

Ciphers Education Work Pack

Out of Joint

2014



out of joint

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NB. All rehearsal photos are by Jon Bradfield

Introduction

Aim and Content

The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance our audiences' enjoyment and understanding of *Ciphers*. They are meant to illustrate the process that was embarked on in rehearsals by Director Blanche McIntyre, the cast, the rest of the creative team and Dawn King, the writer.

Furthermore it seeks to provide a guideline to assist students in the practical study of this text. It works alongside the workshops Out of Joint provides for *Ciphers*, led by the Director, a Cast Member or our Education Administrator.

These resources are aimed at anyone with an interest in theatre wishing to gain a deeper understanding of this exciting new play. This encompasses a look at creating a new play, from writing it to the performance.



Bruce Alexander, Blanche McIntyre and Dawn King consulting the play's timeline

The **research** section aims to provide visual and contextual information which can be used to form a basic understanding of the world of spies. There are many available sources to research from, for instance: authorised and non authorised biographies; newspaper articles, and books by people who used to work for MI5/MI6 like Stella Rimington and David Shayler. In addition the MI5 recruitment website is very useful and interesting. This work pack includes a brief history of spies through history, and information about the espionage and intelligence work from the MI5. It also has a brief look at material- video and reading- which can be used for inspiration.

The **rehearsals** section covers some of the analysis and work that has gone into putting this production together. This includes Blanche McIntyre's process through the rehearsal period, from identifying the challenges of the play, to her own rehearsal techniques and her collaboration with James Perkins, the designer of the show.

We hope that you find the materials interesting and enjoyable. If there is anything more you would like to know about *Ciphers*, the page to stage process of an Out of Joint production, or you would like to book a workshop, please contact Isabel Quinzaños on 0207 609 0207 or at isabel@outofjoint.co.uk.

Blanche and Dawn

Blanche McIntyre and Dawn King have previously worked together on *Foxfinder*, which opened at the Finborough Theatre in 2011. In fact, they did such a good job that Max Stafford-Clark thought it would be a shame to separate the team when he read Dawn's most recent play- *Ciphers*.

BLANCHE McINTYRE DIRECTOR

Blanche began her directing career at 15 years of age, after experiencing a performance of *Henry VI Part III* by the RCS. She was sitting in the second row and she felt that the production had drawn her in so successfully and it was such an intimate experience for her that she couldn't wait to go and try and replicate what she had seen. And from that moment, she's been directing- at least once a year.

Her hard work shows through her impressive curriculum. She was the winner of the Critics' Circle Award for Most Promising Newcomer and the Off West End Theatre Award for Best Director in 2012, and the inaugural winner of the Leverhulme Bursary for Emerging Theatre Directors in 2009. She was Associate Director at Out of Joint in 2010, and Director in Residence at the National Theatre Studio and the Finborough Theatre in 2009. Blanche is currently an Associate Artist for Hightide Festival Theatre and an Associate Director at Nuffield Southampton.

DAWN KING WRITER

Dawn's writing career started later than Blanche's directing one. Whilst she enjoyed theatre during her A Levels, she made a choice to study media at university, and it wasn't until after, when she moved to London, that she began her pursuit for an activity that made her happy. This is how she stumbled into a taster day at the Soho Theatre for new writers, after which she ended up being part of their Young Writer's Programme.

Initially, writing plays seemed almost impossible, but Dawn found that she could write if she could get the characters talking to each other. Her first play was given a rehearsed reading at the Royal Court in 2001 and she knew she had found her vocation.

Dawn was one of ten writers chosen for the BBC Writersroom 10 scheme in 2012 and

through this received a residency at West Yorkshire Playhouse, where she wrote the first draft of *Ciphers*. Dawn's play *Foxfinder* won the Papatango Theatre Company writing competition in 2011 and was produced at the Finborough Theatre, London, where it was critically acclaimed and sold out. *Foxfinder* won Dawn 'Most Promising Playwright' at the Off West End Awards 2012 and was shortlisted for the Susan Smith Blackburn prize 2012 and the James Tait Black drama prize 2011/2012. Dawn was Pearson writer in residence at the Finborough for 2012.

In 2013, Dawn participated in the prestigious Channel Four television writing scheme, 4 Screenwriting 2013. She has an original drama series in development with Touchpaper Television. Her short film *The Karman Line* is in post-production.

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Research

Summary of the play

Ciphers is the story of a Justine, a woman in her late twenties who joins the Secret Service in a quest to find a vocation she really cares about. When she is found dead, her sister Kerry sets out to find out exactly what happened to her. Alongside her investigation, we see flashbacks to Justine's life and which reflect Kerry's search for what happened to her sister. As Kerry struggles through her grief and the impenetrable wall of silence and mystery surrounding her sister's death, it becomes apparent that secrecy was an element that extended throughout all aspects of Justine's life.



Gráinne Keenan in rehearsals

What little transpires throughout her frantic search, leaves her even more baffled as to her sister's real identity. Justine was having an affair with a married man. No matter how hard he denies it, Kerry has reason to believe it was quite serious. She has no leads, she doesn't know who to trust, and she thinks someone might be following her. But the most difficult thing that Kerry faces is the fact that if her sister lied for a living, how will she know when she finds the truth?

Inspiration- Dawn King interview by Jon Bradfield

The text below is a transcript of a video interview.

JB- What was your inspiration for *Ciphers*?

DK- The inspiration for the play was the real story of Gareth Williams, it was a real case called 'The Spy in the Bag' case, he was working for MI6 and he was on secondment at GCHQ and he was found dead, sort of padlocked inside a bag in the bath of his flat. The case kind of stuck in my mind because after it happened, lots of stories got into the papers saying lots of different things about this man and some of it seemed to be very hard to understand- where did these stories come from?

JB- What kind of stories?

DK- The stories were that he was into bondage and he visited bondage websites and that he was a sort of repressed, unhappy gay man and that he had women's clothing in his flat and that there were weird things found in his flat, like there were lots of SIM cards lying on the table and it was kind of difficult to figure out how you'd ever get to the truth about what happened, what really happened- how he really died.

And, underneath all of this kind of media froth, was the very real fact that there is a family who lost their son, brother... and they're grieving and they want to know what happened to him. I guess it stuck with me the sort of, the idea that if you've got someone you love who is working for a Secret Service and something happens to them, then you never really know what happened. And by nature, the Secret Service is secret, so even if someone sat down and said "look, I'm his boss and I can tell you what happened," you could still think that they were lying. So, I thought that there could be an interesting journey of trying to find the truth about something and, because that thing is a secret thing, you can never get the truth of it.

And then when I started thinking about it on a bigger scale, I was thinking about somebody who lies for a living and who has different versions of themselves, that they kind of use, some of them professionally, some of them personally. The initial idea was that I had a character that had more than one face, so you'd have three scenes in a row where- first of all they'd appear to be one sort of person, then appear to be somebody else and then they appear to be somebody else.

In the play there are two sisters, Justine and Kerry, and Justine is working for the Secret Service and she's found dead under mysterious circumstances, and Kerry is trying to find out what's happened to her. For her job, Justine has different personas and also in her personal life she has quite different versions of herself that she's using. On a bigger level I'm asking a question about identity, which is about how can you ever really know somebody who lies for a living and how can you ever get close to them, but also, how can you ever get close to anyone and what's the difference between two sisters who are actually so alike but so different in so many ways.

With Justine, her secrecy doesn't just involve her working life- she's got a secret lover as well, so she's having an affair with a married man who is part of a semi-celebrity couple; he's a young artist and his wife is an extremely wealthy business woman who is in the pages of Hello Magazine. And as a couple they are kind of a bit of a sort of sexy couple who get their photographs taken when they go out to events- and Justine is involved in this affair and I think that as you follow her story you realise that she by nature wants to be hidden and prefers to do things privately rather than doing them in the open- I think.

I think that somebody who has chosen to do a job which they have to keep a lot of what they are doing, if not all of it, secret from people that they know, I think that for me- it seemed natural that a character like that might also have other parts of their life that were very private and very secret and other people wouldn't know about. And inside one kind of secrecy there would be another kind of secrecy and then another one and another one- which leads you to the question of 'who is this person?' So the question of 'who killed Justine?' becomes the question 'who is Justine?' or 'who was Justine?' And 'how could we have not known these things about her?'

JB- How does *Ciphers* relate to your previous work, *Foxfinder*?

DK- There is a link between my first play, *Foxfinder*, and *Ciphers* which I didn't realise until after I had completed it.

Foxfinder is set in a version of the English countryside in which people blame foxes for things that go wrong, in the same way that we might have blamed witches in the middle ages. And there is a farmer and his wife, and the farm is doing badly and the government sends the Foxfinder to their farm to find out why they are doing badly and if they have been contaminated by foxes. The fox finder is a young guy who is 19 who all his life has been trained to fulfil this mission and when he arrives he is full of belief in his mission and by the end he's realised that actually things that he has been taught aren't really true and that his mission is a lie.

In *Ciphers*, Justine's character, she begins the play thinking she is going to do this job and that it's going to help people and she believes in it and its importance. Through the course of the play she realises that it's not that simple and she becomes disillusioned and she gets involved and she gets hurt and by the end her position is changed.

So, I guess I've written two plays about people doing certain jobs and who end up not believing in those jobs as much as they did at the beginning... Or at all, actually.

Both plays have got grief in them. In *Foxfinder* there is a dead child. In *Ciphers* Justine is dead, so there are two timelines running: one when she is alive; and one is when she is dead and Kerry is trying to find out what happened to her. And the grief is this black centre in the play which is radiating out through Kerry and through Kerry's journey- it's almost like she's trying to find her, like if she could find out what happened to her, she could know who she was, she could get to her again and she could make herself feel better. That's never going to happen. Partly because she can never get to the truth, and partly because that's not how it would be anyway. I imagine that finding out what happened wouldn't actually take away your grief. It might change it slightly but it wouldn't exactly take it away.

JB- Which writers and plays inspire you and your work?

DK- There are quite a few writers that I've been influenced by.

I love a writer called Dennis Kelly who's written loads of visceral plays and he also wrote to book for *Matilda the Musical* and a Channel 4 series called *Utopia*. I love the fact that he has done all these different things. And he is also a very nice guy- just to add on, an extra thing. He is a very nice guy.

I love Caryl Churchill, every play that she writes is very different but you can tell they are Caryl Churchill immediately.

I love Philip Ridley. I had a period where I watched loads of Philip Ridley plays- they were all being produced everywhere- and I saw his play *Mercury Fur*, and it was the most tense I've ever been in the theatre and when I came out with my friend we just didn't speak to each other for 15 minutes.



That's why I love theatre: because when it works, when it's really working and really good you're sitting there and you feel that tension and it's totally electrifying. Because it's really there, it's really happening there in front of you.

Dawn King in rehearsals

Introduction to the Characters

Justine, a member of the security services. Late twenties.

Justine is private, quiet and discreet. She can easily hide from the public eye, go unnoticed and is at all times measured and controlled. As the play progresses, she is torn between her yearning for love and her ambition to be professionally successful in a career path.

Kerry, a gallery manager. Justine's sister. Early thirties.

Kerry is extroverted, charismatic and loud. She is the polar opposite of her sister. She uses drugs, can't stop smoking and drinks too much. When faced with her sister's untimely death, she is confronted with how little she really knew her and a deep desire to know, really *know* what chain of events led to Justine's murder.

Played by GRÁINNE KEENAN

Kai, an artist. Late twenties/early thirties.

Kai is suave, cool and charming. He is disarmingly seductive. He is a small time artist who hit it big by marrying a rich business woman and becoming an asset of the socialite scene. He is, however, disappointed with his lack of artistic development and not being able to carve his own path under his wife's heavy surveillance, despite which he still manages to be notoriously promiscuous.

Kareem, a Muslim youth worker. Late twenties/early thirties.

Kareem is hard working, deeply dedicated to his community and his family. He is reluctantly recruited to gather intelligence on a target the Secret Service wants to monitor within the Muslim community. In a quick succession of events he sees himself involved with people and situations far too serious for his ability to cope and stay safe. Nevertheless, he is unable to stand up to Justine and Sunita and refuse his complicity in their mission.

Played by RONNY JHUTTI

Sunita, Justine's boss. Early forties.

Sunita is in control. She is powerful. She is steady. She is a clear leader- aggressive when she needs to be. Everything about her character is measured and thought through. She is a master manipulator and therefore, extremely good at her job. However, she is sincere about her affection for Justine and the bond forged between them during their work, as evidenced during the last scene of the play.

Anoushka, a businesswoman. Kai's wife. Early forties.

Anoushka is rich- filthy rich. She is the archetypal business woman- she knows what money can buy and what sort of dividends to expect from each investment, which she shows in her actions towards advancing her husband's career. She is extremely

successful and glamorous. Notorious and recognisable. She knows the right people, she makes things happen, and she represents stability for Kai, her husband, which he would never be able to achieve on his own. However, she is nobody's fool and her controlling nature means that she knows exactly what her husband is up to behind her back even though she can't rein him in. The problem is that she can't control her feelings for Kai- he is her weak spot.

Played by SHEREEN MARTIN

Koplov, a Russian diplomat. Late fifties/early sixties.

Koplov is mysterious. He seems warm and kind, someone you can trust, like a father figure. He is an important man, very powerful- loyal to his country and his roots. He develops a physical relationship with Justine, despite their age gap. In fact, there is reason to believe from the text that Koplov has developed similar relationships with his previous assistant. Most importantly, it is clear that underneath his pleasant and understanding facade, he is truly dangerous and threatening.

Peter, Justine and Kerry's Dad. Late fifties/early sixties.

Peter is a kind man. Fiercely stiff upper lip. Patriotic, well-meaning and slightly naive. He doesn't want to stir things up- he doesn't want to make waves. He just wants life to continue and grieve his exemplary daughter in peace. He wants for life to move on and for things to go back to normal. He is a man broken. He is also recovering from a recent heart attack which happened after Justine's death. He is physically tired. A grieving father.

Played by BRUCE ALEXANDER



Gráinne Keenan and Bruce Alexander in rehearsals

Background research:

What we know about the invisible people

Source: *How Do Spies Operate*, MI5 Security Service website, 2013

There is a crucial difference between intelligence and espionage. *Intelligence* is information of all kinds gathered by a government or organisation to use in order to make informed decisions. This includes information that may be both public and private- obtained from publicly available or secret sources. Often both. *Espionage* on the other hand, is a process that involves agents and/or technical means to obtain information that is not publicly available. It can also involve seeking to influence decision makers, people in power and opinion-formers to benefit the interest of a foreign power.

It is a routine activity to gather publicly available information by diplomatic staff, military attaches and trade delegations. They generally use open sources (the media, conferences, diplomatic events and trade fairs) as well as open contacts with representatives of host governments. This enables them to monitor political, economic and military developments in their host country and use it to brief their own governments. This way, foreign representatives help their governments to shape their foreign, commercial and military policies.

This type of work is generally not harmful to our national interests and in fact, it aims to help us to build good relationships with other nations.

Espionage focuses normally on non-public information gathered through covert means. What is often referred to as classified information is kept secret in the first place because of its potential to harm national security, and jeopardise the country's economic well-being or damage international relations. Its sensitivity makes it necessary for us to protect it but also makes it attractive to spies.

If classified information is obtained by those who have no right to access it, it would carry serious consequences. For instance, other countries are seeking technical details of weapons systems so that they can find ways of neutralising our military advantages. Information on key services such as gas, oil and transport could enable terrorists to seriously damage these important economic targets. And the theft of classified technologies could enable foreign companies to copy them, threatening British national security and jobs.

Having the means and resources to counter this threat is thus a key priority for the Security Service.

There are two kinds of spies: intelligence officers and agents.

- An *intelligence officer* : He or she will be highly trained in espionage techniques and the use of agents. Intelligence officers may operate openly as a representative of a friendly intelligence service. Alternatively, they may operate covertly under the cover of some other position, such as diplomatic staffs or trade delegations. In some cases they may

operate in "deep cover" under false names and nationalities. Such spies are dubbed "illegals" because they operate without any of the protections offered by diplomatic immunity.

- An *agent*, more formally known as a "covert human intelligence source": an individual who clandestinely provides information to an intelligence officer. He or she will probably not be a professional "spy" but may have some basic instruction in espionage methods. An agent may be motivated by a wide variety of personal or ideological factors.

Confusion often arises between what is meant by an *officer* and an *agent*. Other countries use the same terminology in different ways. In the United States, for instance, an agent is a member of an intelligence or security agency such as the FBI or CIA. Such agencies call a covert human intelligence source an "informant" rather than an "agent."

Intelligence officers seek to gather covert intelligence directly and to recruit agents to obtain intelligence on their behalf. Foreign intelligence services typically seek to establish networks of agents whom they can use over a sustained period of time, so that they can obtain a reliable flow of information.

The methods used by intelligence officers vary widely, and are often limited only by their ingenuity. They will often take advantage of the latest technology, using it to eavesdrop, tap telephone calls and communicate secretly. However, the human relationship between an intelligence officer and his or her agents remains a key element of espionage.

Agents operate by exploiting trusted relationships and positions to obtain sensitive information. They may also look for vulnerabilities among those handling secrets. They may be aware of flaws in their organisation's security that they can exploit.

Real Spies from History

Source: information compiled by Gemma Richardson & Cameron Reynolds from Queen Elizabeths Community College, Crediton; with help from Malaika Kegode, Box Office Assistant at the Exeter Northcott Theatre. Final edit by Lee Pritchard, Out of Joint work experience, 2013

Ciphers is a play about the kind of people who work in secret intelligence – the kind of people drawn to that kind of work, and their unknowability. But also, about the way we are all, in a way unknowable.

Here are some real life spies:

Mata Hari (7/8/1876 – 15/10/1917): Taken into custody in France, Jan. 1917, found guilty of espionage and causing the death of roughly 50,000 soldiers. Later executed by firing squad.

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (1915/1918 – 1953): Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were American Communists who were executed for passing nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union. They met in the Young Communist League in 1936 where he was a leader and had two sons. Julius was recruited by the KGB in 1942 and was regarded as one of their top spies. He passed classified reports from Emerson Radio, including a fuse design which was later used to shoot down a U-2 in 1960. Despite others being arrested and tried under similar charges receiving only prison sentences, and notwithstanding the undetermined extent of Ethel's involvement, the couple were sentenced to death by electric chair.



Aldrich Ames (1941): Ames is a former CIA Counter-intelligence Officer who was convicted of spying for the Soviet Union in 1994. On his first assignment as a case officer, he was stationed in Ankara, Turkey, where his job was to target Soviet intelligence officers for recruitment. Due to financial problems in his personal life as a result of alcohol abuse and high spending, Ames began spying for the Soviet Union in 1985, when he walked into the Soviet Embassy in Washington to offer secrets for money. Ames was assigned to the CIA's European office where he had direct access to the identities of CIA operatives in the KGB and Soviet Military. The information he supplied to the Soviets led to the compromise of at least 100 CIA agents and to the execution of at least 10. He ultimately gave the USSR the names of every CIA operative working in their country; for this they paid him 4.6 million dollars. Ames used the money to live well beyond his means as a CIA agent, buying jewellery, cars, and a

\$500,000 house. He is now serving his sentence in a high security penitentiary in Pennsylvania.

Giacomo Casanova (1725 – 1798): Casanova, born in Venice, is most well known for his womanizing and his book *The Story of My Life* which gives the best account of life in the eighteenth century that we have. With the financial support of many of his mother's patrons he was able to go to school to receive a very good education. This enabled him to become a lawyer. Over many years his romantic affairs with women in power made him a very powerful man. He gained and lost riches at a rapid rate (in one case he lost the equivalent of over 1 million Euros in one night). Between the years of 1774 and 1782, he worked as a spy for the Venetian Inquisitors of State. It is not known what his role involved as his famous diary ended the year he began his work. In 1782 he was exiled from Venice for spreading libel against one of the City patricians.

Klaus Fuchs (1911 – 1988): Fuchs was a German-born theoretical physicist who worked in Los Alamos on the atom bomb project. He was responsible for many significant theoretical calculations relating to the first fission weapons and early models of the hydrogen bomb. Whilst attending university in Germany, Fuchs became involved with the Communist Party of Germany. After a run-in with the newly installed Nazi government, he fled to England where he earned his PhD in physics. For a short time he worked on the British atomic bomb project.

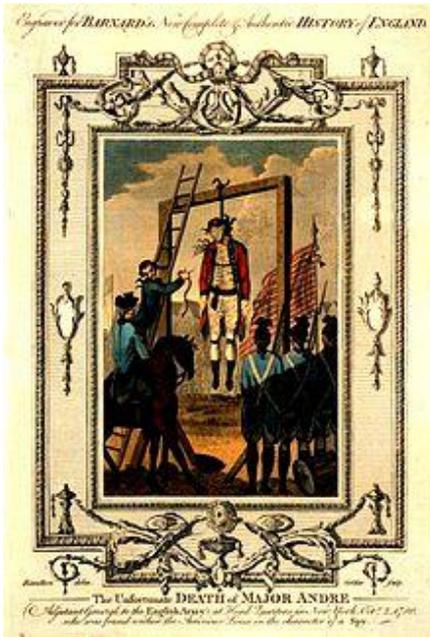


It was while he was working for the British that he began to give information to the Soviets. He reasoned that they had the right to know what the British and the Americans were developing. In 1943 he was transferred to the United States to assist on the Manhattan project. From 1944 he worked in New Mexico at Los Alamos.

For two years he gave his KGB contacts theoretical plans for building a hydrogen bomb. He also provided key data on the production of uranium 235, allowing the Soviets to determine the number of bombs possessed by the United States. On his return to the United Kingdom in 1946, he was interrogated as a result of the cracking of some Soviet ciphers. He was tried and sentenced to fourteen years in prison, the maximum term under British law for passing military secrets to a friendly nation. He was released after nine years and immediately moved to Germany where he lived out the remainder of his life.

Major John André (1750 – 1780): John Andre was a British officer hanged as a spy during the American Revolutionary war. At the age of 20 he joined the British Army and moved to North America to join the occupying forces. He was a great favourite in society, both in Philadelphia and New York during their occupation by the British Army.

During his nearly nine months in Philadelphia, André occupied Benjamin Franklin's house, where it is said he took items from Franklin's home when the British left Philadelphia.



In 1779, he became adjutant-general of the British Army with the rank of Major. In April, he was placed in charge of the British Secret Intelligence. By the next year (1780) he had begun to plot with American General Benedict Arnold, who commanded West Point, and had agreed to surrender it to the British for £20,000 — a move that would enable the British to cut New England off from the rest of the rebellious colonies.

Using common clothes and a false passport, Andre travelled toward New York with documents supplied by Arnold. He was stopped by three men at gunpoint. In the conversation that followed in which both parties were confused over the allegiance of the others, Andre admitted he was British. The three men searched him and found the papers he was hiding. He was put on trial before a board of senior

officers. On September 29, 1780, the board found Andre guilty of being behind American lines “under a feigned name and in a disguised habit”, and that: “Major Andre, Adjutant-General to the British army, ought to be considered as a Spy from the enemy, and that agreeable to the law and usage of nations, it is their opinion, he ought to suffer death.”

He was hanged as a spy at Tappan on October 2, 1780.

Nathan Hale (1755 – 1776): Nathan Hale was a captain in the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. He is widely considered to be America's first spy after he volunteered for an intelligence-gathering mission, but was caught by the British. He is best remembered for his speech before his hanging, in which he said: “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country”.

With the break-out of the Revolutionary war in 1775, Hale – a teacher who graduated from Yale with 1st class honours – immediately joined a Connecticut militia, becoming a first Sergeant. During the Battle of Long Island, Hale volunteered to go behind enemy lines to monitor the movements of the British. He disguised himself as a Dutch teacher and made his way to New York. He was captured in a tavern after he was tricked into betraying himself as a patriot. He was apprehended near Flushing Bay in Queens. He was reportedly questioned and found with physical evidence. According to the traditions at the time, he was found guilty of being an illegal combatant – a crime carrying the death penalty. He was taken to what is now 66th Street and Third Avenue and hanged. He was 21 years old. A British officer wrote this of Hale at the execution: “He behaved with great composure and resolution, saying he thought it the duty of every good Officer, to obey any orders given him by his Commander-in-Chief; and desired the Spectators to be at all times prepared to meet death in whatever shape it might appear.”

Belle Boyd (1844 – 1900): Bella Boyd, born Maria Isabella Boyd, was a confederate spy in the American Civil War. She operated from her father's hotel and gave valuable information to Confederate generals. Her career in espionage had a rather startling beginning: when a group of Union soldiers broke in to her parents' home with the intention of raising the US flag, one of them insulted Belle's mother. Belle pulled out a pistol and shot one of them. She was 17 years old. A board of inquiry acquitted her but she was placed under surveillance. She profited from this by charming military secrets out of at least one of the Union sentries guarding her. She later wrote of him: "To him, I am indebted for some very remarkable effusions, some withered flowers, and a great deal of important information."



Belle passed the secrets she learned to the generals through her slave Eliza Hopewell. One evening in mid 1862 she overheard a general laying out plans for a move that would temporarily lower the Union military presence at Front Royal. That evening Belle rode to a confederate general and confided the details to him. When the confederates rode on Front Royal, Belle ran through bullets to greet the captain. For her contributions she was awarded the Southern Cross of Honour.

Belle was arrested after her lover gave her up on July 29, 1862. She was held for a month in the Old Capitol Prison in Washington but was freed one month later. She was arrested again but was set free on that occasion also. After a short time living in England, she returned to the United States and toured the country giving talks on her time as a Civil War spy. She died, during her tour in Wisconsin, of Typhoid at the age of 56.

The Cambridge Five (20th Century – 20th Century): The Cambridge Five were a ring of Soviet spies in the UK who passed information to the Soviet Union during World War II and into the early 1950s. It has been suggested they may also have been responsible for passing Soviet disinformation to the Nazis. Whilst they are called the Cambridge Five, the fifth member is still unknown. Here is a short profile of each of the four known members:

Kim Philby: Of the five, Philby is believed to have done the most damage to British and American intelligence, providing classified information to the Soviet Union that caused the deaths of scores of agents. He was born in India to St. John Philby, a British officer and eventual advisor to the King of Saudi Arabia.



Donald Duart Maclean: Donald was recruited as a straight penetration agent while still an undergraduate at Cambridge. His actions are widely thought to have contributed to the 1948 Soviet blockade of Berlin and the onset of the Korean War. Maclean was brevetted a colonel in the Soviet KGB.



Guy Burgess: Burgess and Anthony Blunt contributed to the Soviet cause with the transmission of secret Foreign Office and MI5 documents that described Allied military strategy. He was most useful to the Soviets in his position as secretary to the British Deputy Foreign Minister, Hector McNeil.

Anthony Blunt: Blunt was an English art historian, formerly Professor of the History of Art, University of London and director of the Courtauld Institute of Art. After visiting Russia in 1933, Blunt was recruited in 1934 by the NKVD (forerunner of the KGB). A committed Marxist, Blunt was instrumental in recruiting Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean.

They were originally known as the Cambridge Spy Ring because all became committed communists while attending Cambridge University in the 1930s. There is some conjecture as to when they were actually recruited to Soviet intelligence, but Anthony Blunt claimed that it did not happen at Cambridge. Rather, they were recruited after they graduated.



Richard Sorge (1895 – 1944): Richard Sorge is considered to have been one of the best Soviet spies in Japan before and during World War II, which has gained him fame among spies, and espionage enthusiasts. Sorge was born in Azerbaijan during the reign of the Tsars. His great uncle was an associate of Karl Marx. In October 1914 Sorge volunteered to serve during World War I. He joined a student battalion of the 3rd Guards, Field Artillery. During his service in the Western Front he was severely wounded in March 1916 when shrapnel cut off three of his fingers and broke both his legs, causing a lifelong limp. During his convalescence he read Marx and adopted communist ideology.

After being fired from a teaching and mining job, he fled to the Soviet Union where he was recruited as a spy and using the cover of being a journalist was sent to various European countries to assess the possibility of communist uprisings taking place. In May 1933 the Soviet Union decided to have Sorge organize a spy network in Japan. On 14 September 1941 Sorge advised the Red Army that the Japanese were not going to attack the Soviet Union until a) Moscow was captured, b) the size of the Kwantung

Army was three times that of the Soviet Union's Far Eastern forces and c) a civil war had started in Siberia.

On October 18, 1941 in Tokyo, in the house of his lover, Sorge was arrested after a policeman picked up a note that Sorge had thrown on to the road instead of destroying, warning him that he was being watched. Under torture, he denied all ties with the Soviets and as such could not be exchanged for Japanese prisoners of war (the Soviet government also denied that he was spying for USSR). He was hanged in Tokyo on November 7, 1944, 10:20 a.m. The Soviet Union denied all knowledge of him until 1964.

Fictional Spies

Source: information compiled by the Exeter Northcott Theatre, 2013.

George Smiley

Created by John le Carré. Smiley is an intelligence officer working for MI6 (often referred to as "the Circus" in the novels and films), the British overseas intelligence agency. He is a central character in 5 novels, including "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy", recently adapted into a film starring Gary Oldman. Smiley underwent training and probation in Central Europe and South America, and spent the period from 1935 until approximately 1938 in Germany recruiting networks under cover as a lecturer. In 1939, with the commencement of World War II, he saw service not only in Germany, but also in Switzerland and Sweden. Smiley's wartime superiors described him as having "the cunning of Satan and the conscience of a virgin". In 1943, he was recalled to England to work at MI6 headquarters.



Harry Palmer

Created by Len Deighton, appears in 4 books and 5 films.

Harry Palmer is an agent with British Intelligence.

Very little is known about this blue-collar member of the espionage profession. In fact, we don't even know his name. In the four novels about this agent, his name is never mentioned once. Aliases are used but his true name never comes up.

We know he attended college but where and for what is not said. We know he likely hails from Burnley in Lancashire, although that is by no means certain.

Mostly we know that he served in the Army in the Intelligence field during the war and for a considerable time afterwards.

James Bond

Code name 007. A fictional character created in 1953 by "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" writer Ian Fleming who featured him in twelve novels and two short-story collections. He is an intelligence officer in the Secret Intelligence Service commonly known as MI6. Known for his penchant for women, fast cars and martinis (shaken, not stirred). The spy has been featured in 23 films, over 50 years and been played by 8 actors. Bond is MI6's

best secret weapon, with his handy gun work, against threat of any kind towards the British institution.



Alex Rider

Title character and the protagonist of the popular *Alex Rider* novel series by British author Anthony Horowitz.

Alex is a young agent for MI6, the British international intelligence service. At no more than fourteen years of age, Alex was forced into this occupation after MI6 noticed Alex's many talents. He has not only worked for MI6 but also the CIA, Scorpia and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service.

Before Alex became involved with MI6, he wanted to be a professional football player, but now is unsure of what he wants to do when he finishes school. Alex once joked that he wanted to be a train driver. He has stated many times that he is not interested in becoming a full-time MI6 agent.

Sarah Walker

One of the main characters of the fictional television show *Chuck* on NBC.

Very little information about Sarah's past has been revealed. Her father was a con artist, and much of her youth was spent moving from city to city under a series of aliases as part of his ongoing schemes. She attended at least her senior year of high school—and graduated in 1998—under the alias of Jenny Burton. She was (officially) recruited out of Harvard University. She also spent a year with the Secret Service. Sarah's earliest known assignment after being recruited was with the C.A.T. (Clandestine Attack Team) Squad, a team of female spies.

Tom Quinn

From the BBC series "Spooks"

Tom Quinn joined Section D, a counter-terrorism division of MI5, in 1996, where he eventually became Head of Section D following the imprisonment of predecessor Lucas North (Richard Armitage) during an operation in Russia. Tom Quinn is depicted as "serious, focused and popular" with his team, as well as "deeply intelligent", with "impeccable instincts."

Despite being appointed the Head of Section, Quinn had a "conscience explosion" and sabotaged an operation to lure a terrorist cell into buying "red mercury", because he did not like what was being done to the scientist in order for him to attempt to create it. As a result, Tom is decommissioned and takes early retirement from MI5.

Sam Fisher

Of Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell.

Lieutenant Commander Samuel Fisher, USN (Ret.), is a former member of Third Echelon, a top-secret sub-branch within the National Security Agency. Fisher was born on August 8, 1957 in Towson, Maryland. While not much is known about his early life, it is known that Fisher attended a military boarding school shortly after his parents died when he was a child. He later graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy with a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science. Sam hated his time in the CIA, but he rose to the rank of Lieutenant Commander (O-4) in the Navy, where at some point he spent nearly three years (2 years, 11 months) as an intelligence analyst.

Sabrina Duncan

One of "Charlie's Angels"

Sabrina Blaylock was born to a military hero. Possessing a rare mix of academic smarts and athletic capabilities, Sabrina finished her high school as both a cheerleader and a bookworm; the fact that she joined the Los Angeles Police Academy should have come as no surprise to anyone who knew her. Her need for action and adventure in her life was a must.

Aside from being a great police woman, she was also a quarterback on the academy football team. While there, she met and married a fellow officer, Bill Duncan. They divorced when Sabrina decided to leave the force for a career as a private detective with Townsend Associates.

Audio and Visual Material

The trouble with writing a play about spies is that there is not much information openly available out there about what they really do. So, here are a few sources that might help you understand or at least imagine the reality behind *Ciphers* better...

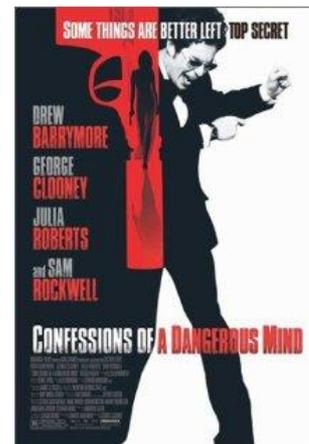
PLAY- The Blue Room (1998) by David Hare

"The Blue Room " a modern adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's "La Ronde", depicts a daisy chain of ten sexual encounters between five women and five men all portrayed by one actor and one actress. The play explores the power struggle and sexual dynamics between characters of different backgrounds. It is a bleak commentary on loveless sex and basic human nature. The scenes take place in modern day London. "The Blue Room" pulls no punches as it examines sexual politics with total frankness. The blue room served to inspire writer Dawn King when it came to examining relationship dynamics that would later influence *Ciphers*.



FILM- Confessions of a Dangerous Mind (2002) directed by George Clooney

An adaptation of the cult autobiography of game show impresario Chuck Barris (responsible for trash TV shows such as *The Gong Show* and *The Dating Game*), in which he claims to have been a CIA hit man. The film follows his TV career and simultaneously his involvement with illegal and undercover activities that result in him having a complete nervous breakdown.



FILM- My Brother the Devil (2012) directed by Sally El Hosaini

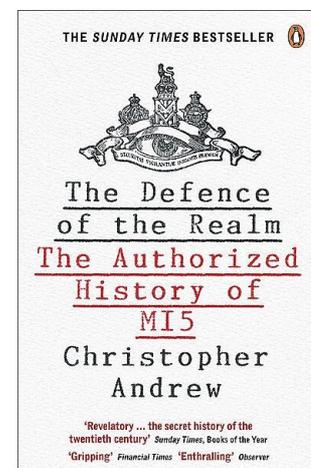
A young boy poses as a street-hardened gangster in order to impress his older brother, putting them both on a treacherous path that could destroy their family in this gritty urban drama. Mo is an isolated 14-year-old boy who longs to be accepted by his peers. His older brother Rashid runs with a local gang and earns enough money to support their family. In Mo's eyes, there's nobody cooler than "Rash," and in a desperate bid to prove his manhood, the sensitive younger sibling accepts a dangerous job. Unfortunately, his actions will have unforeseen consequences that could ruin both brothers' lives.



BOOK- The Defence of the Realm (2010) by Christopher Andrew

This is the first authorised history of the Security Service. The book marks the centenary of the Security Service and documents the work of MI5 from its establishment in 1909 to the present day.

Christopher Andrew is Professor of Modern and Contemporary History, former Chair of the Faculty of History at Cambridge University and chair of the British Intelligence Study Group. He has published a number of previous books on intelligence history, including "Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community", "For The President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush" and "The Mitrokhin Archive". He has also presented radio and television documentaries.



Professor Andrew was appointed as MI5's official historian in December 2002. In writing "The Defence of the Realm", he was given virtually unrestricted access to much of the Security Service's archives and no restriction was placed on the judgements he arrived at.

Director Blanche McIntyre used this as a reference source, as the book goes through a large number of case studies that helped her get a feel for what the world of espionage is like.

Rehearsals

Challenges of the play

There are three important challenges in the text for the cast and the creative team to work on during the rehearsal process. Below I break down the main elements that director Blanche McIntyre has been focusing on during the rehearsal process.

1- LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION

The play takes place in multiple locations, moving back and forwards in time and progresses in an agile pace. This can be very confusing to an audience, so it is the team's job to ensure that everything that happens on stage follows a pattern that the audience can decipher throughout the play.

2- IDENTITY ISSUES

Ciphers questions the real identity of people, within the spy world but also in our daily and ordinary life. Dawn King cleverly uses the double casting of parts in order to create this confusing world where you are never really quite sure which character has just come on and what they really want. The downside to this clever trick is that it demands a great deal of work from the cast to craft distinctive personalities for each character, and for Blanche to make sure the audience can read the whole picture.

3- THRILLER

The play is a thriller, a classic genre in film and theatre. The genre is the style of the piece; this style is chosen based on the best possible way to tell the story and the effect it should have on its audience. A thriller (as opposed to Michael Jackson's misrepresentation of the genre in his music video 'Thriller') relies on suspense, mystery and intrigue. A successful thriller keeps the audience guessing what will happen next, making them work really hard to keep up with what is happening in front of them.



Ronny Jhutti and Gráinne Keenan in rehearsals

Rehearsals

Considering the previously mentioned challenges of the play, director Blanche McIntyre discloses some of the techniques she has had to use in order to make Ciphers *de-cipher-able*.

All of the above mentioned challenges are joined by one characteristic- the need for CLARITY. The production needs to be able to be understood despite the elements of the story that purposely make it more obscure.

One of the visual inspirations for Blanche when thinking about how to tackle the problems of this play came from different kinds of mechanisms- clockwork, machinery, a Rubik's cube.... something formed from many different components that move and adjust with precision in order to change and ultimately create something else in a seamless pattern.

Staging

In order to achieve this, Blanche and designer James Perkins, alongside the rest of the creative team have been working together to both explore the idea of identity whilst working out a system that will teach the audience to read what is in front of them. In a way, they are teaching the audience to crack the code.

One of the first solutions they came up with was within the design of the stage. James came up with the idea of moving slides across the stage which will help create the illusion of wiping the scene in order to allow a new one to form after it. It is a creative way to quickly affect and change the environment.

Patterns

Blanche came into rehearsals with the idea to create a physical language that helps the audience understand the power play between characters. The actor's physical position in the space is purposely plotted to create a recognisable pattern that can give clues to the audience.

For instance, the first three scenes of the play take place in offices with a similar set up- in all scenes there is one person in charge and one being interviewed. The way the characters present themselves, the way they stand and their position in the space provide visual clues which guide the audience as to who is the character, what they are doing, and where this is happening.

Use of Design

The visual elements of the set can be decoded to provide the audience with clues about when and where the scene is taking place. Simple pieces of furniture change their nature with their shape- a table turns into an easel or a bench into a chaise longue.

In addition the slides move to and fro to create larger or smaller abstract spaces and the lighting maps out squares on the floor within which the characters are confined. The combination of flexible abstract shape on the set encourages the audience to 'read' the scene for clues and use the difference between scenes as a guide to the places and times.

The same is true for the characters. As each actor is playing two parts, you can't rely only on the way they first appear to you- you have to dig further and notice the smaller details. A scarf, a coat, a hint of colour... they all become bigger hints as to which character it is.

Actioning and Analysis- A Different Approach

For *Ciphers* rehearsals, Blanche made a conscious choice not to action, but instead used a similar approach to dissecting the text in order to add depth and detail to the performances.

Her approach can be described as Blanche's own personal style of actioning, Out of Joint Artistic Director Max Stafford-Clark's method of working with text.

Blanche's approach is largely text based. This means that as her director, she uses the clues in the writing to determine an actor's intention with each line and works alongside the actors to determine what each line is trying to achieve. Unlocking this intention, gives the actors freedom to choose their tactics for achieving their targets.

For instance, take the following extract from scene 3:

Sunita's office. Sunita and Kerry are sitting opposite each other. Kerry is agitated, tense.

SUNITA: You could have made an appointment. *(She is trying to make Kerry feel stupid for kicking up a fuss downstairs- she is reproaching her and shaming her with a simple and straight forward solution in order to calm her down)*

KERRY: If I'd... called up reception and tried to make an appointment to see someone they'd have let me do that, would they? *(Kerry clearly doesn't believe that the Secret Service would have a system for appointments like this- she therefore confronts Sunita's suggestion in an attempt to ridicule her)*

SUNITA: Yes of course. *(Sunita refuses to take the bait- she is clear and professional; continuing her intention to embarrass Kerry into a subdued and calmer state)*

Pause.

SUNITA: You must be... under a lot of stress. But you didn't need to get so/
(Sunita here shows compassion and a willingness to empathise with Kerry. Her intention is to get Kerry to soften up and to cooperate from now onwards)

KERRY: They weren't going to let me in. *(Kerry shows her stubbornness, she is refusing to admit defeat at her assumption on how the organisation works. Her intention is to have higher status than Sunita despite how highly emotional she is.)*

SUNITA: I was in a briefing. There was nobody free to talk to you. *(Sunita is trying to use rational thought to show Kerry why her attitude was unnecessary- her intention is to make Kerry understand and cooperate)*

KERRY: I said I'd wait. *(Kerry is still refusing to be won over by Sunita. She is continuing to challenge everything she says and throwing it back to her face as rebellion.)*

SUNITA: As it is I don't have that long, I'm afraid. Why don't we arrange a time for a proper chat? *(Sunita presents Kerry with an attractive and informal option for talking at a later time- in fact this is a tactic to make Kerry realise her time in the room is limited.)*

KERRY: I'd prefer to talk now if that's ok, Sunita. Is that your real name? *(Kerry still refuses to give in to Sunita's attempts to diminish the importance of her mission. Although she is highly emotional and erratic, she continues to drive her own agenda. She questions Sunita with the intention of shaming her in order to coerce some answers from her.)*

SUNITA: Yes it is. *(Sunita's patient concession shames Kerry back.)*

Why don't you try doing a similar analysis on the following section?

Kai and Noush are out to dinner in a restaurant.

Kai has been on a call to Justine about meeting in secret- he wants to keep it from Nous so tells her it was Kerry on the phone. Kai goes back to his table.

ANOUSHKA: What was that about?

KAI: Someone got in touch with her asking about me. She was just passing on the interest.

ANOUSHKA: Someone, who?

KAI: I don't know.

ANOUSHKA: A collector?

KAI: Yeah.

Anoushka is frowning, suspicious.

ANOUSHKA: I was never sure why you decided to have your show at that gallery in particular.

KAI: Because it's small and it's cool and/

ANOUSHKA: It was. I heard the place is going under.

Kai shrugs and eats some more salad.

ANOUSHKA: It didn't exactly deliver what was promised in terms of sales.

KAI: That's not/

ANOUSHKA: And it didn't raise your profile in the way we'd hoped.

KAI: Is it really *my* profile you're worried about?

ANOUSHKA: Excuse me?
KAI: Nothing. Here, have some more wine.
He pours wine. She looks at him.
ANOUSHKA: I've only ever been supportive.
KAI: I know, I'm sorry.
ANOUSHKA: No one gave a shit about you or your work before you met me.
KAI: Noush, I'm sorry, all right?
Pause.
ANOUSHKA: You'll meet the architect with me on Friday.
KAI: I said thanks but no thanks.
ANOUSHKA: But it would be so much more convenient!
KAI: I want my work and home spaces separate.
ANOUSHKA: They would be!
KAI: Christ Noush! What's next? An electronic tag?
ANOUSHKA: Tell me you've never taken a girl to that studio.
KAI: I've never taken a girl to the studio!
She looks at him. He's lying. She gets up.
KAI: Noush, where are you/
ANOUSHKA: You can pay for this.
KAI: Noush!
She's gone.

Improvisation

Occasionally, the analysis of the scenes can lead to a lot of questions. Sometimes, it's hard to really understand what the characters are going through, and sometimes, it's hard to understand why things unfold in a certain way rather than another during the course of the play.

In these instances, the use of improvisation is a tool that can unlock those things in the actors. In the particular case of this play, this problem is made more difficult by the scan availability of information on the topic of spies.

An example of an improvisation exercise done during the rehearsal process was for scene 25- where Anoushka and Justine have a confrontation. Anoushka has a gun and uses it to threaten Justine. This might be normal in the world of spies, but in real life actors tend to have very little experience with guns.



Shereen Martin in rehearsals

Therefore, in a situation like this, they undertook a series of improvisations to help them gain an understanding of what a gun can do and how it changes the power balance in the room.

In order to do this, Blanche set up an improvisation based on the scene but that allowed for the course of action to veer off the text to a set of conclusions that had been previously been talked about with the cast. These were monitored by giving the actors a certain set of parameters to follow during the improvisation- rules in order to make the free flowing actor's exploration have a shape and a target to achieve.

For example:

- 1- If Justine could make a run for it and escape, she could.
- 2- If it came down to it, Anoushka could shoot Justine with the gun.
- 3- Justine doesn't need to let Anoushka in to her flat.

Etc.

Set up your own improvisation based on the following extract and create a set of 3-6 rules that open up the possible outcomes of this scene and explore it. Make sure to first discuss the material with a partner to question what do you think could have potentially happened, and after the improvisation, why do you think what is on the page happened. What does that tell you about the characters in it? It is crucial to use the exercise to analyse the text.

Scene 8

Kai's studio. Kai is sitting, staring at a half finished painting and drinking a glass of whiskey. Music plays. There's a knock on the door. Kai turns the music off and listens. He goes to the door.

KAI: Who is it?

KERRY: Kerry.

He's not pleased to hear this. He gets up. Hesitates.

KERRY: Open the door. Kai. Kai?

She bangs on the door.

KAI: Fucking....

Kai opens the door. Kerry stands there. She's tired and edgy, and looks a mess.

KAI: What the fuck?

KERRY: Can I come in?

KAI: No. I'm in the middle of some/

Kerry walks past him and into the room.

KAI: Kerry!

He follows her.

KAI: You can't be in here.

KERRY: Why not?

Pause.

KERRY: I need to talk to you.

Kerry lights a cigarette.

KAI: The paintings.
KERRY: What?
KAI: Put that out.
Annoyed, Kerry puts her cigarette out.
KAI: What d'you want?
KERRY: I need to ask you about Justine.
KAI: I uh... I read about what happened. I'm sorry.
KERRY: I need to know what happened to her.
KAI: Ok, but... I can't help you. I only met her once.
KERRY: Justine was working undercover. Did you know that?
KAI: It's in the paper.
KERRY: What did she tell you about her job?
KAI: Nothing. She said she worked in admin, and it was very boring.
KERRY: That's all?
KAI: I spoke to her for five minutes.
KERRY: I saw you talking to her at the private view. A deaf, dumb and blind person would have... smelt what was happening between you two.
KAI: I fancied her. So what?
KERRY: I've been at her flat. It was really tidy. She was never that tidy when we were growing up. I don't know when she became tidy. Do you think it's part of the training? Being tidy?
KAI: I have no idea.
KERRY: I found a little painting on the back of a postcard. It wasn't signed. But the second I saw it I knew that you'd done it.
KAI: What painting?
KERRY: You were lovers.
KAI: No.
KERRY: Did she tell you anything about the people she met, the things she was doing? I need to know... I need... they fucking killed her!
Kerry is upset.
KAI: She killed herself. That's what it said in the/
KERRY: No. She was murdered.
KAI: It's hard for you to accept, but/
KERRY: The police told me that someone else was in the flat with her when she took the pills. Someone watched her do it or... made her.
Kai is shocked.
KAI: Who?
KERRY: I don't know!
Pause.
KAI: I don't know anything about this. I'm sorry but I can't help you, and... you have to go now.
KERRY: Did you love her?
KAI: I didn't know her.
KERRY: That's not an answer.
KAI: If Justine was murdered... the police will find out who did it...
KERRY: Will they?
Pause. Kai at a loss.

KERRY: Did Noush know about you and Justine?
KAI: Kerry...
KERRY: What would she do if she found out now?
KAI: There's nothing for her to find out!
KERRY: If you don't tell me what I want to know, I'll tell Noush about you and Justine.
KAI: That's it. Get out.
KERRY: Everyone knew about you. Kai with his rich wife, fucking every gallery assistant in London. Did you go for Justine because I turned you down?
KAI: Goodbye Kerry.
KERRY: Kai, please!
He bundles her out, violently.

Languages in the play

Ciphers has an extra dimension- the characters speak multiple languages. Russian and Japanese are the ones featured during the play.

Now, as any linguist knows, Russian and Japanese are difficult languages to learn in a few weeks time and for the sole purpose of a play. However, it is important to maintain a sense of authenticity of the characters for the audience, the story and the actors themselves- meaning that enabling the actors to perform something so essential and particular about their characters with accuracy will not only convince the audience, but work towards giving the performers a greater sense of who they are trying to be on stage.

Although the original script demanded for longer sections of conversation in these languages, a decision was made during the development and rehearsal process to cut shorter these sections for the sake of clarity and to avoid too much use of subtitles which could make the story harder to follow.

For *Ciphers*, actors Bruce Alexander and Gráinne Keenan had to be coached to speak Russian – Alexander as a native speaker and Keenan as flawlessly as possible to be true to her cover story.

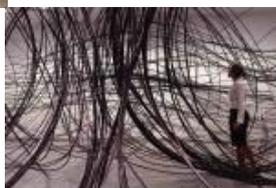
Likewise, Keenan and Ronny Jhutti both had to be instructed in basic Japanese, again Keenan with a greater deal with proficiency because her character has a gift with languages. In Jhutti's case, his character, Kai, is able to speak basic Japanese.

The study of the pronunciation, rhythm and cadence of another language is important when it is for a play. For all intensive purposes, the language needs to sound genuine and effortless to someone, whether it is someone who is a native speaker or someone with no experience of the language.

Design of the set - Interview with James Perkins by Jon Bradfield

JB- What is the start of the process for designing a play?

JP- I read the script a couple of times before I start, and then re-visit it two or three times throughout the research process. My next step is always to create a mountain of images that are inspired by the script. *Ciphers* is at 400 pictures and counting!



JB- How prescriptive is (director) Blanche McIntyre?

JP- Blanche manages to be clear about what she does and doesn't like whilst at the same time being very open to ideas. Her interests are broad and she maps a production in quite a visual way. We've worked together a few times so can move through ideas quite quickly.

JB-What are the unique challenges and opportunities for *Ciphers*?

JP- It's a fast moving, almost cinematic script with a lot of short scenes, so the key to the design is in the transitions rather than the scenes themselves. It's set in a world that the audience "know" quite well through TV and film, so there's less need to stick to naturalistic details to explain each space to them. Once the rules – the visual language – of our world are established we can move from location to location quite quickly.

JB-What have you come up with?

JP-The set is a series of oversized photographic slides, which can truck across the stage to create new spaces throughout the show. It's a world of information, voyeurism,

collections, connections and movement. The scale of the story feels both operatic and intimate.

JB- How involved are you in the physical building and installation of the set?

JP- Because of the moving parts the set could be quite technically intricate, so I imagine that Gary, the production manager, and I will talk things through in a lot of detail, in collaboration with the scenic builders too – their insight and expertise might lead to tweaks of the design.

JB- With the moving elements you're talking about, presumably lighting will play into that too?

JP- Gary Bowman (the lighting designer) is another regular collaborator so again we have shorthand, which can speed up the design process. The lights will bring the space to life. If we can adjust the set to improve how it lights – for example which materials and finishes we choose – then we will.

JB- Looking at your portfolio, your designs are very structural. And they're conceptual without always being abstract. *The Girl in the Yellow Dress* for example, or *Lost in Yonkers*, they're like cubist versions of a more naturalistic set: They're "realistic" but you're showing more than you'd see if you were just looking into a real room. But others are less evocative of specific locations. What do you think theatre design is there to do? How do you decide on an approach?

JP- If theatre is about telling a story then theatre design is about building worlds in which you can tell that story. I think these worlds are built from two things: physical truths and emotional truths. Physical truths are details required by the script to tell the story, and which aren't explicit in the dialogue.

So, does the audience need to know the period? How accurately? Do we need to know immediately that we're in a kitchen? How much visual information do you need to provide to know it's a kitchen – fully fitted units or just a couple of taps floating to suggest a sink? In *Ciphers* there are plenty of scenes where Dawn has done the work for us; the first few lines tell you where you are ("what's wrong have you never been in a hotel room?...") or she uses a simple prop to provide the necessary clue (such as Peter with a rake in the garden).

Emotional truths are perhaps more interesting. We can layer visual information onto the script to enhance ideas that already exist. The set can push the feeling of being watched or trapped. What's it like to have your life spiral out of control? To show an audience what they already know or expect is uninteresting, but imaginative and abstracted visuals can draw them into a story and keep them questioning themselves and the world. The design may not address these ideas directly it may just provide a space in which the cast and director can tackle the script head on.

Most design – not just for theatre – is about maintaining a balance between two seemingly opposing forces: intellectual vs. instinctive, naturalism vs. abstraction, explained vs. oblique, cost vs. quality and form vs. function. Ultimately the job of the design and the designer is to serve the play. Not through simpering servitude but by challenging and championing the ideas and stories set out in the script.

JB- Where do you turn for inspiration?

JP- I visit museums and exhibitions, I read lots of magazines, books and websites – a current favourite is www.dezeen.com. Lots of the people I know are interested in similar things so talking in pubs works pretty well as a form of research.

JB- Are there design ideas in your head that you're waiting for the right shows to apply/adapt them to?

JP- I'd like to try 3D printing, and also printing onto wood, either flat or textured. Also, ideas have a tendency to feed from one project into the next – for *Ciphers* I spent quite a while looking at architectural felt. It's a fascinating material, but it turned out not to be right for this design so I wouldn't be surprised if it popped up in a later project.

JB- Is there a famous play or musical you've always wanted to design? How do you see it?

JP- Nearly a decade into my career and I've still not managed a Shakespeare! I've always liked *The Tempest* and I'd love to take on *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl is a beautiful script that would be great to tackle – zinc buckets catching water from rusty pipes, lots of string and sand.

JB- Tell me about a stage design you've really liked?

JP- Christopher Oram's set for *The Tempest* at The Old Vic. The opening 5 minutes. Blue backdrop, rope ladder into a trapdoor, storm scene, clap of thunder, rope ladder released, all the cast fall into the trap, which slams shut, blue backdrop falls and is coiled into a small book that is lying at Prospero's feet. He picks up the book and the play begins. When you've been hit with such a strong picture the production has you by the throat, it was a visual idea that left the audience totally open to the words, performance and story.

JB- When did you know you wanted to be a stage designer, and how did that come about?

JP- I knew I wanted to be an artist of some sort – sculpture felt too free and architecture felt too rigid. I hadn't even realised theatre design was a career until a tutor on my art foundation course recommended it.

JB- What other career would you have enjoyed, or indeed would you also like to pursue?

JP- Butchers have always fascinated me. I don't really want to be a butcher but I love people that are passionate about their work and I enjoy that some people are passionate about butchery, which is quite foreign to me. I don't really know if I'm passionate enough about anything else, it would have to be design related, and I'd never be happy without plenty of people to bat ideas off. Maybe advertising design, but I don't think I'd suit the achingly trendy headgear or facial hair.

Media Features on *Ciphers*

Theatre director Blanche McIntyre: All you can do is make something you love and hope it will go down well

By Sam Marlowe and Tom Fulford-Jones Thursday 10 Oct 2013 6:00 am

Director Blanche McIntyre and playwright Dawn King talk about making unsettling new work *Ciphers*.

‘Look, there’s a monster coming over the hill!’ Blanche McIntyre’s face radiates intensity. ‘We all know we’re pretending. Nevertheless, the monster might be real.’

McIntyre – easily one of the most exciting directors to emerge in recent years – is describing her favourite part of the rehearsal process: the early stages, ‘when it’s all very loose-jointed and childlike’.

The results of her working methods to date have been dynamic, lucid and imaginative, and as wide-ranging as a reinvigorated version of Chekhov’s *The Seagull* for touring company Headlong and a whip-smart production of classic Broadway comedy *The Seven Year Itch*.

There have also, indeed, been monsters: a staging of Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party*, oozing end-of-pier grotesquerie and creepy atmosphere; and, perhaps most notably, *Foxfinder*, Dawn King’s dystopian debut play in which faith rides roughshod over reason and foxes have become creatures of terror.

When McIntyre’s unnerving production opened at London’s Finborough Theatre in September 2011, it was clear not only that King was a startling talent but that she and the director were a brilliantly symbiotic pairing.

‘It was incredibly fortunate for me,’ says McIntyre. ‘No, for me,’ insists King. ‘Blanche is one of the smartest people I know. She’s really good at analysing scripts as well as people.’

Now they’re reunited for King’s *Ciphers*, a piece that promises to be just as unsettling, presented by touring company Out Of Joint. The two young women generate a forcefield of jittery energy. McIntyre is angular, articulate, constantly pushing her floppy fringe out of her eyes with a long-fingered hand, while there’s something spikier and vaguely punky about King, with her bleached-blond crop and steady gaze, her wryness and self-mocking half-smile.

‘I’m a bit terrified,’ admits McIntyre, ‘but all you can do is make something you love and then you send and hope it will go down well.’

Ciphers is partly inspired by the cases of Gareth Williams and Mark Kennedy. Williams was an MI6 employee whose naked body was found in 2010 locked inside a sports bag in his bathroom. Kennedy is a former undercover police officer who in 2011 was

revealed to have spent seven years posing as Mark Stone, an environmentalist, in order to infiltrate an eco-activist group.

The Williams incident remains obscured by a thick fog of unanswered questions; the Kennedy operation left a toxic wake of emotional devastation, betrayal and moral ambiguity. For King – whose husband works for Greenpeace – this was murky fascinating territory.

‘The Gareth Williams investigation reported that there might have been some involvement of the secret services but it has never established how he died,’ she says. ‘And I thought, how terrible that would be if you were the relatives – that you couldn’t ever find out what really happened.’

She was also keen to write a piece with female characters at its centre – both she and McIntyre identify themselves as feminists, ‘and what I can personally do as a feminist is make my career as successful as possible and write kick-ass roles for women’.

So, drawing on a genre that more usually features a George Smiley, a Jason Bourne or even a James Bond, King has created a drama around two sisters and an unexplained death. Full of ‘parallels, reflections and symmetries’, it aims to be both a thriller and a timely meditation on identity, intimacy, privacy and perception. ‘Can you ever get close to someone if what they do is a secret? How well can you ever really know anybody?’

And there’s an element of sexual intrigue – a common accompaniment to espionage, according to McIntyre, who like King has immersed herself in research.

‘There’s a staggeringly high percentage of spies who have been found dead in situations that hint at cross-dressing, bondage or sex games,’ she says. ‘It’s been suggested that’s one way to get people to back off – because of the stigma and the easy explanation. It allows investigations to end early.’

If Ciphers sounds discomfiting, the ideas King is cooking for her next project, a play she’s writing on attachment to the National Theatre, are even more so. ‘I’m listening to old English folk songs and thinking about murderous ships’ captains. And women who take their babies out into the woods and kill them,’ she says, with quiet glee. Nightmares, it appears, lurk in the dark corners of King’s imagination; let’s hope it’s a long time before she turns the lights on.