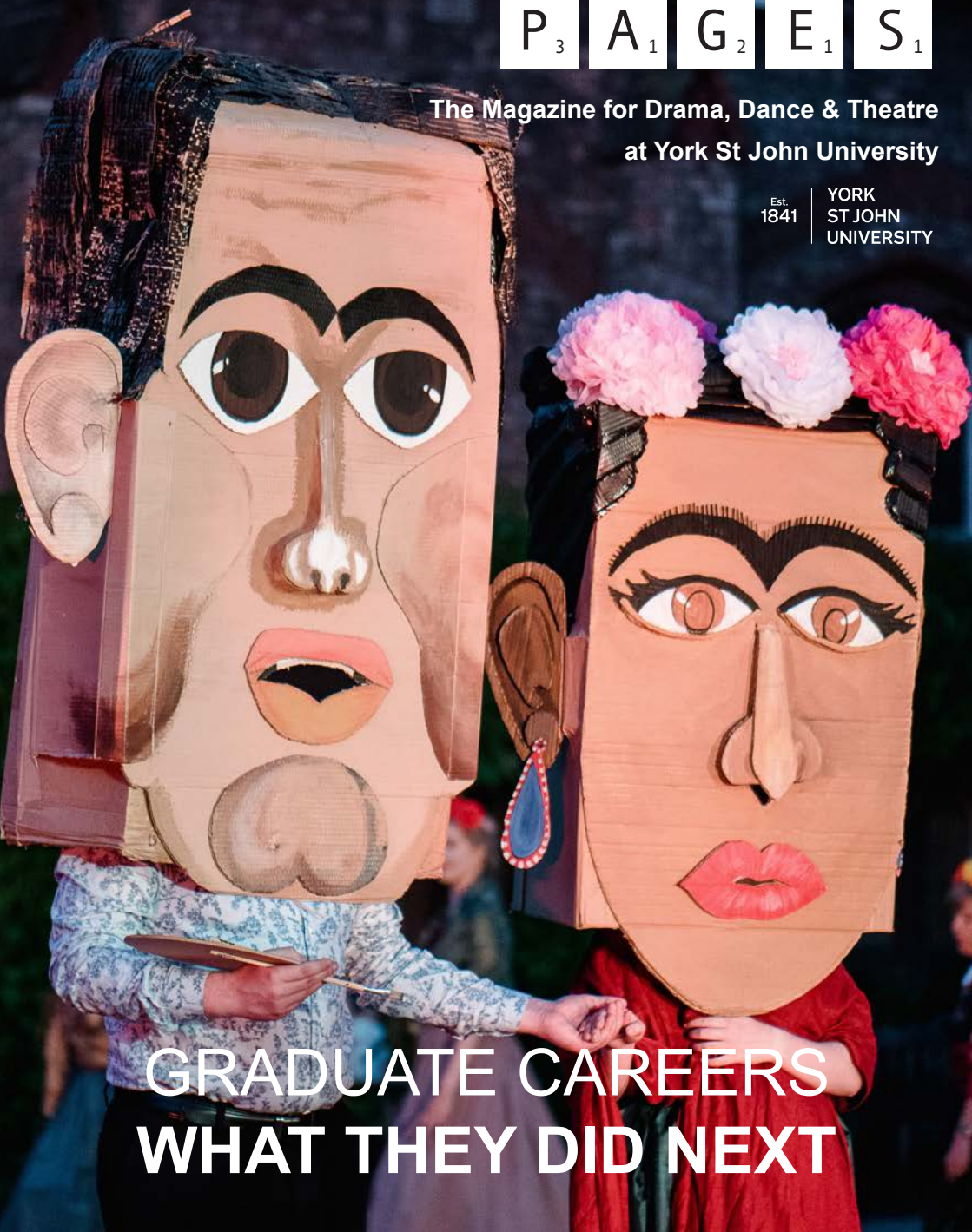


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The Magazine for Drama, Dance & Theatre  
at York St John University

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YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY



GRADUATE CAREERS  
WHAT THEY DID NEXT



# THEATRE PAGES

## GRADUATE CAREERS

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One of the questions we often hear from students is: 'what am I going to do when I leave university?' While we want students to invest themselves fully into their university experience, and not constantly worry about what happens next, we are also aware that this concern for future careers is important and inevitable.

During their course our students receive rich and diverse opportunities to expand their thinking, all informing their journey to discovering what they might want to do once they leave university. This includes work placements with the creative partnerships that the university has with regional and national arts organisations, study abroad programmes, internships, and career development support. All this, we tell our students, will not only prepare them for careers after university, but sometimes even provide them with the first step, the first opportunity, that first vital contact.

And it works. In the latest national survey of graduate destinations, 96.9% of students from York St John University are in employment or further study six months after graduating. This outstanding result places the university 23rd out of 153 in the country for graduate outcomes, alongside being placed in the top 50 universities for student satisfaction with 96% in 2020 NSS for overall student satisfaction.

Such statistics, however, do not reveal exactly what it is that our students do when they graduate. They do not reveal the myriad of stories that we hear from our graduates about what they have done and how they have grown and developed as practitioners, educators, entrepreneurs, artists and performers. Nor do they reveal precisely how their university experiences prepared them for such adventures.

This alumni edition of *Theatre Pages* hopes to do precisely that, giving twelve of our graduates from the last ten years an opportunity to return and tell us what they did next. More than statistics, it is these graduate voices that speak clearly of the experience of studying drama at York St John University and of how pivotal moments of learning provided transformational opportunities and informed their journey to employment or further study.

Issue editors: Rachel Conlon, Lauren Hall and Matthew Reason

WHAT THEY DID NEXT



# OUR COURSES

All of the drama, theatre and dance programmes at York St John are practice-led, with students using their mind and body to learn on-their-feet, through doing and experiencing.

Within this framework we offer four BA Honours programmes and two taught Masters programmes. Across these courses we aim to help students find their own unique voice and style, building their confidence and allowing them to develop into fully rounded creative practitioners.

## BA Acting

Acting is a focused and creative programme at York St John University. It offers a well-rounded experience of what it means to perform. This practical course encourages voice, movement, acting, interpretation and textual analysis. The course lets you identify yourself as a performer and connect to our many creative partners in the region.

## BA Drama and Dance

This course recognises that powerful performances happen when drama and dance come together. It has been designed for people who are passionate about both dance and drama and enjoy exploring opportunities to combine them to create new and exciting work. If you enjoy expressing yourself physically and want to keep doors open for a career across both disciplines then this course is for you!



## BA Drama and Theatre

This immersive and varied degree is centred on creativity, giving you the opportunity to grow as an artist. Do you thrive on performing live and creating unique theatre experiences? Do you want to make work that speaks about important social issues? Are you ready for the talent of others to inspire your own growth as a performer? If the answer is 'yes' then our Drama & Theatre course is a great match for you!

## BA Drama: Education and Community

Want to develop your dramatic practice and use your skills to improve lives in a community or education setting? At York St John University community really matters to us and as the longest-established Higher Education institution in the city we have a firm belief in the transformative power of education. This is why we're the perfect place for you to study drama where you can make a difference through socially-engaged practice.

## MA Applied Theatre

Theatre can transform lives, which is why this programme offers you the opportunity to combine a passion for theatre with a belief in social justice.

## MA Theatre and Performance

Investigate the interrelationships between your own arts practice and questions arising about knowledge, research, studio practice and performance.



# THE JOURNEY

In our excellent studio facilities you'll be supported by our expert academic team, technical staff and visiting artists with a strong reputation in their field of practice. There are opportunities for theatre trips, in-house and outdoor performances, festivals and work placements in educational and community settings in the city and region.

Overall, you'll develop the confidence, credibility, creativity and team working skills to support you in a range of careers. If you are creatively driven and engaged in the world around you, then York St John University is the place for you.

## Academics in Theatre & Dance

All academics who teach on the programme are experienced theatre practitioners, writers and researchers whose works are performed and presented both nationally and internationally.

## Visiting Artists

Students are offered opportunities to work with visiting artists / practitioners in the field of applied theatre.

## Performing House

A receiving venue on campus programmed by the Performance department, providing you with an opportunity to see touring contemporary performance work of an international level.

## Study Abroad

You will have an opportunity to study abroad as part of the University exchange programme.

## Field Trips

Field trips are an essential part of your learning that ensures you are able to explore creating work outside of traditional spaces.

## Transferable Skills

The learning activities you will take part in during your time on the degree will also present the opportunity to accumulate a set of skills which are highly valuable to employers, such as; creativity, team work, collaboration, contextual awareness, problem solving, independence and the ability to meet deadlines.

# THROUGH YOUR DEGREE

## First Year: Orientation

The first year of the programme will take your existing knowledge and skills and develop them in a variety of ways. You will develop key skills in contemporary drama and theatre and learn to work creatively in groups. You will also gain an understanding of how contemporary practice sits within historical contexts.

## Second Year: Application & Specialism

In your second year you apply the techniques and knowledge learned in the first year and deepen your skills through increasing specialism; allowing you to develop expertise in your own areas of interest. You apply these abilities to drama, theatre, dance and performance making in a range of social, educational and site specific contexts whilst considering its relationship to the world around you.

## Third Year: Independence & Industry

In your final year you will work as both an independent artist and as a member of a performance company, developing work from research and development to actualisation. You will be supported in positioning yourself and your portfolio of skills as you prepare for employability in your chosen career ahead of you.



# ALEXANDER KANIEWSKI

## DIRECTOR AND THEATRE DESIGNER

My time at York St John gave me a sense of the vast breadth and diversity of work, life and art that can be labelled 'theatre.' A lot of things were new to me, and filled me with a sense of ambition and excitement, making me want to be a part of the kind of work and concepts that we were exploring.

After completing my BA I was awarded the graduate prize from York Theatre Royal and undertook a year-long residency with the university. This allowed me to continue to explore my interest in interdisciplinary ensemble works and during this year I created a contemporary opera, *MEDEA MARIA*, for York Theatre Royal. I also lead a group of YSJ students in a contribution to the 2018 York Mystery plays, bringing *The Remorse of Judas* to the streets of York. I am very grateful for the opportunities that my residency afforded me and look back on that time with very fond memories.

After leaving York St John I became the Drama assistant at Warwick School for Boys and its sister school Kings High. The schools have a thriving drama community with four major productions a year and most young people taking part in both academic and extra-curricular drama. As their first Drama Assistant I quickly defined my role, organising and running their costume department, building a drama resource library and taking over design and directing responsibilities for the large performances. These required skills that my opportunities at YSJ had

allowed me to develop and refine. The school's onsite commercial theatre has become a second home to me, when supporting productions such as *The Wind in the Willows*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Marry Poppins*. The most challenging aspect of the role has been sourcing the scale of costumes required for these large works, where casts can be as big as 60, with 125 costumes to design and produce as well as props and sets.

Outside the the school, I also lead a youth theatre group on Saturday, an outlet to explore more progressive and creative ways of thinking about theatre. Together we have looked at the body within Steven Berkoff's works and more modern physical and dance companies.

I continue to be interested in post-modern opera and interdisciplinary work, regularly seeking out performances that are of interest to me. I probably see more theatre now than I ever did, from Phillip Glass operas to experimental dance pieces exploring the music of Steve Reich. My theatre diet has been rich and inspiring over the past year and half and calls me back to making progressive works of my own.

My next step is to take up a place on the experimental performance course at Birmingham Conservatoire. The course specialises in my rather niche area of interest and I look forward to collaborating with others on new works in the coming years.







# MOJISOLA ELUFOWOJU

## CEO AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

I am the CEO and Artistic Director of Utopia Theatre, a leading African Theatre company resident at Sheffield Crucible Theatre. Previously, I was staff director at the National Theatre, working alongside Nadia Fall (Artistic Director of the Royal Theatre Stratford East) on *Three Sisters* by Inua Ellams. I also was a recipient of the 2017 Opera Awards Foundation bursary, a founding member of Mosaic Opera Collective and currently a guest director at the London Academy of Dramatic Arts and at London South Bank University.

I left York St John in 2011 having gained a First Class Honours degree in Theatre: Performance and was the recipient of the York Theatre Royal

Graduate Prize following my production of *The Shepherd's Chameleon*. I really think that it was these experiences in directing and live art at York St John really helped shape my career.

I am passionate about the growth and development of ethnic minorities in the theatre industry. In my work I use African storytelling to advance education, health and wellbeing of people from all backgrounds and nationalities so that they can achieve their full potential, play an active role in their community and have an improved quality of life. I also create work extensively with/for marginalised communities and under-represented voices. My aim is to raise

awareness and increase appreciation of African culture, therefore I now commission new writing and present established classics within a strong African context, and in so doing, employ black artists, dispelling stereotypes and encouraging authentic voices from the African diaspora.

I have recently launched a new initiative, Utopia Theatre Creative Hub, bringing African theatre experts together to offer courses, workshops and events online. Utopia is partnering with national and international organisations, including Sheffield Theatres, to launch the free 6-month programme with support from the Arts Council's Covid-19 Emergency Fund.

The Creative Hub will bring together some of the world's leading African artists who will share their own knowledge and experience through workshops and events as well as offering 1:1 sessions with artists. The programme is designed to support the development of a sustainable talent pool, give black artists greater visibility and inspire the next generation of artists, ultimately strengthening black African communities within the Arts.

The Creative Hub guarantees paid work for over 30 freelance artists who will offer free courses, workshops and talks for people of African origin aged 16 and above.





## JAMES LEWIS-KNIGHT

### ACTOR, FACILITATOR, CLOWN

The framework on which I base all my artistic decisions stems from the journey I undertook at YSJ. The constant drive from all my tutors guided me to realise that if I wanted to be an artist I needed to commit, to jump in headfirst.

I'm currently the Artistic Director of Clown Space, a physical theatre company I founded in 2017, through which I host workshops and teach classes in clown, mask and acting.

I also keep myself busy working on other projects. These, include *Butterflies and Steel*, a performance about toxic masculinity touring prisons around the UK, and *Bold, Bright and Brave*, which explores themes of mental health. Both projects were created by Night Light Creative Arts. I also performed in *Any Mother Would*, a play about disability, love and

motherhood, created by Next Door But One. I also helped to create a clown performance for Practically theatre, and over December I brought laughter and mayhem to Castle Howard as a part of Rusticus Arts' Commedia dell'arte Troupe.

I returned to YSJ as a visiting lecturer last year, teaching the physical comedy module. The fact I was invited back to train the current students, to join them on their very own journey as the artists of tomorrow was an amazing feeling. We laughed, we failed, we failed some more but above all else, we embraced it.



## SOPHIE MONTAGUE

### FREELANCE PRESENTER, ACTOR, MODEL

Since leaving York St John University in 2017, I sought to develop a career as an actor and presenter. My first step was to be accepted into the London School of Dramatic Art to study acting. My experiences on the Theatre course at York St John University gave me the necessary grounding to make this an incredible year that taught me so much about the industry.

After completing drama school, I worked for Virgin for a year and a half as a presenter, working alongside accomplished professionals from MTV, BBC Radio and ITV. The highlight of my career to date was being selected to represent the Ernest Jones Christmas Campaign in 2019, an opportunity that also involved my partner. I am currently filming a series which is due to be released at the end of 2020. I feel so privileged and excited to be back in the acting industry: it is my true passion and I owe my success to York St John University, where I first began to turn my interests into a successful career.

# LIZZY WHYNES

## DIRECTOR AND FACILITATOR

I graduated from YSJ in 2014 with a BA in Theatre. Since then I've had a phenomenal few years working in a variety of different jobs within the industry from directing, performing, choreographing, stage management, arts management and education. I currently work part-time at Harrogate Theatre as their Youth Theatre Officer and also freelance for theatre and dance companies across Yorkshire. Truthfully, I do a little bit of everything and I love it.

I have created a number of productions since I graduated in 2014. I was especially proud of my original production of *Pandora* which was performed on the main stage at York Theatre Royal in 2016. It was a hybrid of autobiographical performance and ancient Greek myth told through the medium of movement and theatre, and I am currently in the stages of remounting this project.

In 2019, I was the director/movement director of Harrogate Youth Theatre's production of *The Odyssey*, performed on the main stage of Harrogate Theatre. It was really uplifting to see an ensemble of 33 young people ages take on such an ambitious production telling an epic tale through physical theatre. I would not have been able to make these productions without the skills I learnt at YSJ.

My three years at YSJ were challenging but extremely beneficial. It pushed me to my creative limits and

I learnt a great deal about myself as an artist and the world we live in. I focused my degree on performance-based modules, as they allowed my art to be vulnerable and also speak to others. I continue to use the skills I learnt in these modules all the time in various roles.

Alongside my degree I worked with York Theatre Royal's Creative Engagement department, starting as a volunteer and working my way up the ranks to a youth theatre practitioner. In the year after my graduation, I was Artistic Director of the Culture Award Winning TakeOver Festival in 2015/16 making work for the National Railway Museum, York, and for the studio, main stage and surrounding spaces at York Theatre Royal.

My advice? I have learnt that things take time, but success will happen. You may need to do a part time job alongside your creative practice for a few years straight after university and you might find yourself working with people who you are sometimes challenged by but use that time to continuously develop your art and performance making as every job will teach you something new and life is a good inspiration for art. You have a lifetime to tell stories and your stories are your art; no one else can make your art like you can. Trust in it and most importantly trust and believe in yourself.







# JESSICA ROBSON

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE PRACTITIONER

My five years as a student at York St John, first on the BA and then an MA in Applied Theatre, opened my mind to many possibilities, politics and the greater world around me. The courses offered me incredible diverse opportunities, continued encouragement, and rich learning which have shaped my professional career. I discovered a love for collaboration with artists and participants from multiple different settings and it taught me that we don't have to just be 'one thing' and fit into a box of a titled job description. Instead, we can be multifaceted creative practitioners, theatre makers and performers and can carve a path of longevity in Theatre.

The most transformative moment of my undergraduate degree was in third year on the Contemporary Performance Practice module where I ran a weekly drama workshops at HMP Askham Grange as part of the University's Prison Partnership Project. During this time, myself and four fellow students created a performance with the women in prison called *Through the Gap*. This production explored issues surrounding incarcerated women and challenged the stigmas associated with women in the criminal justice system. We later won the York Theatre Royal Graduate Prize and put on our show at York Theatre Royal.

It was this module and the YSJ Prison Partnership Project that inspired me to continue to develop

my practice by enrolling on the MA Applied Theatre. For my Masters, I predominantly worked in HMP New Hall on a weekly basis co-delivering workshops with fellow student Casey Fox around womanhood, hope and journeys. It was during this time that I really began to hone my practice as a confident and professional drama practitioner.

Since graduating I have been employed as a Drama Practitioner on the Prison Partnership Project where I deliver weekly sessions in prisons and mentor students who come onto the project through their modules. I have also been employed as a Drama Practitioner on the Shakespeare on Screens in Prisons project which is a collaboration between the Prison Partnership Project and national theatre organisations, working with top industry professionals.

As a mainly self-employed drama practitioner, theatre maker and performer I work in many different settings with different organisations such as: Night Light Creative Arts, Fuse Theatre, The Sound of MAIN, and Shakespeare Schools Foundation. Most recently I have been made the company co-director for Night Light Creative Arts.





# MATTHEW HARPER-HARDCASTLE

## THEATRE MAKER

Looking back to my graduation in 2010, I remember a few of my peers were disappointed that their BA theatre course hadn't turned them into one particular thing. 'I thought I was going to be an actor' a few of them said. In contrast, both at the time, and also especially now looking back on my career, I am extremely grateful for the range of modules, contexts, styles and techniques that I was engaged in whilst studying, allowing me and my career to be unrestricted by never sticking to just one thing.

I've never wanted to pigeonhole my practice, as I love so many aspects of theatre and didn't really want to let anything go. To this end in my second year I discovered applied theatre practice, which enabled me to use all the theatre skills I knew in making work for, by and with different community groups. It was the encouragement not to look at the learning from modules in isolation, but to understand how they can bolster one another, that has created a framework for my current practice. Analysing Pinter in text studies has transferred into workshops I have run with youth theatres; or exploring Shakespeare and Sophocles has been incorporated into devising processes with adults with learning disabilities.

This diversity not only gave me great personal satisfaction, but also – especially in the early years of my career – made me confident in being able to take up different opportunities

in theatre and explore avenues I might not have. Creating and sustaining a professional practice within this industry is hard work and can be tough, but the more you can harness all of your skills and understand how to apply them, the more resilient and successful you can become. This was one of the reasons I returned to York St John University to complete my MA Applied Theatre in 2018.

After being long-standing Co-Artistic Director of Upstage Centre Youth Theatre and Assistant Director for Grand Opera House York's Stage Experience, I had five years of being the Artistic Director of Once Seen Theatre Company (a company formed of actors with learning difficulties) and Theatre Tutor for Converge (an education programme for those with lived experience of mental ill health).

Currently I am a Youth Theatre Practitioner for York Theatre Royal, an acting member of Playback Theatre York, and the founder of Next Door But One, an applied theatre company focusing on social justice and community cohesion. We are currently funded by Arts Council England. Most recently, I took up the role of charter programme manager for Parents and Carers in Performing Arts, and joined the board of Out of Character Theatre Company and Tutti Frutti Productions.



# LISA THORNTON

## APPLIED THEATRE FACILITATOR

I can't quite believe I began BA Theatre at York St John ten years ago. Whilst studying at undergraduate level I never completely knew what I wanted to do afterwards, other than to somehow continue making theatre. Coming from a small north east town, some people thought I was naïve and should 'just get a proper job.' However, I always held onto the advice I was given in my third year to 'always call yourself an artist, if you don't believe that, no one else will.'

From 2013 I worked on several YSJ partnership projects, most notably the NSPCC and York St John University's It's Not Ok project. Reaching over 25,000 young people, the team and I raised awareness around the issues of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. Touring nationally across education settings was a huge learning opportunity. I then played the character Becky in the NSPCC National Digital Resource, again produced by the drama department at York St John. I'm incredibly proud to say every young person in the country has access to this provision.

To further my skills and knowledge from 2016-2018 I studied MA Applied Theatre part-time. Social justice was at the heart of the syllabus and this motivated me to continue working in a range of social contexts.

Following graduation I moved to Manchester, where I have since embarked on various freelance projects. This includes being

appointed lead artist for All Ways Making's Creative Critics Project, in partnership with the Manchester International Festival. In this role, I devised and delivered a series of arts/critical thinking workshops for year 8 students, who became official critics for three MIF19 events. Now an Associate Artist with All Ways Making, I advocate the organisations mission, 'developing creative, learning, healthy communities.'

I am also a Facilitator and Engagement Officer for Proper Job Theatre Company. Delivering the LAB Project, volunteering and wellbeing courses across some of Manchester's hardest to reach communities. Participants are aged 19+ and unemployed. With diverse backgrounds and living in some of the country's most deprived areas, learners can often be vulnerable with complex needs. Through theatre and therapeutic techniques the LAB Project helps participants to recognise their potential and support their journey back into education/paid employment/volunteering. A highlight of the role is guiding participants in groups to deliver a drama workshop in a primary school.

Turns out I was able to find a 'proper job' after all. YSJ equipped me with the tools I needed to carve a place in the worlds of applied theatre and theatre in education.







# GEORGIE FISHKIN

## ARTS AND MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONER

If you had asked me at the beginning of my first year at York St John what I wanted to do with my degree, I would have said 'act.' I had no idea of the vast opportunities I would have the pleasure of experiencing, and just how versatile performance can be in a whole variety of different work settings.

The second year of my degree was by far the most significant in setting me up for my future career. Studying the modules Performance in Social Context played a huge role in my passion for theatre in the community, as well as broadening my understanding of how the arts play an integral role in cultural engagement and intervention.

During this time I gained the experience of facilitating reminiscence theatre workshops in a care home. This was my first experience of creating theatre in the community, bringing to life stories which had been shared with me first hand. One woman shared with me her story of how, as a young Jewish girl living in Nazi occupied Vienna, she had managed to escape and start a new life in England. I will never forget that.

Through first by BA, and later an MA, York St John has provided me with the skills which have supported me massively in my current role as Young Persons' Co-ordinator at York Mind. As part of my role I support young people aged 11-21 who identify as struggling with their wellbeing. I work

with young people from many different backgrounds, who are often high need and vulnerable. A big part of my role is ensuring they feel comfortable and at ease in any one-to-one or group sessions that we provide. Through both my undergraduate and masters degree, York St John has provided me with the skills and techniques needed to work in an ever changing, quick paced environment. Through a vast range of resources, I have been provided with the creative knowledge needed to run workshops with young people, taking into consideration their individual needs and abilities.

The independent research which is implemented in both the undergraduate and post-graduate degrees, has allowed me to flourish whilst creating new projects from scratch. In my role at York Mind, I have recently pulled together a project called 'Creative Lives' using the arts as a lens in which to explore how we can explore, manage and maintain our emotional wellbeing. The project has been successfully run in five schools.

Two years after graduating from my masters and York St John still has a massive place in my heart. I know I have grown not only as a professional but also as a person because of the passion and encouragement which I received as a student here.



# CHARLI WARD

## ACADEMY DIRECTOR, MIND THE GAP THEATRE

My experience of studying at YSJ has been invaluable in preparing me for a career in the arts and it was my final module in community theatre, that has led to the area of theatre I now work in.

It was this module that gave me the opportunity to work with various different groups in York, providing me with the skills to make theatre in a range of ways, with a range of people. This became a big passion for me and on completing my degree in 2005, I began pursuing work in this area.

The next two years involved me making theatre in ways I had never thought of. I worked with schools, universities and began to gain more experience of working with learning-disabled community groups.

I loved the challenge of creating theatre in different ways and different places. I began shift the way I saw a theatre making process work. I didn't need a stage, just the people and their stories. These stories are the theatre. Throughout these two years, I continued to work with people with disabilities and in 2007 I got my first full-time job at Mind the Gap, England's largest learning-disabled theatre company.

My journey at Mind the Gap began with supporting learning-disabled students who were training in the arts. One of the big projects I worked on, was to support students working in mainstream drama schools, to gain more arts training. This project was also about changing perceptions

of people with a learning disability. I began to realise just how under-represented people with a learning disability are in the arts.

I loved making theatre but was driven to see how more opportunities could be available to people with disabilities. Over the next few years, I continued to support students with their arts practice, along with strengthening the training Mind the Gap delivers.

I am now Mind the Gap's Academy Director, beginning my 13th year with the company. I am responsible for programming six different performing arts training programmes and leading a team of artists to deliver these. We provide high level training for people with a learning disability, that want a career in the arts industry. In this role I work closely with theatre companies, casting directors and other creatives to make these opportunities possible.

I still get the opportunity to make professional work that tours nationally and internationally. I am currently one of the lead creatives on *A Little Space*, a physical theatre collaboration with GECKO Theatre, which just finished it's first national tour.

My time at York St John was integral in harnessing my skills as a theatre maker. Over the years since I graduated it has supported me to explore countless opportunities towards carving a career I love.





# GENEVA RUST-ORTA

## WRITER, COMEDIAN, PERFORMER

I am from the United States, where I was rejected from every theater programme I applied to. It was this (thank whatever) that brought me to York St. John University, a leftfield move that could not have been more pivotal to my current work.

YSJ dismantled my preconceived notion that theatre must be difficult, elite and exclusive. I remember an exercise in my first year where we were asked to walk to a chair, sit, say 'hello', and walk back to our original seat, 'without performing'. The exercise made me keenly aware my own inevitable performance as well as the inevitable performances of my peers. Performance became inescapable. It was insights like this that gave me permission to see performance as a common commodity.

Another module I that was very important to me was Artist as Witness, which asked us to bear witness to the Shoah. As a Jewish person, remembering the Shoah ignited sorrow but also relief. Sorrow that the past happened and relief that the present is here. work on this module placed the Shoah around my peers and me, a part of the past, present, and future.

Both my final year projects explored Jewish humour as it relates to sorrow and tragedy. YSJ allowed me to hold academia, humour, discomfort, and all of their intersectionality at once in my writing and practice. It was feedback from tutors that taught me to

ask forgiveness instead of permission as a performer.

I took my final year performance project, a 30-minute standup set, to the Edinburgh Fringe in 2016 and 2017. My practice is always evolving but my central strategy remains the same: there were, there are, and there will be bad things, and they don't go away + time

Now I am a comedian and my practice is incredibly simple: I talk. Which is a far cry from the New York City Broadway Musicals I once considered the only route to theatre.

I perform an elevated version of myself and discuss elevated versions of my own life experience. As an understated person generally, my persona draws a thin line between life and theatre. I hope this ambiguity challenges my audience to question what it is that they find funny. Are they laughing at a real person? Is that okay? Are they laughing at a real persona? Is that any better?







# ELEANOR SMITH

## COMMUNITY DANCE FACILITATOR

During my final year studying BA Dance: Community Practice, my peers and I were tasked with establishing teaching placements. I took this opportunity to gain as much experience as possible. One of these was with an inclusive youth club in York and a highlight of my degree was when a member of the club made a poster that said 'the dance sessions are my favourite part of the week.' A simple statement, but it made me truly realise how much of an impact creativity and dance could have on someone's wellbeing.

I believe it was through these placements that most of my learning and development took place during my degree. I gained confidence liaising with the staff, became more equipped at attuning and responding to the needs and energy of each individual and I began to find my flow as an independent dance facilitator.

During my time at YSJ, I gained important facilitation and communication skills through volunteering to assist with the Converge dance programme and also with a dance session for people living with dementia and I am very grateful of the opportunities, support and guidance I received from my lecturers. I continue to use these skills in my current work to constantly refine and develop my practice.

I now work with MeshDance (an inclusive dance group for

young people aged 11-25 with and without disabilities in Leeds) as a self-employed support facilitator. In addition I work with Dancing for Well-Being which runs dance classes for older people with mobility limitations in the Harrogate District.

I often reflect on how elements of my degree continue to be relevant and useful to me in my current career. Sometimes it is small things that stick in the mind and have a big impact. One example of this was during a site Specific module, where two of my peers and I were showcasing choreography inspired by Willi Dorner's work. We choreographed the movement outside on a sunny day and when it came to the showcase, it was a miserable, rainy day. We agreed we would commit to the movements and choreography 100% (which included lying on the pavement and climbing a slippery wall!) Our lecturer praised us for giving our all to the task as it made such a difference to the end product.

This is a quality I strived to carry throughout my degree, from the practical work and the placements, to the essays and portfolios. And it is something I bring to my work now, during each dance session I facilitate, each new project I work on. I truly think giving your 'all', whatever that is to you, will accelerate your learning, development and your career in the arts.





## AMANDA THURSBY

### SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

My time as a drama student at York St John taught me that theatre allows great scope for interpretation. It was this that inspired me to teach drama today.

In my second year I took the opportunity within my modules to volunteer at a secondary school to gain experience as a teacher. My tutors encouraged and supported me in finding my placement which helped me to work professionally and confidently in a school setting. I am heavily inspired by the practitioner Dorothy Heathcote, and her teacher in role method is one which I continue to explore to motivate and inspire my students. This module confirmed for me that teaching would be a rewarding career and provided me with the facilitation skills I needed.

Full disclosure: I have stolen many warm up exercises from my time at

YSJ, although I always credit the lecturers.

After completing my degree I went on to study a PCGE at Durham University. And now I am a secondary school drama teacher.

I will be forever grateful for the opportunities theatre at York St John provided me with, as I would not be where I am today and I honestly love my job. My tutors never gave up on me, inspired me to be a facilitator, and I credit my drama teaching career to my theatre degree.

My advice is be greedy and take every opportunity thrown your way. You only get out what you put in so make the effort from day one as it really is an excellent course.



## JAMIE HEELBECK

### SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

The phrase I most often use to describe what the BA theatre course at York St John University provided is: 'endless opportunities'. So much so, that by the time I'd finished my second year studies, I was employed and working alongside theatre lecturers in touring the Theatre in Education project. It's not OK, a play and workshop created through a commission from the NSPCC.

When I finished sixth form college I had never imagined that even before I finished my degree I would be employed as an actor, touring nationally to Yorkshire, Wales, Sheffield and Nottingham.

During my degree I also worked with Converge, a YSJ project providing arts education opportunities to mental health service users. And, in another example of the endless opportunities I mentioned, volunteered with two

theatres in York where I worked with artistic directors and children with special educational needs. This made me realise that we need to actively strive to ensure that theatre is truly accessible for everyone. Working in such environments also helped me make connections and amazing friends along the way. Not only did I tour around schools but I was offered a placement in a York school with the best support from the teaching staff there you could imagine!

Four years on and I'm in the job of my dreams, working in a school for young people with special educational needs. I will teach drama up to GCSE, a key stage 3 class and run the school allotment. The resilience and endless opportunities studying at York St John gave me has enabled me to reach out into the world and make build a vibrant and rewarding career.





# HOLLY SLOAN

## EVENTS AND VOLUNTEERS CO-ORDINATOR

I graduated from York St John with a BA in Drama: Education and Community in 2018, and since then I have been fortunate to be part of some incredible organisations. I often reflect on my years as a student and feel incredibly thankful that this was the route I chose; it's taken me down an amazing career path that I would never have imagined 5 years ago.

In my first year I took part in a module called Workshop Practice, where I began a placement with Converge, a partnership between York St John University and the NHS, offering educational opportunities for adults who use mental health services. I remember feeling sick with nerves before my first session; I had no idea what to expect. I had heard of 'mental health' but I didn't truly know what it was, and any knowledge I had was fuelled by the stigmas I'd seen in

the media – even if at the time, I didn't know it.

Two hours later I went home feeling completely awestruck. Despite our mix in ages and life experiences, our combined love of theatre brought us together and quickly dissolved my nerves. Thursdays became my favourite night of the week. One of the most important values of Converge is co-production; as a York St John Student, I formed close bonds with the Converge students I worked with because, in the space, we were equals. We supported and learned from each other.

Throughout my degree, my most significant learning experiences often came from work-based learning opportunities. In the first semester of second year I completed the Children and Young People module where we facilitated workshops in a primary

school, and in the second semester I worked with Fuse Theatre, a company for young people with disabilities, as part of the Performance in Social Context module. These placements not only allowed me to develop my workshop skills; they taught me the importance of spaces where people can be creative, have fun, feel part of a community, and the positive impact this can have on a person's mental health.

In my third year, holding these values close to my heart, I began running a Sunday Coffee Club for York Mind. Two years on, the Coffee Club has grown significantly; it has become a place held by the friendships built between clients and their ability to welcome anyone new with open arms.

Today, alongside the Sunday Coffee Club I am a member of the board of trustees for York Theatre

Royal, where I sit on the Audience Engagement Committee, and I work full-time for Converge as their Events and Volunteers Co-ordinator. My favourite part of my job is organising the end-of-term sharing events, where Converge Students come together to display or perform some of the incredible work they have created over the last term.

Growing up, I always knew that I wanted to do something that felt meaningful. For me, the work I'm involved in since completing my degree goes beyond that. Every day I am inspired by the wonderful people I work with, and I feel so lucky to be at the beginning of a career I love. I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of York St John.





## KEELAN SWIFT

### DOCTORAL RESEARCHER

My advice for anybody entering their first year of the theatre course at York St John university is that you may find something challenging, even weird, but you should let go of your inhibition, trust the tutors and trust the process.

As you navigate your way through the world of theatre, you will begin to explore in more detail issues such as class, gender, sexuality and race. It is important that you do not shy away from these topics when creating art. Creating theatre that investigates and examines these subjects is important, and should be shared.

Since graduating from York St John in 2016, I've undertaken first a Masters and now a PhD at the University of York. My research explores the work of Bertolt Brecht and how we can use theatre to understand the world and our place within it. In my own play-writing practice, I am concerned with writing plays that interrogate modern stereotypes of social class.



## LAUREN HALL

### DOCTORAL RESEARCHER

In the three years of my BA at York St John University I gained invaluable knowledge from my lecturers and guest artists, running workshops as well as bringing performance to the studios. In the second year, when you choose which modules you would like to take, modules such as Performance in a Social Context and Autobiographical Performance really start to mould who you are, and what you want to specialise in as a practitioner. Each student in my year utilised the knowledge given to all of us to become independent practitioners, working in any field of their choice.

After I finished my BA at York St John, I continued onto the MA Theatre and Performance course. The MA really encouraged me to work more independently, to engage even more with the world outside a black box

theatre, and to think and make bigger. This led to me creating a 30 minute docu-drama film about out-shore rescue boats for fishermen, which later was shown at an RNLI base. Post-MA I spent a year working on my own limited company, which was supported by Grad2Director at York St John. The company created bespoke online education for secondary schools, specialising in sex education and in 2018 won a Young Entrepreneur of the Year award.

However, in October 2018 I returned to York St John to start my PhD, specialising in Learning Disabled Theatre. The support and encouragement I have received throughout my journey so far has been overwhelming, and it makes me extremely proud to now be teaching on the drama course.



# PROFESSIONAL PLACEMENTS, INTERNSHIPS & INDUSTRY PARTNERS

Central to the student experience on the drama, theatre and dance programmes at York St John University are opportunities for high-quality placement experiences to any students who want to undertake them. These placements are often organised in collaboration with long-standing industry partners whereby we can guarantee the quality and integrity of the experience and the learning opportunities.

These placements are built in as core components of a number of modules. Experiences might include working with children in formal or informal educational contexts; working in arts and health contexts with Converge or Moving Minds; partnerships with professional theatre companies such as Mind the Gap and York Theatre Royal and many more.

The value of these placement experiences cannot be over-emphasised. They provide skills and experiences in real world contexts; they provide contacts and routes into future careers; they give an opportunity to try out and experience working environments. It is for all these reasons that so many of the graduates featured in this magazine remember their placements as the moment when they became clear about the career they wanted to pursue after university.

The following pages introduce you to just six of our established partnerships: Converge, Mind the Gap, the Prison Partnership Project, Moving Minds, NSPCC and Spark.







## CONVERGE

Converge and Out of Character offer a range of opportunities in theatre to local people who experience mental ill health. Theatre students have been working with our groups since 2008. They have led and joined in workshops, supported the rehearsal process, provided technical support and performed with our theatre company, Out of Character, at York Theatre Royal. They have been invaluable in supporting our work and continue to be so.

Student involvement often begins with a placement in the second year, for some this develops further and they continue the work beyond graduation. Currently we have four alumni working for Converge and Out of Character. The relationship with the drama department is sufficiently strong that five people in Converge have gained enough confidence and skill to obtain places on the undergraduate programme.

**Nick Rowe, Director of Converge**



## MIND THE GAP

It has been fantastic to welcome York St John students on our placement programme at Mind the Gap Theatre Company over the last two years. The Performance in Social Context Module seems to be a great match with our Academy programmes, giving the students from YSJ an opportunity to develop and apply their facilitation skills, along with offering them the chance to explore different ways of making theatre with people with learning disabilities. It is a real exchange of skills and students within our Academy are also broadening their knowledge of theatre making.

The relationship we have been building over the last few years has also led to working together in other areas of work, opening doors to paid employment to some students after their studies. We have several members of our core staff team that are York St John Alumni.

**Julia Skelton, Executive Director of Mind the Gap**







## PRISON PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

The York St John University Prison Partnership Project started in 2013 and is a creative partnership between the university and HMP New Hall (closed female prison) and HMP Askham Grange (open female prison). It was born out of the desire to provide a unique partnership between education, the arts and the criminal justice system facilitating a weekly drama and arts provision in prison.

The partnership brings together two different kinds of communities – university students and staff and female prisoners and prison staff – and aims to enable each to encounter the other across profound social barriers. These are two communities who in other circumstances would never normally meet. The intention is for both communities to be part of a transformative creative learning experience that emphasises collaboration and addresses issues of social concern. Students from all the Drama programmes can gain the opportunity to work on project throughout their degree – on campus and in prison.

**Rachel Conlon, Director of the Prison Partnership Project**



## MOVING MINDS

Moving Minds is an innovative project that creates opportunities for people affected by dementia to participate in dance and improvisational movement sessions. Began in 2016, Moving Minds explores what dance, as a creative embodied practice, could offer people living with dementia and those that live alongside them, and questions how dance might enable embodied expressions of identity and selfhood.

The project engages staff, students, external partners and our wider community in a shared ecology of creative practice and enquiry. YSJ students from drama, dance and occupational therapy have the opportunity, either as part of an elective module or on a volunteer basis, to work with the project, gaining valuable skills in planning, facilitating and evaluating workshops. The project also supports a student internship and a student-as-researcher post, both of which are paid positions. Several students who have worked with the project have gone on to develop similar projects following graduation and are now working professionally within the area of arts and health.

**Elaine Harvey, Director of Moving Minds**







## NSPCC

In partnership with the NSPCC the *It's Not OK* Theatre in Education tour and online digital resource is delivered regionally and nationally by YSJ staff and students from the drama department. The tour is a 25-minute play following four teenager characters through their experiences of Child Sexual Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation via the prism of the internet, gaming & social & family relationships, alongside a 90-minute drama workshop where pupils explore the issues raised by the play. Through TiE techniques the pupils give the characters 'advice' and find strategies in order to gain a 'rehearsal for life' and seek out support against sexual abuse and exploitation.

This collaborative project was born out of a call for action and a desire to combat the cultural epidemic of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation through the power of theatre in order to enable understanding around complex safeguarding issues, act as a rehearsal for life and facilitate empowerment and social change.

Currently *It's not OK* tours to schools and the online film version of the play and teaching workshops are on the NSPCC national website and is used by teachers and support workers in formal and informal educational settings nationally.



## YORK THEATRE ROYAL

York Theatre Royal – York's main producing theatre in the city – has been producing great drama in the beautiful city of York for over 270 years and is one of the country's leading producing theatres.

Each year the theatre entertains over 200,000 people with its wide variety of performances, events and collaborations with the wider community and school groups both on and off stage and with their thriving youth theatre. Through our partnership work with York Theatre Royal, drama and dance students are taught by guest artists and staff from the theatre and are regularly on placement with their youth theatre and community outreach projects. Emerging student artists are further supported by York Theatre Royal by accessing the theatre's productions, post show talks and master classes also.







## SPARK

Based at SPARK: York, Platform is YSJ's city centre community theatre, offering inspirational, community arts engagement and performance that challenges prejudice, promotes fairness and fosters creative relationships through accessible, arts participation and performance. Our aspiration at Platform is to enhance people's lives through creativity, knowledge, collaboration and community cohesion, enabling all, to reach their full potential and to make a positive contribution to society.

The YSJ and SPARK: York partnership is a project which enables sustainable community arts practice to take place alongside inspiring teaching and learning and impactful research. Students throughout their time at YSJ are offered access to the space for rehearsals and events, watch performances and work with external artists. Through this work the project will facilitate reflection and understanding in order to find out what the people of the city of York desire for now and for the future in respect to community arts practice and performance.

**SPARK\***  
Y O R K



## STUDENT INTERNSHIPS

Performance students have the opportunity to apply for YSJ student internships while studying with us. These internships can boost your CV and kickstart a potential future career. You can develop key recruitment skills, gain valuable work experience and start to build your professional network. We have student and graduate internships and summer internships. They are part time and last for a duration of between 4-12 weeks on campus with different YSJ departments and projects and off campus with organisations in the city or the wider region.

Recently we have provided internships in our department with Spark, Converge, Prison Partnership Project and the Shakespeare on Screen in Prison Project and other performance students have taken part in internships with arts organisations across the region.





## GRAD2DIRECTOR GRAD2FREELANCER

Both Grad2Director and Grad2Freelancer provide students with the opportunity to start their own business, but it is about way more than that. The coaching and mentoring for both uses an online programme that was designed to help corporate professionals accelerate their careers. The programme was designed in such a way that to progress through it participants simply have no choice but to learn critical enterprise skills such as: Leadership, Creativity and Innovation, Working Effectively with Others, Communication, Priority Setting, Initiative and Follow Through, Thinking & Problem Solving and finally Technical Mastery.

The programme is now in its third year, with 50 company founders having undergone coaching and mentoring, 200 graduates signed up for the online course and 20 founders running their own business as sole traders or as private limited companies.

**Dr John Park, Director of Grad2Director / Grad2Freelancer**



## LAUNCHPAD

Launchpad provides careers support and advice for all students. Their team provides support in finding work experience, volunteering, internships and placements during your study. They also provide support through careers advice and graduate job opportunities.

LaunchPad Online is the official York St John University careers portal, which gives students access to finding part-time jobs, internships and work placement opportunities.

LaunchPad also helps students with their professional development, including CV writing sessions, careers funding and regular workshops such as interview skills.





BA Acting  
BA Drama and Theatre  
BA Drama Education and Community  
BA Drama and Dance

MA Applied Theatre  
MA Theatre and Performance

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