

# **KELI RESOURCE TRANSCRIPT**

# KELI | MARTIN GREEN

The play is about music, community, to some extent it's a coming of age story. It's about a 17-year-old and it's about what happens over several generations. Because we have a character who's 150 years old, we can look at more generations than is possible in real life. So, I think it's about a small place over time and how that might change and what that means for those young people just kind of entering into their adult chapter.

I am originally from the suburbs of England and I moved to Midlothian to a mining area and I live very close to the Scottish Mining Museum and one day I drove through Newtongrange where that museum is and they were having a brass band gala and I encountered all these brass bands and fell in love, first of all with the sound cause the sound is remarkable and then ultimately the stories and the people. Having now lived in an ex-mining community for 20 years, obviously I see it from the outside and I think it might be more fascinating to me perhaps than some of the people that live there because you know your own normal is only so interesting, but to me I find the whole thing, the social history, the music, the politics I find all of that remarkable.

So my background is in traditional music, folk music and I play the accordion and primarily that has been my job since I was 17. So, I was brought up with multigenerational music with with a working-class form that exists for people to make their own entertainment after work. It's not a performance form. It's not a concert form. And I saw so many similarities in the brass bands. It's its working-class music. It's its afterwork entertainment. It is something that people self-organise or self-create and that many generations of the same family might do together and those things are increasingly rare. So I suppose when I see those similarities, I find that quite exciting.

I also live in a place where people don't talk like me, there's a completely different rhythm to the music of speech and I suppose musically that catches my ear. And in terms of writing scripts, the dialogue is the most like music. That's the bit that has rhythm and punctuation and rise and fall. And so I've been I've been there with these people who I've grown to love very much, in the place where I live for 20 years, listening to the to their music and the music of their speech and their stories. I don't know. I find that fascinating. And you know, my love for that community is very real. My love for that music is very real. There are only so many ways you can express that I suppose.

The seeds of this were in lockdown. In lockdown, I didn't have any gigs and so I started some of the things that are on, you know, the list of things I'd love to do one day and that was interviewing brass banders, interviewing miners and trade unionists, talking to people about the strike. You know, I feel the weight of the that industry and that time and the closure of the industry. I feel all that still where I live but very little discussion about it. So I did a lot of interviews with, with people around me and then with people in the wider brass band world and then we made an online brass band which was surprisingly successful and that became the seeds of this. I didn't know it was going to be a play. I had started making audio drama in lockdown because I had no gigs. So I had a little bit of experience of writing scripts for audio drama and the Lyceum in Edinburgh commissioned an audio drama because at that point their building was still closed and they they were commissioning audio. So I wrote an audio for them but that contract said they would have first refusal on a on a stage play, so that commission was also to write a play. Otherwise I would never have written a play. It wasn't that I met these people and thought this should be a play. I just kind of found this world and thought I want to immerse myself in this as much as possible. And so various things came out of that.

We made a series for Radio 4 of of documentaries about brass bands. And so one of the very powerful people that I met during that talked about how the brass band was was literally the only safe space in her childhood and it was a reason to leave the house and so because her own household wasn't safe. It was a violent environment. So that was a very powerful thing to hear, you know, and

music is wonderful and it is empowering, but there's this whole other dimension to community work of any sort, which is that people need it. And and that is no less true now than it was in 1985. And so that was one of the stems of Keli. What's it like for a teenager for whom this is their escape? And another very powerful interview was with a woman called Shona White who might be the best tenor horn player in the world. She talks about how difficult she finds what she calls real life. Music is she says playing the horn is easy in comparison to life. That that was one of the quotes from this interview that that I kind of had stuck on my wall while I was writing. And and all her control comes out through a bent metal tube, you know.

So, it's taken five years from when I started writing this script to it being on a stage. I don't think that's unusual. So, that's one thing that I've taken away from this that that I've been saying to younger writers and younger theatre makers when I meet them is it just takes a long time. Don't don't be put off. I've had a lot of conversations that that haven't resulted in this play being made. I'm very very grateful that National Theatre of Scotland came in as a partner. But before that, the process has been a lot of development with with other partners that maybe don't have the resources to make the show, but were kind enough to have an interest in the show. So, we spent some time in Hull at Hull Truck doing some development there. We spent some time with a company called Wise Children. They were instrumental in helping it kind of come out of an audio form into what it might look like on stage. We spent some time at the Lyceum doing work. So there have been many many conversations and these little islands of work where you get to try things out. That development is absolutely vital. But it often doesn't result in somebody going great. I'm going to put this on a stage. And so anyone that might be having that experience, stick with it. That work will never be wasted. So I feel like we learned an awful lot. We're very lucky to go down to the National Theatre in London and do some work there. And the National Theatre of Scotland were kind enough to come 500 miles to come and see that. And and at that point, it felt like we had something ready for somebody to say, "Okay, yeah, I think we we could partner up and make this happen." So, you have a very very slow climb and then all of a sudden the green light goes on and you start running.

I'm very lucky in that I get to write words and music simultaneously and I find that very helpful. That's a very symbiotic relationship for me. The way that I write is in prose first. So I write stories about characters I think might be in the play or the world in general. A lot of characters that never appear in the play, but I find that easier than trying to nail pieces of dialogue straight away, but everybody's everybody's different. And alongside them, I write pieces of music. Obviously, I don't have a brass band, unfortunately, on tap. So, I, you know, I'm mocking those up on the computer. Then I record myself reading the story and I put the music behind it as a soundtrack. And then I go for a long walk and I listen to that a few times and I wonder how one influences the other. And that goes backwards and forwards. And eventually I throw 80% of those stories away. I keep 20% and they become dialogue and and you try and form them into some kind of structure. But because I can go backwards and forwards between the music and the stories, it is very helpful for me for one to be able to influence the other, especially when you're lucky enough to get in a room with live musicians and actors and and you can kind of tweak them a little bit in in real time. One of the similarities I think between writing the characters in a play and writing a piece of ensemble music, but you know, a piece of music for more than one sort of instrument is you want enough similarity for it to feel coherent as a whole, but you need enough variation between those voices to to give everyone their own voice. And in music, if you write for an orchestra, for example, then you know, you've got a trumpet and a cello, they they make different sounds to start with, and you you are therefore pushed to write for them in slightly different ways. And the characters in a play, if they all come from the same place, then that's a bit like a brass band. Everyone in that ensemble makes the same sort of sound and then you try and give them their own little bit of individualism. Where it becomes sort of easier in this play is to have a character from the same place but from a 100 years ago where the rhythms of speech were different and I suppose we don't have recorded records. I don't actually know how those people spoke but when I see their letters or what they've written down there seem to be more words than we use now. You know, I think everything we do is getting faster and shorter. So, I enjoyed playing with Willie Knox in particu-

lar, who has quite who says at least three times more words than anybody needs to to get the point across. And then Keli has this quite sort of sharp, spiky way of speaking. Those I definitely hear as a piece of music. So, a really fundamental change that took place. The audio drama plays out chronologically and we hear Keli's story just from beginning to end as it happens, but the play starts with Keli falling through the floor of the house and telling her story in flashback to Willie Knox. So that that first moment in the play is 3/4, 80% perhaps of of the way through and we catch up with time through the flashback that came from Emma Rice from Wise Children when we did the development with her. The first thing she did was to play about with the structure of the script and ask you know could could we do it like this? And so that felt like a really a really fundamental change that also opened my mind to how live storytelling which is not quite the same as audio where you can have two things going on at once in audio and we can sort of deal with that. You can't really do that in the same way on a on on this on the stage. So that was one big discovery.

The other was that the amount of music and how busy it can be, it has to be reduced significantly to make sense on a stage. And for me, the biggest takeaway is the storytelling has to be clear all the way through. So the first bits of development that we'd gone in, I was kind of trying to get the band to do a whole gig and the actors to do a whole play at the same time. You can't you that's 200% information and we can only take, you know, 100% at home. So learning where to thin out, where to go up and down, how pacing works, which is not the same. They all felt like quite big milestones in discovery. The other big, big discovery was that the ending wasn't satisfactory the way that it had sat for a long time. We're so sensitive to story. Like if it doesn't land, we don't feel satisfied and we are surrounded by stories, you know, real stories from our own lives and fiction and news and and so if that curve is off, that doesn't make sense. So I found that out in the first time we got to do some development and didn't really solve it until I mean luckily before rehearsals, but quite late in the in the process. That's the point of development. If you come out of some of that development time with more questions than answers, I think that's right. I think you should do you. You are trying to find the weaknesses in in the piece of work and then you go away and try and solve them. You're not usually finding the answers. As a writer, it's sort of all about you until you hand that rehearsal script over and then it's about the director. And so my role in the room then was to try and help Bryony Shanahan who directed the show who's the most wonderful collaborators and is one of those people that will take the best idea in the room, not her idea and they'll take it from wherever it comes and that's a wonderful environment to work in. But it's still her show, you know it's still her that's directing the show. So I hadn't experienced being a writer in a room before. I've been the composer in a room before and where I learned a lot was suddenly realising that either the storytelling isn't clear so perhaps you need a few more lines somewhere, when you read this the script through on the first day of rehearsals and some beats of the play are not clear or you realise you're saying something three times you need to get rid of a bit or a scene is too long you know so and those sorts of things I'd never had to do quickly before. So that was quite exciting. It's like all right, we kind of need that tomorrow. So I found that quite exhilarating. I quite, I quite liked that process. I was very lucky with with the musicians partly because I'd had some time to work with them as a band previously. Also the director Louis Abbott who is absolutely- the musical director- absolutely fantastic is an old friend and we've done a lot of work. So our communication is very very quick and our tastes are quite similar. So the scale of this show has meant things are much slower to implement than I'd ever experienced before because every department needs to take on a change. And once you get into tech that becomes slower still because every every change has to become a cue and that cue needs to be programmed by every department. There's a new level of patience that I've had to to learn. Which is good for you.

The key themes for me were about the importance of spending time with other people doing things. That's almost the biggest one. The other is that we all need help. You know, that that is a given. Whoever we are, at some point in life, we're going to need some help. and they ended up being the primary themes. Music is also vital, but music is a vehicle for exploring those themes ultimately. I think it could be could be football. It it, it could be poetry slams, you know, it it it doesn't really matter, I don't think, what the activity is. Music happens to be my thing. So, but I don't think the point is we

could all be saved by music. I think the point is we all are going to need other people in our lives. I think in terms of Keli opening to other people, Saskia, who's the woman that she meets in London, is quite important to this. Keli has a lot of defenses around it and pushes people away quite a lot. And when she meets Saskia, she sort of tries to do the same thing, but Saskia's not taking it, you know. So Saskia kind of pushes through Keli's defenses and goes, "Nah, come on. I to some extent I see a younger me in you. I know this game and it's a sad road. There's a better road." And so it feels like this is an important thing for Keli. There there's this stranger really who has decided that they believe in Keli enough. And actually a lot of people around Keli believe in her but Keli finds that very difficult to see, and I think she finds it easier to see after that. So that feels like one pivotal moment. I also think that at the end one of the things that she learns from Willie Knox is that Keli understands a bit more about what Brian has pushed through to be where he is. Brian understands more about why Keli's life is difficult. And once we have those bit little bits of empathy with each other, it's so much easier to get on with people.

A wonderful magical thing about theatre as a writer, you're you're giving them some words and a background and you hand it over to an actor and they invent a human and you can't invent that human. Like only that actor can do that and all you can do is try and guide them on their route. And so the scenes between Keli and her mom Jayne, so which is Liberty Black playing Keli and Karen Fishwick playing Jayne. There's a moment where Keli says, "I'm so tired. Can you see it?" which it wasn't a throwaway line for me, but it was just a bit of dialogue, you know, and the look that Jane gives her and the way that Keli was delivering that line had this real effect on me which was that's not that wasn't my work. That was these two humans and it and it gets me every time and that's those people. Do you know what I mean? There's no amount of writing cause that's three words and a look. That's all it is. You know, there are lines in that play I agonised over. That was one of them, you know, and so it's like, yeah, all right. That's that's kind of what theatre is for me. It's humans crushing my soul, you know.

# KELI | BRYONY SHANAHAN

So I first heard about the project. I got an email from who have become the two Martins. Martin Green who's the composer and the writer and Martin Atkinson who's the producer for Lepus Productions. That's their company. Sort of saying we've got this project. It's about it's about this teenager who's an amazing tenor horn player. She's like stuck in a mine at some point and it's got a massive brass band. Are you interested? I was like, "Yeah, definitely. That sounds amazing." So, we initially had lots and lots of chats to work out if we were the right people to work together. A lot of the work I'm interested in touches on sort of similar themes, I suppose, of place, of people, of community, of what it means to come together to do something. And also music has been quite a big part of my work in my practice as well. But the way in which it works and and Martin as the writer and composer takes a really specific kind of relationship between the two of us especially.

You know this piece has existed for many many years in Martin's brain and heart and also in lots of different formats. So there was like a podcast series a documentary series there was an audio drama and so it's had various iterations. So this was the full time that it was coming, you know, fulllength to stage for theater. And it's Martin's first fulllength play for theater in this form as well, which is amazing what he's been able to achieve. Therefore, I wanted to just put through like a really rigorous process of making sure essentially what his ambitions for the piece were is what was actually happening in the script. And it's quite a complicated story as well. When you when you describe the story out loud, it's it's like one of the things I love about it. But it's wild and and strange and a bit magical and totally grounded. It's like all of these things. So, making sure that or trying to make sure that character arcs were felt clear and felt there was that that sweet spot between enough but not too much and also just in terms of I suppose structurally how we move through the piece where we want audiences to understand certain plot points, things like that. And then I try and do as much like prep and script and script work and digging into the script I can do before rehearsal starts because when rehearsal starts I very much prefer to be on my feet cause you know you always have limited time anyway. I will do as much therefore prep at home as I can thinking about what are the questions that come up for each character. What does it seem that people might want? What is it that people are struggling with? For example, I guess it's the whole discipline sets you free thing. Do your work before so that you can come and be a bit freer in the room. Another bit of my job as a director is to to support actors in finding their characters and finding the different dynamics that they're playing. And one of the things that I really enjoy is working out what actors might need. So, one of the the core relationships in in Keli is that between Jayne, Keli's mom, and Keli. And we have got sort of short scenes that are peppered throughout the play that give us the opportunity to learn about their dynamic. And it's one that they they care about each other very much, love each other very much, they have fun together, they get on, but also Jayne's experiencing some really debilitating mental health issues that are undiagnosed and mean that it is really difficult for her to to leave the house on her own. And that is something that is getting worse. And external triggers can be pretty pretty volatile. Keli is sort of managing that on her own. And their relationship is why Keli ends up in in the mine. It's in a way it's why she's desperate to get out. So, it's fundamental. And for an audience, we really need to believe them and believe in their relationship. We did do an exercise kind of early on with Karen and Liberty who are just the most brilliant, brilliant, gorgeous actors and incredibly talented and incredibly rigorous about their own process and wanting it to feel real and proper.

So, one of the things that we did is I call it sort of text frames. So, we get lots of different pieces of paper. They have like a the same set each and on each piece of paper I'll write a statement that is not complete. So it could be something like you make me laugh when dot dot dot or on the flip side it could be something you let me down when dot dot dot I was proud of you dot dot dot I was, I get frustrated when you dot dot dot a whole, a whole array of different things. Um but they have exactly the same put them in fold them up put them on the floor they stand opposite each other and then they take it in turns they'll read it and try and answer it and in that answering of it sometimes it might



be it might be something from the play that we already know about that that becomes the answer but I think when it becomes more useful is when they start imagining beyond the parameters of the of the text. So, for example, they might imagine a really ridiculous incident at a birthday party that went completely wrong or or they might imagine something that is hinted at in the play that then they explore a bit more widely. And essentially by the end of the excise, you have the possibility of having created like a bunch of memories so that you know when Liberty can walk on stage and sees Jayne on the sofa, she's also got a whole bunch of different you know in the way that we do in real life. You know, we whenever we meet someone that we're very close with or spend a lot of time with, there's like a rolodex of of memories for us that make our relationship real and explain our behavior towards each other. And and of course, the audience will never know that. I would be really surprised if they went, "There was a silly birthday party or whatever it is." But what they might do, I believe, is the way that that means that Liberty and Karen can relate to each other, I hope, is richer for it. And obviously, that's just a small part of then the process that they do themselves, too. Uh but I kind of believe that the more that they as actors understand who they are and and they have kind of, a depth of experience to think about then we are as an audience going to in some way detect that I think rather than it just being on the surface. But right away there was this real interesting challenge of Keli is an absolutely incredible tenor horn player and how do we stage that? So even before I'd gotten involved, they kind of become pretty much a decision made that it had to be someone else because then we could kind of honor the both things of the story like we could get someone who's dedicated their life to brass, you know, and a brilliant actor who's the right age and right place for Keli as well.

So we did a lot of in that week as well as the music, we did a lot of exploring of how do we stage that in a way that feels interesting and satisfying as well. There was like a practical and a wider thing we're considering. So the the the practical consideration was like Keli is she's not just quite good at tenor horn like she's unbelievable and she has to be breathtakingly good and Martin's experience of going into brass band rooms in Whitburn primarily but across Scotland he has been met with like extraordinary talent that like takes your breath away. So firstly, like I think our responsibility in depicting these brass bands is to celebrate the craft and you know these are people that they're at the top of their game. And so that's really important for us to make sure we get that right and give this the audience the same experience that Martin and I had when when you just get like your socks blown off. It's amazing. And that's really difficult like because actually I'm sure that there are brilliant actors. I mean Karen Fishwick who's who's playing Jayne is playing Euphonium in this and she's absolutely amazing but Tenor Horn as well such a specific instrument and then also on a sort of wider level Keli is she's trapped in a mine and she's telling her story. So quite often Martin's written you know where Keli's describing the moment that she goes to the club and she plays this brilliant horn solo or whatever. We don't want it to the action to be slow. So the idea that you can you can be going this is happening and we're seeing it live. We can't split her in two. And then also one of I guess the themes of of the piece that's so important is that Keli's just a normal just a normal 17-year-old with all the things that come from you know being a 17-year-old but music is so much a part of her but she she really doesn't tell many people about it and it's almost like a different version of Keli when she goes to the cooling tower and she practices on her own. It's like a different side of her. It's the place that she feels that she gets to release all the pressures of the world. So it's almost like this like Keli that walks around in the world and then like music Keli. So we kind of got interested in going okay well all of those considerations together and the third consideration by the way is also finding an actor who can authentically portray Keli the age she is where she's from as well. So that's all going into the mix.

So with all of those considerations, we were kind of like, well, let's in that music week, let's explore this idea that the musicians are going to be on stage all the time. And that Keli can be very much continuing her story and we can place her in those scenarios, but we get to work with a tenor horn player and can that work? And it was something I was really nervous about cause I was going, "Oh, is it just going to feel like, oh god, the actor can't play or whatever?" like, you know, and I actually am I'm am really thrilled with what we've ended up with because I think for a while we imagined that one person would be like the music version of Keli and the re be this relation. So there's a whole bunch

of exploration we did about them kind of like shadowing each other and it felt like it was just too much and it was kind of getting in the way of the story a little bit and but we still sort of right up until rehearsals thought it would be one person. We realized that the moment that when Keli goes into the club and plays this incredible horn solo that that is like that's a bit of Hannah. So that started going, okay, well Hannah could take that moment of Keli's and Andrew could take the moments in the tower of Keli's. And firstly, we're really really not literally going, we're not trying to pretend that the Keli that we see in the mine is playing. But I think it offers us, you know, an idea that Keli could be anyone. It just so happens that we're telling Keli's story, but there's a million Keli's in the world and not just in brass bands, but in whatever it is. And it sort of widens it up a little bit. And I found it quite exciting. And I, you know, I know that some people might come to it and go, "Well, she never plays." And that's okay. But I think what we get because of that decision is like exquisite musicianship, which is so important. And also, like I say, we get to sort of throw the lens a little bit wider on who Keli is.

The first time we looked at I think it was the first band scene. You've got four brilliant musicians going for it, but also with a piece of music that's still relatively new to them. Actors who are, you know, never stood up and done the script before who are on book. Met each other two days ago. We had an entire pretty much an entire sound department because of the demands of the piece in the room and loads of people. And the first time we did it, I was so overwhelmed by all of the information. And I could see the actors like you know and everyone was just overwhelmed because there was just so much information and it was one of the only times I went oh my what if this what if this doesn't work maybe we can't underscore the whole thing and that's like one of the central hopes of the piece. So that, that was quite tough but I realised then that I think we were so keen to make the whole the whole thing as a process cohesive. We didn't want musicians and actors or the play and the music that that everything kind of feels like it has to have a natural relationship. But from that moment I was like okay I think we need to split it just for a little bit not you know. So what we started doing was say the first band scene myself, associate director, DSM and actors for example would go just like reading it chatting about it a bit and having a go at a shape for an hour like not long for an hour or something like that even less sometimes towards the end 10 minutes. And then at the same time the musicians with Martin and George sound designer and the sound team who were in the room they would go over the music that we had planned and then an hour later we'd come back and put it together and see what we had and then tweak it and then try and work out the dynamics and very much to my relief when we did that after feeling so overwhelmed by that first time we put the band music together. Even just an hour later where you've had the actors are feeling a bit more in a stride of something and the musicians are feeling a bit more confident and there's been a few more conversations about where the peaks are in that scene and musically and well emotionally because it then does the same musically that it does for the text. Then suddenly it was really strange. It was exact same piece of music, exact same words being spoken, but suddenly I could I could hear it all and it felt exciting and clear. And for the first bit of the process, every time we touched a scene for the first time, we did that. And once we had our first shape, then the rest of the time it was just all of us in the room all together. Sort of, you know, even big detail, but also tiny details like, oh, if we take out four bars of that drum just while that that bit of the text comes out and and vice versa or that bit of the music, we didn't realize, but that says so much more. We we don't need to say it again with text. So, can we cut that because of what they're doing? It was Yeah, it was like that.

There's a lot of themes that are running through it. I suppose the ones that I connect with the most are, but what it means to be a young person who is holding lots of different life pressures and who hasn't yet found the language or the way in which to share some of that. So, I can absolutely, you know, see Keli dealing with what's going on at home with her mum, doesn't occur to her that anyone could support her with that, you know, just dealing with it and wanting to protect mom in that and protect them in that. So, kind of shutters come down and then working at at Scotmid or whatever and not really letting them know how amazing she is in the brass world and and all the opportunities she's getting in the brass world just, you know, dismissing it, keeping that as a separate thing and then in in and then being this extraordinary player but not letting this group of people who actually



are kind of a bit of a family and are there for her, not being able to to share that with them either, any of the stuff that she's going through. So we don't arrive, I don't think, at a neat resolution, but I hope that we arrive at a place where it suddenly starts to feel a bit more possible for her to breathe and for her to be herself, whatever that means, but be herself in all of the spaces that she occupies and be like, "Yeah, I work at Scotmid and I'm an amazing tenor horn player and I'm doing, you know, that she can be multifaceted." So that's a big one for me good of coming together and doing art, whether that art is, you know, theatre, whether it's music, whether it's what whatever, but that there is like genuine benefit to mental health and well-being and community in coming together and doing something. And that could be at the level that Keli's at, which is extraordinary, or or not at all. It can it can just be something for yourself or for fun. But that that is a really powerful thing.

The relationships between the people are like the most important thing really I think in terms of making the audience care you know other like the music is incredible but if we don't care or invest in those central relationships then there's only a limit to where we can go. The relationship Keli has with her mom is so vital to the story so vital for Keli's journey part of her the reason she ends up in the mine reason she's desperate to get out of the mine but then you also have really interesting relationships Keli and the band leader Brian, which is sort of partly it feels almost like a parental kind of feel to that but they're also dead honest with each other sometimes in a way that is like too far you know they fight with each other they bicker with each other and this is one of the sort of the most direct examples of this but after Keli plays at the Albert Hall and she gets one note wrong and I think that's that's also important it's not like she like she's incredible but for her it's just this one note that's slightly you know that's it but she's devastated And I think she says to Willie Knox in sort of retrospect that what she wanted was like a warm reassuring hug from Brian, you know, and just feeling probably in that as we all do it moments that, you know, you just feel like a kid and you want someone to tell you it's okay. Um, so sets that up and then turns around and fuck you, Brian. It's like funny a little bit but so sad to see as well. And if she was able to be more vulnerable in that moment and go, I'm so scared that I mess this up or whatever, then the whole the whole trajectory of the play would be different. But you can just feel what that what that does and the explosion that that causes. Yeah. So, she's she's a character that's really lovely. She's full of being absolutely honest, but also not knowing how to let anyone in.

I want audiences to have hung out with a really amazing young person and they don't have to like it all the time. They can be frustrated at her or whatever, but to to have really spent time with someone uh who actually has a lot to say, a lot to offer and have been also like basked in the most amazing, amazing music.

# KELI | BILLY AND PHIL

We meet William quite early doors, quite early on in the play at the bottom of a pit. So, he's a miner and he's been down the pit for a number of years and Keli drops in on him unexpectedly and that's when we first come across this gentleman known as Willie Knox.

And Brian is the band leader of the local band. And they're rehearsing for the big the nationals which take place at the Royal Albert Hall every year and that's like the biggest event in the brass banding calendar. So that's where you find him at the beginning. So rehearsing for that and his kinda stakes are pretty high cause he's you know trying to get them in good enough shape to take to the nationals and hopefully hopefully win the contest. But and that's where Keli's in that band. So, and that's kind of that's the first moment in the play that you'll see him realise that Keli's he knows that she's a virtuoso sort of tenor horn player anyway, but it's the first time he notices something else for that moment. So, he moves her up to become the soloist and the tenor player. So, that whole scene is about him trying to convince her cause she doesn't want to because of the pressure of that. And yeah, so the stakes get higher and higher and higher for for both of them in that scene.

During COVID this Keli project came on and I was I was introduced to Martin and to the rest of the team. I was actually concentrating on Brian the the band leader. So that was my kind of main character throughout and so we did this audio play and we did it and then we did some development work with NTS. Then we did some development work down at the National in London and then lo and behold it went to stage and I was auditioned. I've auditioned for the part of Brian initially thinking that's the character I've worked on all this time so I'm looking forward to that and then they said would you read Willie and I've seen Willie done during development so I've kind of had an idea of how I would have played it and so I did it and and they decided that I wasn't very good at Brian, but I was better at Willie and so they gave me Willie Knox. So, William, which was great. It's a character I I just I'd never thought of playing him before. Never, you know, never really crossed my mind, but then obviously I got to know him and I kind of fell in love with him.

He's an old gentleman from yester year, but he's quite politically right on, you know, he's a good socialist and he still has his his views and his opinion on on those that have and those that have not. So it's interesting and a good challenge. Now, I had to go and do my research about his age, right? He's 136. We're not going to play a decrepit old old man, you know, who's we're playing a man who's frozen in time. So he's frozen in time, but he's 136. He was down the pits when they had pit ponies and stuff like that. You know, the Davies safety lamp was just being introduced. I thought, okay. So I've done a bit of research on the history of mining and and about leaders like AJ Cook is leader of the miners union. I did a bit of research on him and his political beliefs. I thought, "Oh, okay. I got I like this guy." I also looked at older people, the way they walk, their gait, the kind of the shuffle, the way they turn the whole body rather than just the head. And so these things had to be incorporated and quite a lot of physicality. And because he's an older gentleman and been in the pit for so long, he's kind of stooped because he's kind of on the outside listening. You've got to listen. If you if you don't, you can't switch off. If you switch off, you disengage and you lose out on where you were or what's happening and you cheat the audience. So you've got to engage and hear everything for the first time and try and not make judgment in your head while you're doing it. You want to be a proper correspondent given both sides of the story here, you know, but falling on the right side. That's the way I go. I go about the history of the character, his life. Was he married? Did he have kids? You know, and I have a whole backstory and and I work on it with my wife and kids at home, you know, we have little chats about, oh, what do you think you do here and what you do there? So it's I kind of become the character for a little while which is a bit selfish of me because if you live at my house all of a sudden I'm Willie Knox and no longer dad or anything because I've got to try and get my character and got to try and get into the head.

I had done a bit of like research into the sort of, reminding myself of the miner strike stuff cause often with the miner stuff it was kind of focused in the North of England or Wales or that's that was the news footage was mostly from that period.

You didn't sort of get so much of the sort of you know the the Scottish angle in that and there's you know many you know closed minds as well you know a lot of these communities were devastated in Scotland as well.

Yeah so I did a bit of research on that brass banding world which I didn't really know much about again the association with that is Yorkshire. Scotland didn't make that automatic connection but there's loads of brass banding there it's a big thing in Scotland as well we visited Whitburn one of the bands that play and just having that being in that room with those guys you know and I don't know what their jobs are. They come from all over the place, but they're just absolutely, you know, committed to this brass band and to their instrument, and they're obsessive and passionate about it. So, that that was that was that was great. And being in that room, that gave me lots of insights. Actually, when I got the job, we went along to Whitburn to meet the you know the conductor, and the the guys. That was a really interesting sort of couple of hours for me cause I, you know, I'm playing the band leader, I'm having to learn to conduct and all of that. So to watch them and watch him particularly - Chris, I just kind of watched them intently used to see how because at that point I didn't know how to I didn't have a clue, you know, how to do that. I was making up my own actor version of conducting, you know.

It would've been interested actually to hear that band and I was conducting at the at the very beginning. But Chris just watching him he was amazing. He was he was very sharp, very - knows his stuff, you know, every beat, every you know, he would say some comment. He just just the the banter between him is brilliant. And then as soon as it kicked in, he just kicked into the zone, you know, it was like watching an actor, I suppose, and he was just into the zone and just, you know, every little thing and they were just watching him with this, you know, his every move. So I thought, yeah, that's the guy I'm going to I'm going to take a lot from that from from him, you know.

Andrew is a fantastic sort of tenor horn player who plays in the play. He's amazing. Amazing. So for a tenor horn player, he kind of taught me how to conduct as well, you know. So that was he just gave me a few wee - I was kind of getting there with some other help from a few others, but he just gave me a few specific pointers that kind of really opened it up for me, you know. I think at one point Hannah who plays the tuba said to me one night, you know, she said, "We we were following you." And I went, "Don't follow. Please don't follow me, you know. But that was just lovely, you know. I had no idea that I was, you know, maybe getting and, you know, probably little moments getting them right, you know, and they were following my lead, you know. So that was great. Generally, what I do is read the script over and over and over and over to get I like to have an overview of the whole the whole thing and especially for this because it's such a collaborative experience actually, you know, just with the music, just the whole thing coming together and it was is amazing cause I've never really worked in a situation where there's lots of musicians and actors together. Well, I'd never heard a brass band in a in a room, you know, when it really kicks off is, oh my god, that was I think we're all in tears, you know, within about 5 minutes. And it's a very tech heavy show. Obviously, there's a lot of music, a lot of, you know, sort of cues and a lot of things to be, very specific things you to sort of fall into. But we started that from day one really. So, we were mic-ed up from day one. The band were in the room from day one. The kind of musicians would play. So, it was a kind of work in progress actually. I mean the script was there in its form at the beginning but then each minute was a, stop discuss. I mean first of all we sat around the table and kind of broke down the scenes you know into into sort of units you would call them in an acting terms, and kind of name those units so you would sort of concentrate on those specific scenes, say okay what's happening here, what's the shift, what's the you know what the characters want what is the scene you know what's the objective of this scene for instance and then of course individually go away and do your own specifics within that scene and break it down even sort of to more to minutiae with the character. Yeah. So every day, every minute was a stopping and start and does this line work? Does this idea work? Can we try it this way? So it was kind of really and really collaborative, which is, you know, you not always

the case, you know. So it was kind of lovely to be able to sit and have a lot of input into to Brian for instance you know who's my character just to you know because we'd heard a lot of, Martin did these amazing interviews with miners actually during this talking about the time during the strike and guys that had been sort of sent to prison for you know basically protesting, and basically still having a criminal record and that following them, haunting them all their lives you know that they couldn't get a job they couldn't and then that's kind what happens to my character. So I listened to a few of those kind of verbatim tapes and and they were incredible, incredibly moving, you know, and so I kind of brought that I sort of said to him that those amazing interviews you did. Can we can we maybe get some of those or the essence of some of those in there if we can, you know? And he went yes, I'll go and it was in there, but we kind of just just, you know, fleshed out even more. And that kind of went for the whole thing. The whole thing grew as it, you know, we had a big enough play to begin with, but bits taken out and new bits were put in and new sort of focus in different areas. So, kind of everyone was in it, learning, changing as we were going through. So, it really genuinely was a work in progress. I mean, the music coming in that was changing. There was certain there's an underscore obviously that you're kind of generally in a play you don't always have underscore. So, there's no so, that's kind of interesting. So there was music's doing one thing and the the drama is doing the they're both doing kind of same thing but different things and hopefully they complement each other. That's the thing. And Bryony is amazing. Bryony just is very open and collaborative as well and really open to ideas you know everyone's opinion. I never felt I don't think anyone in that room felt that they couldn't just say look I don't think this is working or or can I try this?

You come in with all these preconceived ideas of who you are and what you are and then somebody puts the intonation on a different word and it creates a whole different sentence and a whole different meaning. So you got hold on a minute and that's what I love about rehearsals is all of a sudden something's fired in and it clicks off and so what I thought was Willie Knox actually wasn't and it became a bit more like this or it came a bit more like that. Be as familiar as I can be with the lines but I don't like to learn them because I want to experience why I'm saying it. I learn my lines during the action, you know, because then I've got a muscle memory and I've got a feeling and an emotion and they all come together. I'm not very cerebral. I'm not one of the most articulate or clever guys. But emotionally, I find I can I can get my characters. And if I get it emotionally, then 99 times out of 100, I'm correct in in my thoughts, I think. But I'm also willing to be challenged and I'm I'll try anything like the director go with what the director and the writer wants. If I can get as close as I can to that, if not then we'll try and manipulate and work away so that I can get what they want and ultimately what what I want.

My main relationship in the play is with Keli really. And Keli he's known Keli since she was 5 years old. So he came to the band room and and he from a very early age he saw a talent you know so he's kind of been nurturing I suppose that talent for many many years he has a connection with the the family history her granddad involved in the the miners strike, that was part of the dynamic that you know sort of negative thing that happened when he was you know a young man so there's a kind of history within for Brian and Keli's family which goes way back which he doesn't know about at the beginning of the play and I think he knows, but he's kind of shoved it to the back a little bit and he doesn't know much about the the situation at home.

So, he cause he's very focused. He's very sort of work obsessed, Brian. He's he's doesn't have a family, doesn't have, you know, partner, whatever. So, he's his world and his his life after the miner strike became and he couldn't get another job. So, he got a job driving a bus, you know, but he couldn't get back to work with the rest rest of his mates, which was kind of traumatic for him. But that stuff he keeps keeps hidden hidden down and sort of suppresses that. But his relationship with Keli, it's like the father daughter thing if you like. His emotional lifes probably kept well under wraps. She kind of pulls at him a lot in the play to try and get him to, you know, open up a little bit and certainly towards the end the very end of the play he kind of opens up. But that relationship is all about him. He sees her potential and he wants her to, he's living vicariously through her talents in



some ways. you know, he wants to see her, you know, thrive and grow, but doesn't quite understand the pressure that she's she has at home. And the whole play is about pressure and about how how one deals the pressure and it's a buildup of pressure. So, in a way, he's adding to that, you know, at the beginning of the play, he's adding pressure to her by saying, you're playing the solo. He thinks he's doing a lovely thing, but you know, she's like, I've got all this. I can't I can't. He's come on, you've got it. Come on, come on, you can do this. You're a strong girl. And so, he's putting pressure on her from a different angle. So that that builds and builds and builds and builds until we get to the, you know, nationals when she's a soloist and it all goes terribly wrong and then they have a big blowout, you know, where he's disappointed obviously that it's messed up and she's angry at him for putting her in that position in the first place. So they have this huge argument and both say things that they wish they hadn't. She disappears to London. He gets a call from her mother and she's in a bit of a distressed state. He goes and sorts all that out and then then he from that he discovers what she's really been living with and the and the sort of dysfunctional sort of life she has at home. So then he feels terrible and he feels he has to kind of make up for that. So that's how they kind of both arrive at a kind of more vulnerable emotional state and they're able to communicate in the end they're able to communicate in a much more meaningful kind of lovely way really.

With my journey with Keli. First of all when I see her I'm know what the hell is she who why is she here? What the hell are you doing here? What is the reason? And I've got to work because I've been stuck down here and I need to die. I need to die. Keli's come along now. The coal, I've trusted the coal all my days. Has the coal brought her here so I can end my life? And that's what I want to do because I've been I'm 136 and I've had enough. I don't know this girl and she's a bit foulmouthed and she's a bit abrupt and I don't really like her to begin with. But then I hear a story. She doesn't receive stolen goods like the the shop assistant crushes tins of alcohol and to share, you know, and to drink because they were damaged in transit or whatever. She refuses to she's never stolen anything. She's honest. She's conscientious. She works hard. She's got so many issues at home now. Slowly but surely, I'm getting shown this and told and anybody I can't keep a hard heart to that. When you see it, you've got to soften. You've got to soften. And then when I hear the way she plays, it all makes perfect sense. And then all of a sudden from coming from somebody who's listen, I'm on Brian's side, the band master side. You should be rehearsing, work, work, work. You should be working to earn a living. You should, you know, you should turn up on time. You should do all So I'm Brian and I'm authoritarian that when I see a story, I soften and then I start to become her champion. So when it comes to the Albert Hall, I reveal who I am because I want to encourage her because I want her to do the best. And of course, when it fails, I'm just as devastated as she is. But I realize being a bit older that success isn't measured in trophies. So we've got to move on. I then see a side of her when I see her performance side when she's in the club and she play and I think, "Yeah, I know that. I know that feeling." And I know it in real life what it's like to to to perform and have that kind of audience and just electric. And so I know I know what she feels there and that buzz that she's got out of it. And so now I'm not only a champion, I want her to go further. And I know, I know by hearing her that she's more talented than I. And so the only form of escape is to get that mine to collapse some more to hopefully get some daylight out there. And the only way we can do that is by Kelly playing that that horn. And so although it's going to be the end of my life, which I want, it's also her escape which we need. And so I think we make a full circle of she is everything I need to get by and hopefully I will let her go and flourish.

There's the obvious ones obviously, there's there's the kind of explosive argument they have in the middle which is just a release of pressure I guess but there's a moment when she doesn't turn up for the last rehearsal and he says where where have you been you know this is the last rehearsal so there's he's kind of disappointed in that but he also sees the kind of state she's in in that moment so there's a real little lovely moment in that scene where he he asks her if she's have she's had anything to eat and she looks a bit pale and and she's like well no I've had a crunchie I think she says and he gives her money to get something and she said, "Oh, my mom would have cooked any I mean, it's not necessarily in the script. There's a wee moment just that realization. Does Brian know that,



you know, mom doesn't cook anything for her, she doesn't eat properly or or or is he just giving her money to get some chips?" You know, it's a bit way I play it is he kind of is a little moment where I look at I kind of know what's happening at home, but go and get yourself some chips and and and practice that thing, you know. So, he's kind of saying it but not saying it, you know, to each other. They don't they don't have the language at that point to be open.

Fulfilling potential of being able to unlock some creative life that they maybe haven't as yet, you know, and that could be in any form. Yeah. Communication, talk to each other.

You know, when you put plays on like this about community, about struggle, and about how we can come together and overcome the odds, then that's that's a message, I think, and that's reason why it should be seen and why people should come and escape for a couple. It's quite a fast show. You can escape for a couple of hours and and it it will pull your heartstrings, but it also give you a bit of joy.

# KELI | LIBERTY, KAREN & OLIVIA

Through the play basically just everything that's already going on is amplified. So when we meet her, she's already a virtuoso tenor horn player. Already sort of looking after her mum. The relationship is really close, really like loving, but it's difficult. She's already working at the Scotmid and she's yeah, kind of grew up playing the horn, so she's had Brian in her life for a long time. Yeah. So she's already quite stretched thin, but she's sort of chugging along. She's doing okay.

I think similar to Keli, it's sort of meeting her just day to day, nothing particularly huge has happened recently. I think every time we we look at the scenes with with Jayne, we had to figure out quite quickly whether this was a good day or a bad day for her on varying scales. So the first time we meet Jayne in the play, just before they're going to go into the supermarket, up to that point, it's seeming it's seeming like an okay day for her mental health-wise, she's feeling quite in control and it's maybe been a while since anything's flared up or there's been some kind of incident which maybe makes it more difficult to watch when things very quickly spiral. So, always have that in my head starting the play of where where she is.

You meet Saskia on an average day for her. I think she's just like tramping through Victoria in London and she needs to pee. So she goes to a pub and they force her to buy a drink so she can use the toilet, but it's very much an average night for her on the town with her lovely people that she has in this Club Voyager and she picks up Keli on the way.

I love Pinterest and I will sit for hours making Pinterest boards. Like for Amy, I made this whole Pinterest board that was like so Love Island with like partying with like ice lattes everywhere as an image I can I look at and go that screams her and I will just sit for hours on my iPad and make the Pinterest boards for characters. And I spent a lot of time doing that before my audition. So like I really felt like I knew what I was going in with. And then after I got it, I was like, "Okay, it can really flesh this out and really take it time."

Are you a visual learner, would you say then?

I would say, I would say I just I feel like I like to do tangible things like physically doing something rather than like I don't know that to me does something, and music is huge for me. Like I will make playlists upon playlist upon playlists. Like I think Azealia Banks, I was in the 212 is like Amy's anthem and then like Saskia's was like all like Fleetwood Mac and like I was just like that's how I would just like see them. But like yeah so music and like visual pictures for me was something that I was like I if I can get those down I feel I can go in the room and be like this - and like star signs so stupid, But like if I'm like she's a Gemini and I know she's a Gemini like that's how like for me that's something that really works.

I'm very much into language and words and things like that. So one of the first things that I said even in the audition was I found it really interesting that a lot of Keli's dialogue is very like staccato and then the music is very sort of melodic, very sort of smooth and that was one of the first things. It's like it's about rhythms for me and things like that. So, I spend a lot of time with the script and I have like notebooks upon notebooks just writing and I do like little charts for myself of like the different relationships that Keli has to people and what their relationships to each other are. And also, I like doing this is very sort of drama school, whatever, but I like doing the what do I say about myself? What do other characters say about me? What do I say about other characters? Like that kind of stuff.

Quite often I quite like to read a script maybe once or twice and then actually just leave it for a little while to then come back to it with a bit of a fresh take but I think the very start of my works very

script-centric. I probably go through and pinpoint everything that I don't know what it is and go find out do my research and and tick those things off and then almost start section by section really. So I suppose the first thing was for me was exploring what what this fictional town of Anston could be like what bits of it do we know what do I need to go out and like placing myself in that world first of all and then I'd take a section of like the mining strikes and and trying to find out a little bit more about that and then trying to zoom into to Jayne's musical culture and try and find out a bit more about that and I think I'd do it section by section I've always got my notebook as well of just trying to gather these thoughts all together. I'll probably also have a very brief go at trying to just be in front of a mirror as that person just to see what's there. Not really making any decisions yet.

Amy and Saskia are from very different worlds. So, I guess just trying to really distinguish the difference between those worlds and the similarities I have as Olivia. They're so different, but I'm kind of like the in between of them too. So like kind of just like drawing on my own experiences and bringing theirs like kind of like splitting myself in half both ways which is really fun. And then accent work just like listening to all my English friends all the time and ask lots of questions. And I think that's like something that like drama school training was really helpful for having like access to like accent breakdowns and everything.

The three characters I play are they're very different and they've all got a lot of different things going on. With Jayne, there was a lot to look into in terms of the mental struggles that she has. Agoraphobic definitely. So like the fear of sort of going out of of wide open spaces and things like that. And a lot of my research was kind of online of different people's experiences from all over the world. I mean even the fact she's slightly goth influenced. So I was like, I need to do my research on this.

In terms of the lady of the manor, did go to a big country house with Martin Green, our writer. And we walked around the grounds and just discussed a lot of where that old money might have come from. And he's got a bank of interviews of people that he that he sent over as well that were really helpful. So I think I certainly drew on bits of that as well. Martin also sent me lots of lots of music to listen to.

In terms of like things that Bryony did, like kind of exercises and things in rehearsals, one of the things that I remember as being like really impactful on not just sort of like the moments with Keli and Jayne, but just the general performance cause I think Keli's whole drive the entire time is got to get my mum, got to get my mum, got to get my mum, was when me and Karen were sort of doing like relationship building and stuff and Bryony basically had brought in, lots of questions on little pieces of paper and we sort of stood opposite each other and you had to pick up a question from your pile, read it to yourself, think about what your answer would be and then look at the other person sort of as your character and be like this is like say the question and then say your answer and it was sort of to build up a backlog of memories. So, it's like the time that you made me feel most proud of you, the time that we had the biggest laugh and stuff like that. And it was actually it was very emotional. It was just like 10:00 in the morning, me and Karen just crying. But I think it was really it was a really useful way to very quickly have a very established relationship that you don't need to then go and sit and, and it also gets both of you on the same page really quickly. And then also we did another exercise at another point which was sort of how much do you agree with this statement. So it was like strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree. And so Bryony kind of read out statements and then kind of as a company it was like you would go to whatever part of the room and that was really useful cause some of it was stuff that probably wouldn't come up in the play. But it's just interesting to know that about your character. Like one of them is do I have a tattoo and stuff like that. And then that just made me think I was like do you know what? I think Keli probably does like a really terrible one she got when she was like 16 off her mate. Do you know what I mean? And then it was also interesting to see then how you your character relates to other people's characters and what the similarities are. Very quickly I was like wow me and Phil have very similar answers for almost everything. And it was just a very visual way to be like oh yeah Brian and Keli are very much one and the same and that's exactly why they can fight so intensely. We made like the the map of

the town or not even the town. We made a map of just the world of Keli. So we had place names written down and just hundreds of photos and pictures. So we'd be like, "Okay, so this is a town. So town center here. Gather any pictures you think would sit around here." And we, okay, so where's the mine? Okay, so where would the battle have happened all those years ago? Probably about here. So if you live there and Keli needs to get to, the colleges here and the shops here and then we have to place like the Albert Halls like way opposite not totally to scale of course but like just visualising where things are in the room. It's just really really helpful. So she had loads of great exercises.

Yeah. She was even like okay so what tube would you guys have gotten to the club? Like how would you have gotten like from the Albert Hall to like it was just like it was very helpful to like visually like map the play and like see where we're going.

And it's funny how much stuff like that again informs you kind of emotionally which you would think it's just a like pragmatic thing to put you in the world but seeing it laid out then when it gets to the scenes where Keli's talking about I had to go there and then I was there and then I was there it was like the the exhaustion became very real. I think it was quite important to Bryony that it wasn't an easy A to B journey. It was like Keli was really going all around the houses which yeah to see that visually was really helpful. I think by the time that I had kind of come into the process it had already been decided that it was going to be like a separation between actor and musician in terms of the the way it was going to be staged cause that was one of the first things when I got it, I think I'd said to Anna Dawson that casting, like I used to be in a band and I am quite musical, but I was like god I hope she hasn't got the impression that I can play a horn because I was like if I need to show up and whatever so my mate plays a French horn and I was texting I was like can you just show me how to hold it cause I'm like I don't know what they're going to want me to do, but then very quickly it was like no no no that's not what's being expected something I was really excited about was how that was going to be staged and I think yeah like straight off the bat it was like it's going to be a sort of magical realism and I think a lot of elements of the play are kind of larger than life. So I think if the play was very like kitchen sink naturalistic Chekhov like we're walking in, we're feeling something, we're walking off, then maybe it would be a lot more difficult to buy into the kind of language of the play. But I think because so much of it is larger than life and insane and she's down a mine in so many different locations, it's a lot easier to sort of, okay, this is what this is and then immediately just sort of go into that and it's not really something you think about after that - Yeah.

For Jayne, definitely Keli, I would say it's a very difficult relationship and they love and fight in equal ferocity. I suppose they totally drive each other. They are each other's world. The world is around Keli, so everyone kind of has their like spiderweb diagram towards her. Amy and Saskia have two completely different friendships with her. Um, like Amy's kind of like this like forced friendship because we went to school together and like it's like we're both stuck in the Scotmid, but like Amy does want to be your friend and Keli's like piss off the whole time, and that's such a funny dynamic to play. And then Saskia is just like this like magnet that's just like this aura of like come be my friend, I'll change your life and that's also so much fun to play. Kind of more of like an older sister vibe as well, which is like a guiding light, which is really fun. And it's so funny playing the two with you because it's like it's just so they're just such polar opposite girls and like your attitude towards them changes. It's just great. We just have we have so much fun.

Like in line with what Karen was saying, I think Keli has a lot of really important relationships, although possibly she's not fully aware of that until the end, but I would say Keli's relationship with her mom informs how she relates to every other character. Something that was quite difficult was figuring out how to go between memory world and mine world. How do I go from split second this to then being like, okay, I'm actually back in this situation, and not let what's just happened in a memory bleed too much into the mine, at least not at first. But I think Keli's relationship with Jayne was then immediately the key to unlocking that of like, right, I'm in the memory, I'm doing my thing, and then back in the mine, how do I get back into this state? It's like, well, I just need to think, oh my god, I

need to get to my mum. And then immediately that's like, right, I know what I'm doing. I know where I'm trying to go. But I think also Keli's relationship with Brian, I think he's kind of in many ways a father figure to her, which I think she doesn't want to recognise, but is definitely massive in the way that their relationship kind of shifts and change. Something I talked to Brian, the director, about a few times was like definitely Keli has the biggest blow up arguments with the people that she loves the most because you can like that's what happens. It's yeah, you say things to people that you love that you would never say to somebody you hate. And then also Saskia, I think, totally changes Keli's whole perception on her relationships to the people around her, which then has a knock on effect on how she is with Amy. And then the relationship with Willie Knox. What a pair. I love it. Like, it's so it's so wild. I just I think that sometimes I'm like I don't know if I'm ever going to have that kind of relationship in a play with anybody ever again cause it's like she doesn't know what he is. She doesn't know who he is. But here they are. And it was again very early days, me and Billy and Bryony had a conversation where it was like I think for it to work it has to be one of them of like this is the most insane thing that's ever happened to me. Okay. Do you know what I mean? It has to be that sort of right. We're just doing this now. It's me and you man and then the way that that then culminates at the end is just so beautiful. And I think they are actually quite similar. And despite only spending however long, I think, being trapped in a mine, they develop quite a love for each other.

The moment Keli says yes to coming to the club is like she's making a decision in that moment to go, "Fuck it." Yeah, let's do this. Like, let me see what this world and this girl that I don't know who is a stranger has to offer. That does not sound good. But I mean in a like a in a beautiful way. Um like I guess that is a I would say that is a key turning point. And then being when she's in the club, witnessing people in their element without any preconceived ideas of what they should be or what they have to be and just truly being the the version of themselves they want to be is something that I think is like a key changing point for the play.

For Jayne, it's kind of interesting because I think it's actually a moment that you don't see, it's when she um goes to meet Keli off the bus and there's a conversation in the flat before you when she's cut her hand and she's truly unraveled at this point and she's just really reaching a sort of low that she's maybe not been to for a long time or or new territory and really quite scary for for both of them. I think when Keli's asking will you come and meet me off the bus and she's saying you know I don't think I wasn't really planning on going out. I can't do it. I won't do it. At one point Jayne was saying, I don't know what I don't know what you're talking about. And then it became, I know, I know what you're talking about. But now the form that we have by the end is that she doesn't say anything. So at that point, she's definitely battling with how she steps up to this moment. And then I think the turning point for her is which you don't see, but Keli tells us that she goes to meet Keli off the bus. Unfortunately, Keli doesn't get off the bus, which sends her into a an even deeper unraveling of how she's managing in this world. But it's definitely a a turning point. I feel like all the characters, yeah, they they learn something new just from meeting Keli, don't they? I mean, it's Keli's journey, but they all change. And in order for them to do so, they need to have met Keli on her journey.

I think the moment Keli takes the horn from the band room and runs is a big moment. And again, it's a moment there's nothing said. It's just she's like stood and she's like, it's the fact I can't believe I just said that to him. Oh my god, I can't believe these people have just heard me say that to him. And I think, I think the scene just before it is the time where you first kind of I think it's for me it was really important that it comes across the all of this sort of almost bravado that's coming off of her and like the the the swearing and the like this and the the joking and all that. It's because she's like a wounded animal. And I think in that moment it's like like you see like she's a little girl and she's very scared and it's too much and she just explodes. And then the taking of the horn, I think up till that point, it's all about, you know, controlling that pressure and I'm going to get where I need to go and I might be late, but I'm going to be there and I'm going to keep lying to people and covering up and everything's simmering, simmering, and then it just explodes. And then it's that moment of do you know what? What have I got to lose? And then I think because she has that moment of like, what



have I got to lose? Then she gets to go in this journey of like meeting Saskia and having this kind of joy in like makes her more appreciative of the small step that her mum makes and like and allows her to sort of see what Brian's going through. Once she is out of this whole pressure cooker, it lets her kind of see the world that's around her. And I think yeah, a lot of that is just in that moment of I'm just taking this. I'm just going to go. I think Keli and Brian are very similar and I think both of them there are things about the other one that should be very apparent but they choose not to see because it doesn't fit the role that they have in their life. So it's like Brian is pinning a lot on Keli in terms of like he's very invested in the band. He's very invested in them winning and so the fact that she is this kind of virtuoso. So then it's like oh my god like I I need you to be the best. I need you to do this whatever, and then because in her life he's a sort of guiding figure and like leader and things like that, she doesn't want to see that he is also someone who's very lost. So both of them because they need something from the other person don't want to even though they make it very clear at multiple points to the other like this is what's going on with me in some ways it's like very easy to just go do you know what I mean? And then I think in that blow up, it's like everything that they've ever wanted to say to the other one just comes out because neither of them are very good at communicating what they think or what they want. And then the ending scene when they're talking to each other about why I think it's the beginning I don't think it's everything sorted but I think it's the beginning of them being able to just communicate which I think is the underlying reason why they did explode at each other because they neither of them know how to do that. It doesn't come naturally to either of them. So, I think for me the most wonderful part about the ending is less what they say to each other, but just the fact they're both making the concerted effort to have a conversation.

I hope people are just open and excited about hearing live brass. It's such an incredible unique sound and experience to have, even if it's not something you've maybe encountered or maybe something that you've not seen for a long time. Yeah, that's a big one for me.

I think so of the importance of connection and also I think it was important for me and if I've done my job well hopefully this will be taken away. If not that is on me. Um, but Keli is under so much and she's doing so much and she carries so much, but she is a 17-year-old girl and she's vulnerable and like, yeah, she's aggy at times and yeah, she has a foul mouth, but she's a wee girl. Do you know what I mean? And she is, I think, very soft on the inside and she just wants her mum. And I think sometimes young girls from Keli's background that have that much going on, it's like people look at them like a workhorse or like a cart horse and it's like just keep piling it on and they'll just keep pushing because you know that that's who they are and that's you know they're they're built that way and it's like no they are the same as every other young girl everywhere around the world.

And also just the importance of like love and like the love in different relationships to remember to choose love and choose that option is like I think really important especially with what is going on in the world all the time.

# KELI | ALISA

[Music]

My process as a designer really starts when I'm being sent the script. And in that case, I was sent a version of the script, not the current version we ended up with, but a couple versions before that. and I sort of read it over, have my initial thoughts, maybe already starting to I started to put a mood board together, just images and thoughts as I'm reading the script. Maybe I would outline the locations, make a note of them, just to see what what I'm up against with what what we're dealing with in terms of practicalities, and then I would uh I had a conversation with Bryony and Martin pretty much straight away, just to get their take it because obviously they have been with the project for far longer than I was at that point, especially Martin. So, getting their thoughts and how do they see Keli being realised.

The play is challenging in a way where we shift from location to location. So at that point already we started having conversation about what sort of theatrical language we're going to have there. Is it going to be quite realistic? Is it going to be a bit more abstract? You know, how are we going to facilitate all of the changes in the scenes? What's going to be important for the audience to see at first? And all of those questions. Once Bryony and Martin and I have a good understanding of the direction we're taking, I would then create, another model. So, try to think about everything, go scene by scene, and at that point, I will make a list of props, make a list of costumes, we'll start having conversation about costumes, I'll bring some references, just starting to piece everything together, into this big kind of package of information. And yeah, so working a lot with Martin and Bryony to a certain point. I believe we also had a a little concept meeting where we brought something to the table and Fi Fraser who is the production manager, she was like, well, yes, this this is possible. This is this is might be a bit tricky. How would you like to do this and we talked about materials we brought green book aspect quite early on. So I went and looked at different locations where National Theatre of Scotland stores previous sets and I've looked at the kind of the stock which is available for me to use different flats and scenic materials and fabrics. So that kind of really helped for me to think about sustainability from the ground up and design those elements into the set. We went to for example reset scenery. It stores a lot of different set pieces, uh, scenic fabrics, uh, props, just just a lot of things. And basically what they do is after each production has ended its run, they buy those set elements from theaters across or those set elements getting donated to reset and not only theatre, film as well. So we went there. So from there, I take this all information and yeah, just make a model and I make make the design. After that, you just kind of sit down and wait for feedback in terms of is this going to be achievable? Are we going to hit the green book? What are we going to get from all different places? So again, all the questions come back to you and as you walk through those questions, we get to the final meeting and that's where the design sort of yeah sits and then it's the whole rehearsal process and things change. I've never designed a show which is based around the legacy around the mining before. So I've never been to a mine. So at some point during the design process, Martin Green and I went to the Lady Victoria colliery in a Newton Grange which is disused mine and it's got a Victorian part and it's got a bit more modernised part and they've built a museum around that and it's a fantastic place and it's got a lot of Victorian architecture there which is stunning. A lot of old machinery and you can actually go down the mine. They take you in the little elevator. You go down the mine and you're just there in the very small space and you actually see what it what it feels like and what looks like, the coal and the stone as it been drilled and like the tactile quality of it. That was very important for me to see that and all of those all of those images and photos I took and kind of the feel of it has translated to Keli set quite directly. I would say some things have changed and adapted as we started rehearsing with them. Like for example, we had coal faces as we call them. Um so it's the flats, flats with the texture on them on wheels. And the initial design of them was that we would travel them in and out, but they would never kind of go the full in on stage and full out, but they would more like kind of a little waves in and out of the wings. But as we

started rehearsing, Bryony and I just decided that why why they always so static and we ended up using them quite a lot. They went in quite far, they went out. So we've we've really kind of exceeded what I've imagined they would do. So originally all those pieces had a very sharp edge to them. It's just because being a designer, you're kind of battling with I want so many elements and I want all of all of it to be nice and pretty, but the budget is only so big. So, you kind of need to cut corners somewhere. So, um they had a raw vertical edge. So, as they're traveling on on the stage now, we couldn't have that. So, we've added like a little pieces to them to kind of continue the rock formation and continue that little mountain. So that was addition that was a quite big addition because there's four elements on stage and one of the main elements we've used like a technical like a scenic element is this material called alo shape which is a canvas backed with a very thin metal which sort of results in as you scrunch it and you unscrunch it retains the shape and it really looks like a rock. So we covered we covered the entire set with it and then painted it and it's just I felt it looked stunning.

With Keli we've aimed at intermediate level of Greenbook. So Greenbook is this initiative in Britain where we aim at having sustainable sourced materials as new materials and we aim at reuse and recycle as many set elements as we can to reduce the waste produced by the theatre. It sort of trickles down to all different departments in a different way. Like for example in costume we try to get as many things as we can from vinted and eBay and high street and hopefully not to buy new, more kind of rethink something, find dead stock fabrics make things out of them and with set elements it means that as well trying to find materials that's been used before like for example we had red curtains they came from a different show and they were remade for us.

To add to this if we look at the set in Keli the columns which were called girders which are actually H beams they they are came from reset scenery there's five of them we've repainted we've adapted them we've used them so that wasn't a new build I think most of the wood came from old flats. NTS have a very big stock of old flats which they kind of reskin and you know clear out for to be used for different shows to to repurpose so yeah I think our goal goal was 75% to begin with of all the elements for from all the departments but I believe we actually very quickly exceeded that and I'm not 100% sure where it stands now but I, I think definitely over 80% I'm pretty sure of that and now thinking there is really one main element which was not reduced and that came into our like a 20 odd percent was the aloshape material. However, the material itself is very durable. It's got aluminum metal backing and it's easily repainted and it's easily stripped and stored. So, that material was bought with a thought that it's a very interesting scenic fabric. It's bound to be reused again. It will be reused again, let's buy this and let's add it to stock of the National Theatre of Scotland to have a future life because yeah, unfortunately that didn't have a previous life. However, to get to that point, we've also looked at all of the different ways we could achieve the similar finish without buying new and uh then after crunching percentages and you know just time and everything and also the overlook of the show, we've decided that it would be best to just go with that. But pretty much everything else is recycled. Like for example also bar we have a bar on wheels that as well and pretty scenic has reskinned it added different elements and made they made it bigger put it on wheels made it compartment. So yeah it's it's actually wonderful. It's a it's a great idea of not not really investing in anything new but investing in people.

[Music]

Designing a tourable set of that scale was a bit tricky. Specifically, the range of venues we went to on tour was quite large. So from Perth theatre which is quite small and raked to you know Dundee which is very wide and has quite a completely different seating. We've got audience starting on the ground and going up and you know at the Lyceum and at Perth we have a lip we have actually a stage. So it's a very different feel of the space, different sizes to Tramway where the main challenge of it is that we can't fly anything. There's no rig. Tramway is a big disused kind of a tramway barn and there isn't, it's it's not a theatre and we have to bring the theatre to the space. So every single venue had different set of challenges around it and also everything needs to fit in a truck, fit in a van in a lorry and my conversations with Fi Fraser the production manager helped for me to understand a lot of

practical issues a lot because you know she has a firsthand knowledge and maybe I've never packed a van, a truck myself but you know she has and I I have sort of a rough idea of what I could fit there but you know she could really tell me. Okay, that's a bit too much. And yeah, you have some space. We knew from the get-go that the set needs to be quite light, kind of portable. When we've landed on our design, which is basically we've got a backdrop, we've got some tourable flats, we've got flats on wheels, and we've got some hung pieces. So once we got that I felt quite safe to go into different size venues because Bryony and I had a chat and we realised that we can always kind of scale it bring it bring it in take it out a little bit you know at the end we have fixed kind of the height and the width of the stage roughly when we could set a certain width and a height we did that and we based it on a sort of Lyceum and the the dimensions of the Lyceum and then that travel to Dundee and that travel to McRobert.

From the very start, Bryony and I had a conversation about costumes being quite precise and quite characterful, which was easier in some cases. Like for example, we always knew what Keli would wear. But for example, with mum, we sort of had an idea of what she should be. And then when we started rehearsing, we had Mum's Fitting and we've realised that we can't quite fit the elements together because she needs to be a very specific character. She's uh she's somebody who's in her mid 30s. She's a mother. She's had a difficult life and well, she enjoys emo and goth music and she's sort of a very subculture heavy person. Um, so it was it was difficult to pinpoint the specific elements that would end up in her outfit. And at the end, after lots of trials and errors, we ended up with a 9-inch nail t-shirt and slim black trousers that fitted very well. And we've asked Karen Fishwick to also straighten her hair, which we felt was quite useful for her character as mum. So every costume we tried to fit in a lot of, references. So, for example, Willie Knox, he's not really alive. He's not really a ghost. He's he's not a zombie. He's just kind of a presence. And it was very important for his costume to be of that era. And uh also present him in a special way. So, he's kind of an old old socialist, very very well-dressed, sort of nothing too flashy, but modest and proud. It was wonderful to do fittings with actor Billy. He himself carries the role so well and it was great to try and fit in you know is this tie as a good fit and ended up with we ended up with a very lovely knitted tie for him which was very interesting choice. So yeah, so every costume we try to kind of make own unique world. And in terms of Keli, uh that was a big conversation with Martin from the get go because for Martin it was always very very important that Keli's costume would get dramatically worse and worse and worse and worse from the top of the show towards the end of the show. She doesn't quite sleep. She doesn't quite eat very well and she kind of runs around in this mad circle of life from the rehearsal, to work, to mum, to you know, she goes to London and it's all she just wears this uniform and it needs to get progressively worse and worse and there was a big conversation before we started rehearsing about how we approach this in a play such as Keli there is no really any any pauses for Keli to go offstage there's something needs to happen to her costume or something happens to her costume on stage so we kind of had to opt out to her always being in her end piece. So, her being quite disheveled, quite broken down already sort of at the end of the 10 day strike you know through mud and going down the mine and clubbing and getting some glitter and all of that and getting some blood on. That's that's where we meet Keli in the costume way and that was a conversation with uh Martin and Bryony just to kind of talk about okay what would be the best and at first we also thought that maybe we'll add some stages there will be stages of Keli's being you know she would have a new jacket and then we would dishevel it at two points but then in the end it's the massive sort of a speedy train of a of a track for a Liberty Black as Keli and we just felt that it would be better to simplify it a little bit, make it a bit easier for her because she really, really drives that show with her bare hands. Um, and talking about the different brass bands, so we had the pleasure of having two brass bands play live with us for the Keli Tour. It was the Kingdom Brass and it was the Whitburn Brass Band. And both of them have very different uh uniforms. And because each band goes on stage at the end of the show and there needs to be a sense of unity and there needs to be a sense of unity specifically between Keli and the band because this is when everything she's talking about is sort of realized around her and you know swirls up to this wonderful just wall of sound. So it was important for us to mirror her outfit and the outfits. So her jacket and the jacket of the four band

members to what the band will be with us on that night. So yeah, Whitburn have burgundy jackets and Kingdom have like a lovely lovely purple embellished jacket. So yeah, Keli had Keli and the musicians on stage had two different sets of costumes and that was really that was really fun to see that development. And then we have a little distinction. So we have a brass band on stage obviously in their just in their own jackets. And then we have musicians on stage that includes Louis the musical director and the rest of the live band. For them we had the base jacket of the each brass band. But then we also added little bits and pieces to them to kind of make them feel a bit more just a bit more cooler, add a bit more bite to them, them a bit fun and a bit rock but not too rock. So yeah, so they like all of them had like for example um giant lapels. Yeah, just different buttons and embellishment and all of that which was really fun to put on a mannequin and then you know see how it all comes together.

What we see on stage is sort of abstract realisation of mine. We've got a backdrop. We've got uh several hung pieces. It all sort of, I've tried to make a little bit of puzzle of it. So, it's not quite all together, but there's elements which are hung at different depths to give us like a sense of distance. We've got pieces of the coal, coal faces that are traveling in and out which are basically flats on wheels because then once Keli falls down the mine, she meets this old person who ends up being Willie Knox, 137 years old. Uh she tells she tells him, "Oh, I've been there. I've been there." And as she describes, we bring props and little trucks and little pieces of scenery to kind of bring those images to life. As part of the set, we also had we had several ladders. We had one grand kind of a bit of a piece of the staircase on wheels that traveled in and out of the stage. And that was our staircase and also a big window. Those two elements have brought to life the mansion, the deceased mansion, the Snaresbrook home. We also had an industrial ladder which was our sort of a placeholder for the tower, the place where Keli goes to practice and that was used in that way. Also, we bring it for the club because it was it's quite a versatile element to play with for cast and for Bryony just for a bit of a height and a bit of a fun with movement. We had also because the show has was underscored completely. The entire show is scored with live music. our musical director on set, Louie. He had a little platform which I've designed to be like a cool truck and that traveled in and out of the stage and that had all of his instruments and all of his pedals and wires and everything. That was a design solution to solve how are we going to fit Louis on stage with all his gear and you know make it look um cohesive with the rest of the design. So yeah, and then to to add to that, we go we have lots of little elements like for example, when there's a town gala, we bring flowers that we put on our coal faces flats. We've got a little bunting that goes up. Uh so yeah, just those like little little elements. So, it's really the flavor of each location that we've been trying to give the audience with props and additional pieces of scenery uh without going very much uh precise into okay, if we are at home, we need all of those things. But yeah, I think personally I was very excited to do Lyceum and to see the set in Lyceum because it was my first show at the venue and it's just for me personally it's a beautiful theater. It's a beautiful pros arch and the auditorium is excellent and I it's just it felt quite dear to see it there and I was very happy that we opened at the Lyceum.

[Music]





