's more than sixteen years since *Frozen* was first performed so it's fair to question whether it is still a relevant play. The opening monologues felt stylised and the subject matter of the disappearance and death of a school girl and an unrepentant serial killer is abundant in popular culture. I even wondered whether the science would feel dated. But for me, as it developed, this production had a freshness and compassion that I found very moving. Even though occasionally the language does seem a little dated, there is a contemporary feel to the direction and director Ian Brown keeps the pace alive and works the split scenes effortlessly. There were many small flourishes to enjoy that didn't distract from the play, but kept the monologues alive – the use of Tibetan Prayer flags, the silent but ever vigilant Guard, and beautiful work from the lighting and sound designers that keep a lightness and depth to this play that draws you into the story.

There's a clean understated performance from Sally Grey, as Nancy, the grieving mother – neither overplaying nor leaving us unaffected. Helen Schlesinger gives an intelligent nuanced performance, as Agnetha, the psychiatrist struggling with her own grief and remorse. Mark Rose is suitably sinister and disturbing as Ralph, and manages to elicit both anger and compassion from the audience.

This production finds the humour where it can in such a dark subject matter and its strongest argument is that it removes the sensationalist drama from the incident and instead shows us the long term consequences of grief and remorse – and reminds us to think beyond tabloid headlines and investigate the root causes of behaviours, to think about whether evil really exists and to question what we can and should be forgiven for. It's a huge hearted play that reminds us that we can be better than we know. If I had a criticism it is that at times the staging seemed to forget audience sightlines – so grab a front row seat if you can.

Islington Gazette; Jill Trueman:

Bryony Lavery's disturbing play about the widespread consequences of the abduction, sexual abuse and murder of a 10-year-old girl is not easy to watch, so closely involved are the audience confined within the small space of Park 90. The experiences of the four consummate actors are distressing and sometimes terrifying.

Central to the action is the long and agonising journey over 20 years of Nancy, the child's mother, movingly and powerfully portrayed by Sally Grey. She travels from hope to despair, through hatred and desire for revenge, to a slow, if partial, acceptance. That she survives is almost a miracle, but "nothing is unbearable" as she says at the close of the play. It is clear, however, that the lives of all four characters, as well as of innumerable people more remotely concerned with, or even completely unaware of, these terrible events, are changed forever. The acting throughout is strong and sure. Even the silent guard, played by Liam Tims, is perfect in the timing of his moves, body language and facial expressions. Mark Rose gives a powerful and frightening performance in the near-impossible part of Ralph, the perpetrator of the crime. His authenticity is astonishing. Helen Schlesinger deals excellently with the complex part of Agnetha, the psychiatrist. A successful career woman, efficient, worldly-wise, experienced, intelligent and apparently in control of the situation, she is also deeply affected by her connection with the crime.

The apparently disconnected stream-of-consciousness monologues at the beginning of the play gradually come together and the theme is established and developed. It is a story with which, through the media, we are all familiar. Now it is happening to us. We are introduced to innumerable relevant emotions and ideas, including remorse, guilt, revenge and the viability of restorative justice, before coming to a dramatic, partially satisfactory, ending.

As befits a plot where the development takes place inside the minds of the characters, the set (Jason Southgate) is virtually non-existent and the lighting and sound (Charlie Lucas and Gareth Mcleod) are also minimal. The action takes place off-stage, with results as powerful as in any Greek drama. The emotions – both of actors and audience – are mercilessly explored. And the repercussions will continue.

Apart from one joke at the end of this traumatic production, directed by Ian Brown, this is not a fun evening. But it is fascinating and insightful. More a drama-doc than a play, it provides plenty of material for thinking and talking about afterwards.

The Camden Review; Lucy Popescu:

ABOUT as far from Disney as you can get, Blueprint Theatre's welcome revival of Bryony Lavery's 1998 play follows the intertwined fates of three characters dealing with the brutal murder of a 10-year-old child.

In 1980, Nancy's daughter Rhona disappeared on the way to visit her grandmother. Ralph is later found guilty of her murder and six other children. He is discovered with a stash of paedophile porn videos in the lock-up shed where he buried his victims. Agnetha, an American psychiatrist, suffering her own bereavement, comes to England to study Ralph and his motives. Agnetha compares the criminal mind to the "arctic frozen sea" and describes the emotionally detached Ralph as "icebound".

Lavery's laying bare of her three characters psyches is insightful and compelling to watch. This beautifully spare production allows the full force of her writing to take hold.

Ian Brown draws out terrific performances from the small cast. Sally Grey conveys all the anguish and fury of a mother who has lost her child to a monster. As her marriage falls apart, she struggles to connect with her older daughter. Mark Rose is terrifying as the unrepentant Ralph whose only regret is that "killing girls is not legal" while Helen Schlesinger also impresses as the cool, measured psychiatrist, adept at analysing others, but falling apart inside. Lavery's unsettling work has lost none of its resonance. The issues she explores are as vital as ever and this first rate production is not to be missed.

Stage Review; Anne Cox:

Statistically there have been very few paedophile serial killers in the UK but that doesn't stop parents worrying every time their child is a few minutes late home. It is their worst nightmare. Their youngster goes out to play, is snatched and abused, and is never seen alive again.

The police will tell you that the fear of abduction is hugely out of proportion to the reality but we insist on smothering our kids in over-protectiveness. When it does happen, like the Sarah Payne and Milly Dowler cases, we cuddle them ever tighter and pray they will always remain safe.

Bryony Lavery's Frozen (absolutely no connection to the Disney animated film of the same name), a harrowing drama about child abduction, first aired 17 years ago and went on to play both at the National Theatre and on Broadway. This powerfully told revival, by the *Blueprint Theatre Company* and directed by Ian Brown, opened at London's Park Theatre last night and it has lost none of its impact.

As a mother I shared the pain of Nancy Shirley who sent her 10-year-old daughter, Rhona, off on an errand to her gran's house nearby – and she disappeared forever.

At first you hope she's just playing truant and then you convince yourself that one day she'll knock on the door and announce her return. But then, when the knock comes, years later, the reality hits home and you learn the full horror of what she endured.

The youngster had been enticed into a van, sexually abused and then murdered by a very methodical man who neatly filed the bodies of his polythene-wrapped victims (seven in all) in the floor of a shed close to the library of his perfectly arranged child porn videos.

Intercut with Nancy's traumatic story, told mainly in monologue, is that of the murderer, Ralph Wantage, who was caught by chance when it was discovered

that his body tattoos were a illustrated map of his crimes.

The third main character in the play is American academic Agnetha who tries to convince us that serial killer not evil.



She's in the UK to deliver a lecture and we are her audience. Through a series of conversations with Ralph she concludes that the poor soul's upbringing created the creature he became and that his actions were as a result of poor brain development.

Agnetha swings perilously close to being a bleeding heart liberal but is saved by a cold, clinical detachment to her study subject which mirrors Ralph's attitudes to his victims.

Nancy can't move on with her life until she confronts the monster who stole her daughter. She forgives him. She wants to understand. Under the circumstances I'm not so sure many of us would be able to follow her example.

Sally Grey, as the resilient Nancy, is mesmerising. Her eyes reveal all the pain and sorrow of a mother. Then there are flashes of anger and a yearning for revenge to be replaced, eventually, with hope. She presents a very brave Nancy who forces herself to confront an uncomprehending evil and emerge stronger and victorious.

You can't bring yourself to find much sympathy with Wantage, played with real bile by Emmerdale and Corrie actor Mark Rose. He's a bit of a stereotype,

obviously, with the usual excuses for his behavior. The abusive upbringing, of course, a loner, but also someone who says he doesn't understand what remorse is. He's an animal who does what he wants without thinking of the victim or the consequences. It's only when he is confronted by Nancy, who shows him family snapshots, that some humanity begins to surface.

Helen Schlesinger's Agnetha opens the production with an hysterical wailing and, momentarily throughout, has teary little breakdowns, the reason only becoming clearer at the end.

But her own feelings of guilt distract from her part in telling what is an intense, traumatic and bleak story that contrasts ice cold detachment with raw emotion. The science and psychology may offer explanations but, as parents, do we want that? Or would we prefer the American system where they offer tickets to see the perpetrators fry in the electric chair?

Reviews Gate; Timothy Ramsden:

Everyone is frozen in Bryony Lavery's remarkable 1998 play. Agnetha, an American expert on serial killer mentalities, of Icelandic descent, has lost her colleague and lover in an accident. Helen Schlesinger, who goes on to combine a professional manner in her work with a sense of personal grief, begins Ian Brown's production with a long shriek of utter agony.

In England she interviews child abductor Ralph, his mind frozen from violent childhood abuse which leave him torturing himself with justifications and underlying intense self-hate for his revenge on vulnerability and innocence. His skilled manipulation of children's sense of good behaviour, with its sense of threat masked by kindness as he lures another child into his van, is all we need to sense the horror of his psyche and the terrible exploitation of childhood trust.

It's not hard to understand why Nancy, mother of abducted 10-year old Rona, feels her life is frozen. But Lavery is never simplistic. Nancy acquires a new confidence as speaker for an organisation helping parents of missing children. And her older daughter, Ingrid, seen only through her mother's words, grows from stropky child to self-indulging teenage layabout, before travelling into the South Asian heat, which brings her both physical and mental self-discipline and a philosophy that encourages her mother to go beyond revenge.

It's in Nancy's visit to Ralph that the melting in his psyche begins. It's hard for a character conditioned to expect toughness – he flinches violently from a female hand, his body is ever-restless. In the end it's too much and proves a fatal thaw.

Mark Rose achieves a terrible intensity. His arms fold defensively across his front, his forceful obscenities aimed at anyone who comes near are partnered by a vocal fullness and enthusiasm suggesting that his views and feelings are right, but also that he needs to go on proving to himself that is so. He's like ice able to sense it would be destroyed by warmth.

FROZEN ARTICLES

Islington Gazette; Alex Bellotti

Don't mistake it for Disney's Frozen, for this dark tale of murder could hardly be further apart, says Alex Bellotti

"Someone said the other day it's very timely, but then I thought well isn't it always very timely? Isn't child abduction and child abuse always timely as long as it's still going on?"

Sally Grey highlights a sad truth as we discuss the Park Theatre's latest play, Frozen. Coming shortly after the awful case of Bristol's Becky Watts, this revival of Bryony Lavery's dark tale about the consequences of child murder is unfortunately as contemporary as it was when it stormed the National Theatre back in 2002.

Brought to the stage by Islington's Blueprint Theatre Company, the show is directed by Ian Brown and stars Grey alongside Mark Rose, Helen Schlesinger and Liam Timms.

It's certainly an emotionally draining project – while Grey plays Nancy, the grieving mother of a murdered 10-year-old, her (real-life) husband, Rose, plays serial killer, Ralph. Both talk to a psychiatrist (Schlesinger), each delivering devastating monologues as they come to terms with their situation and Nancy moves from desperation to eventual forgiveness.

"There is something going on today where people are beginning to look a bit more between good and evil," says Grey. "People are starting to realise that nothing is that simple and it's important to understand that otherwise it will just keep going on and on and on if you demonise people and say you're evil and that's that."

Of course losing your child – and in such brutal circumstances – is every parent's worst nightmare, and one that is very hard to imagine unless it actually comes to pass. Grey says that taking on the role has changed her attitudes towards forgiveness – "does (Nancy) really forgive (Ralph) or does she just need to see him and tell him that she's forgiven him?" On a dramatic level, she's enjoyed the challenge.

"It took me a long time to tap into that complete loss and stress. It has taken a while, but I'm an actor so I enjoy finding all that emotion, expressing it and looking at the big questions like can you find humour in grief as well? Certainly this character does and can and that's how she survives, by finding a strength and humour in her situation."

The theatre company has been pursuing the chance to perform *Frozen* for years, having long been taken with Lavery's "incredible writing".

"The thing with Bryony is that all the characters are so rounded. I know that sounds a bit of a cliché but you could easily just have the mother as a victim, then the murderer's just this evil weirdo, but there are also moments where he can be very tender and gentle – it's up to the audience to decide how to respond to that."

In addition to the play, a corresponding art exhibition will also be showing throughout the run. Called *Angels Fighting Devils* (named after one of Ralph's tattoos), it sees local artists create a series of images on themes raised in the play such as protection, fear and violence, based on ideas given to them by children. "It's quite nice that we've been able to give children a voice in this, because that's something that's often not done – which is understandable, they couldn't come and see (the show) – but I think it's important that children have as much of a voice as possible in this whole idea of what it means to be safe and understand where the danger is."

Frozen runs at Park Theatre until April 17. Visit parktheatre.co.uk
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Interview with Helen Schlesinger
March 18, 2015 by Neil Cheesman



Ian Brown directs Helen Schlesinger, Mark Rose, and Sally Grey in a rare British performance of *Frozen*, which runs from 18th March to 11th April 2015 at Park

Theatre London. Alongside *Frozen* at the theatre will be a free exhibition entitled *Angels Fighting Devils* which explores some of the issues raised in Lavery's play such as protection, fear and violence.

The cast of *Frozen* includes Helen Schlesinger (Agnetha), Mark Rose (Ralph), Sally Grey (Nancy) and Liam Timms (Guard).

For theatre, Helen's recent work includes *Coriolanus* (Donmar Warehouse), *Bracken Moor* (Tricycle Theatre), *Fireface* (Young Vic), *Skåne* (Hampstead Theatre), *Blue/Orange* (Arcola Theatre), *The Gods Weep*, *The Crucible* (RSC) and *Whipping It Up* (Bush Theatre and Ambassadors Theatre). For television, her credits include *Merlin*, *The Hour*, *Nativity*, *Criminal Justice*, *Trial and Retribution* and *Sensitive Skin*; and for film, *Dirty War* and *24 Hour Party People*. Helen recently took time out to chat about her career and *Frozen*.

You are performing in *Frozen* by Bryony Lavery at the Park Theatre. You are a very busy actress. What attracted you to this particular production?

I read it and thought it was a really beautifully written play. It's a very affecting play.

Frozen has a cast of four. What can you tell us about rehearsals?

It is such a small group that we take it turns because there are quite a lot of monologues. It is quite interesting in a way working on our own quite a lot and also working closely with the director which I have really enjoyed. The closest relationship I have is with the serial killer! Working in a small group you are much more conscious of what you are doing or not doing.

You play the role of Agnetha, what can you tell us about her and how she fits into the storyline?

She is an American psychiatrist and she works with serial killers. She is investigating the effect of early childhood trauma on their behaviour. Her research shows that for example when a child is 'knocked on the head' in their infancy that will have an effect on their brain and change their behaviour. Her work has been in America with serial killers who are waiting for the death penalty, so the serial killers there will be waiting to be executed. Her role in terms of the play is about finding out if a serial killer can feel remorse. Is it possible to forgive terrible acts? I suppose she comes down on the side of compassion, of trying to understand why terrible people do the terrible things that they do. She is juxtaposed against the killer himself and also a mother of one of his victims. Can we understand why these people are like the way they are and who they are.

What is at the heart of the play?

It's about remorse. It's a very poetic play. The woman is frozen in grief. What will happen to her? Will she be able to survive? The man is incarcerated in a sort of frozen state and what will happen to him. The psychiatrists have their own private grief which is only hinted at which you find out quite late on in the play. So it is about 'will these people thaw' in a way.

There is a lot of theatre to see in and around London at the moment – why

should everyone get along to see Frozen?

It is an exceptional play. It is a surprising play in many ways and not quite what you might be expecting. It is also very involving, moving, enthralling and unpredictable. You would never regret seeing this play. It is also in a really intimate space which audiences like. To be close to the action.

Interviewed by Neil Cheesman
@LondonTheatre1

Wednesday, 18 March 2015

WEST END FRAME Guest Blog:

Bryony Lavery's Frozen is revived at the Park Theatre

Mark Rose writes about Bryony Lavery's Frozen, produced by The Blueprint Theatre Company at the Park Theatre. Mark plays Ralph in the production which he has also co-produced.

It is no easy feat to get a production off the ground these days. As a small production company of three people, all with other commitments and time constraints, we have to be absolutely certain we are working with material that will make all the hard work and sacrifice worthwhile.

Bryony Lavery's Frozen is in the consciousness of many people. There are those who never saw its original incarnations at Birmingham Rep or The National Theatre but are nevertheless aware of it and the impression it made at the time.

Critically lauded and award winning the play was an unqualified success in the UK and transferred to Broadway, where it was equally feted. So from Birmingham to London, to Broadway and back again, what is it about a play written nearly 20 years ago that resonates wherever and whenever it is presented?

The answer is in the writing. Bryony has taken a near-unpalatable subject and forged it into a piece of art; it has humanity and heart, it is bold and theatrical, it dares us to examine our reactions to a monstrous act and forces us to ask hard questions.

The subject of missing or abducted children, child murder and paedophilia is the stuff of nightmares. With child or without, we all feel the horror of such acts and the dark shadows they cast upon us.

The Missing, Broadchurch, Torn, Gone baby Gone, Amber. These are just a few of the recent fictional examinations of the very crime that Frozen brings to the stage. It seems that as a society we share a grim fixation on violence against children.

What marks *Frozen* out from the aforementioned examples and also from the often-sensationalised portrayals of real-life cases is that it asks the question - why? It is brave enough to ask us to stop for a moment and look beyond the knee-jerk reaction and the stereotype. Written with humanity and love, the play explores the cause, impact and aftermath of an inexplicable deed.

Blinded by our moral outrage and disgust, rarely do we stop to look at ways of stemming or changing the patterns that are present in nearly all cases. Aren't people who commit these crimes monsters, inhuman? No, they are all too human, nearly all victims themselves. It is a hard fact to face and perhaps *Frozen* is part of a slow re-examination of how society deals with such offenders.



Helen Schlesinger and Mark in rehearsals

Frozen presents us with three people: Nancy, the mother of murdered Rhona; Ralph, the perpetrator and Agnetha, a psychiatrist who tries to make sense of such acts. These three characters are shown as multi dimensional and flawed. Bryony makes no pat statements about them or how they behave. The emotions they all have are compressed and focused and, as director Ian Brown observed, “the audience have their noses pressed up against the window” as the characters live out their painful and relentless experiences.

As a companion piece to the play, and in line with our remit to engage new audiences, we have created a sister project examining the themes of *Frozen*. In previous projects we have worked with Archmonger architects to mount a

photographic exhibition and with Sugar Spun Productions to make a film. This time we partnered with the Wellcome Collection's Catherine Walker to curate an art exhibition. Six artists all provided an original piece for the exhibition which is entitled Angels Fighting Devils. Each piece represents the artists' response to the play and to interviews that we conducted with children aged 8 -10. The artworks line the corridor leading to the theatre space so the audience see them both prior to and after the show, thus viewing the art with what we hope will be a new perspective.

Frozen is ultimately uplifting and this is the play's greatest triumph. It shows that even in the most incredible and traumatic of circumstances, human beings are capable of astonishing bravery and tenderness and, in the face of relentless news coverage of atrocities from all over the globe, this is something worth remembering: we have strength, we have resilience, we have love. We are not Frozen.

Mark Rose's theatre credits include: A Taste of Honey and Port (National Theatre), Women Laughing (Offie Award nomination for Best Male Performance) and This Story of Yours (The Old Red Lion), Platform Performance with Simon Stephens and Maxine Peake (National Theatre), Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Royal Exchange), Twelfth Night (Chester), Spiders Web (Bill Kenwright number 1 tour), The Accomplice (Menier Chocolate Factory) and This Story of Yours (Old Red Lion).

Frozen runs at the Park Theatre (Park90) until Saturday 11th April 2015. Please visit www.parktheatre.co.uk for further information and tickets.