



KIDNAPPED | RESOURCES TRANSCRIPTS

KIDNAPPED | RYAN AND MALCOLM

I play Davie Balfour who's a 19 year old orphan boy and we meet him at the top of the play and he is looking for his minister he thinks is his new guardian because the story picks up the same week where his dad dies and his mother's already passed away so we meet Davie someone who's just lost and vulnerable doesn't know what's going on he meets the minister fairly quickly finds out that he's also lost his house so he has nothing left in this town he is presented with a letter from his father and in the letter it says you've got an uncle and there's this family secret you need to go out there kid, figure out what this is all about and he's at a bit of a crossroads when he discovers that because the minister's like "go go go" so I don't have to look after you he's wondering whether she should stay in the town see how the end of his days and live like everybody else does in the in the village or go out there see what's out there for him find the purpose of his existence really. He's excited to see what's out there for him but it's very quickly shut down when he realises that outside the village isn't actually as safe as what he thought and people are strange and they are after him for some reason. In Act One it sort of goes through a lot of like this is what I need to do and it's totally ripped from him and then the only sense of security that he finds is in Alan, pretty much from his entrance.

So yeah I play Alan Breck Stewart and we meet Alan as he is trying to get back to France and because he is in support of the Stuart King who is in exile but Alan's purpose in life is to go between Scotland and France taking money to to support the crown to support who he believes is the rightful King of Scotland. It's six years after the Jacobite rebellion of '45, Scotland isn't a safe place for Alan. Trying to smuggle yourself between France and Scotland on ships isn't a safe place and he just constantly exists in that sort of world of tension and meets Davie at the point where he's been (spoiler alert!) kidnapped before he sees this person who is out of his depth in a completely different environment where he perhaps belongs I think that's the pull for Alan that's what changes and clouds that sort of super objective of 'this is what I exist to do and I am a soldier on a mission' all of a sudden there's there's something different and different feelings.

The rehearsal process for me was was quite stoppy/starty because there's so much to cram into the wings and backstage and people have to do.. I mean there's people in the show that are just.. everyone in the show is playing instruments, getting getting changed at the same time singing whilst they're getting rid of that instruments and all the rest of it... it's mental I didn't realise that I need to play showing how exhausted he is in this space and I don't get to go off and then come back on and show that like a different... you know there's days went by or whatever apart from one time I think, so have to physically show the difference between Davie at the start in the middle and and the end and I kind of lost sight of that during the rehearsal process because I was thinking about right what does this mean what's that going to do blah blah blah and then I had a conversation about thinking about just going back to basics where we came from and what is it where are you going and then it was the more got the lines down and I was I felt more comfortable I could start to show that physicality and I think playing the vulnerable sort of position at the start is kind of like hunched back and blah blah just keeping in mind that he is walking for days, you know he's not jumping in a taxi and getting to these places he's like walking for days and it was just a reminder for me it was Gareth that said that it was just like just remember like what is actually happening here and it sounds so obvious but when a rehearsal process is quite stoppy /starty you can't sort of connect all until you're running it you know what I mean it's like it's just it was just one of those like light bulb moments I was going 'oh yeah this guy is knackered' and then we see like a total shift at the very end of the play where we see Davie again and he's upright he's tall he's he's proud of his life that he's got and all the rest of it so physicality was was a big thing for me and making sure that that absolutely lands as well as like playing the emotion on the line and stuff they're getting and keeping the pace of the show alive because I think if Davie falls into this really slow like lethargic state it could slow the whole thing down pretty much I quickly realised that I don't go off the stage or very rarely so like during that process of being in the room a lot of work went into transitions and all the rest of it and I was sort of like I

was like 'I get to relax a little bit' but then quickly realized that as soon as all this stuff sort of merges together I feel like I'm running a marathon you know what I mean so which is great for Davie because it needs to look like he's exhausted and tired and me, Ryan is exhausted and tired by the end of the show.

As soon as we auditioned we'd read together in a in a recall and we literally had five minutes with a piece of script because I couldn't stay any longer I was rehearsing another show and so it was just kind of thrown together and feel like so much of what we did instinctively because we just had the words in front of us and all you can do is focus on the words and there's no time for any of that preparation is is still in now you know 10 weeks into this rehearsal and running in the process and (I think that's...) testament to actually just looking at the piece of writing you have in front of you and going okay (playing that that yeah) this is you know I'll find I'll find the beats and I'll find what to feel in what I what I'm saying and how it's received and it doesn't always have to be this sort of massive cogs turning in the background and then I was you know its so freeing, its a good lesson of seeing it, throwing yourself in there and just I've played it for about having figuring it out as it's happening as opposed to putting in so much.. and I thought I thought I would be going back to the book and looking at scenes that we were doing and going 'well how is it in the book' and how is Alan there and am I going to be like someone was in the film or any of these other portrayals yeah and it's actually just so nice to be free of that to look at this as an adaptation that is unashamedly different and new and unique you know in so many ways the things with the cuts as well I think it's just about getting rid of um the air in between stuff and things that are might be funny but not necessarily adding to the point of the overall story. Isobel's very good at just making it slick and pacey and get through it and doing the thoughts on the line and and so there was a lot of stuff that just that just didn't really need to be in it or or the stuff that's still in it but it's just shortened down and condensed and you're still getting the exact same story sort of thing.

Yeah it's the thing about jokes can be funny and move the story along and they serve their place in the piece but if something is just funny and makes the audience laugh but it doesn't move the story then you're you're pausing the story for a beat yeah and this is the sort of show that relies on that the energy and the the fast-paced nature of those beats coming thick and fast and one after the other so that when there is a big dramatic moment you can suddenly have pauses and gaps and that air is charged as a result of the sort of high octane thrill ride that you're trying to take an audience on and so it affords you time as actors to really celebrate intimate moments and not leave people going 'oh we know what's what's going to happen now and we're just waiting for the inevitable' yeah it can it can really feel like okay well this could go either way because there's an energy to it you know the excitement of Cluneys. Cluneys is a scene that you know as an example that changed dramatically from the first iteration to getting it on its feet what we thought it would be and then the the sort of set piece that it finally became and I think it takes it takes a lot of bravery as a creative team to make such substantial changes at that point in a process because it's intimidating as actors to to feel like you know parts of a parts of a show or parts of a track are changing so dramatically when you feel like you don't even have a handle on the rest of the show you know the stuff that's staying the same yet so to make the choice to do that but also to kind of Kill Your Darlings in a sense of going 'well we really like the idea of this better, we really like what this could be but actually it's not gonna... we're not gonna realize it in the way that we wanted to' and whether that's because of time constraints or whether that's because of people's quick changes that they need to do or whether the beats just aren't quite landing or the jokes just aren't quite funny enough or it's not quite having the effect so being able to go rather than constantly trying to tinker and make the thing work to just go okay step back what can we what can we do that's gonna have an effect and is going to get the same the same story beats across you know show the same the same um parts of the narrative that we need to give to the audience yeah but do that in a more economical way in terms of rehearsing a show as well as... because that Cluneys scene so much longer than what it is now but because of the pace of the show up until that point it still really lands doesn't it still like it's still what it was but it's just totally shortened like totally shortened. And people ask how faithful do we think it is or feel that we're

we're being to the source material and I think it's actually a less complex answer than it than it can seem on the face of it because the change should be expected an audience aren't coming in for a rehearsed reading of a novel and I don't think we would be packing the house in the way that we are if that was the case and I don't think the laughter would be there I don't think the heart would be there because a novel is a it's a it's a personal experience and 10 people can you know read the same novel and in that sample size you will have 10 different opinions on on what certain moments meant because we relate to things in different ways.

The key moment is for as first one would be making the decision to leave the town like that's that's the point of that's what kicks the thing off so I mean he can live this life or he could totally just for once in his life get his shoes on and get out there and it ends up being the right thing to do. The second point is I would say for Davie in the cabin where it's the first time we see him being honest about who he is and his feelings and being able to express that to someone um because he's just not the type of person that would do that and totally shy away from it and it just says there's something about you, no idea what it is, but there's something there that I trust and I think for that moment it's like for Davie's growth it's the point where he's given into how he's how he's feeling and he's just like you know what here it is and again it works they both realize that well for Davie he needs Alan there first of all to get him out of this situation and then also after that find in him something that he can latch on to in keep in his life because he wants him there because he's feeling something towards him um now I think for for Alan is Davie saves his life at one point and that's kind of like a big thing for being the military man that Alan is and that sort of thing... He saves his life at more than one point really... yeah. The silver button and the passing of of that in the moment in you know it's it's the flip of his cavalier attitude putting him in genuine mortal danger Hoseason is pointing his own gun at him, there is nowhere to go, he can't jump into the ocean this is like it's it's game over and sort of playing that first moment as an acceptance of I've I've gone I've gone too far this time and this is it and I'm gonna meet the end and to suddenly be lifted out of that to be saved by this person that he's just met who who went along with this this pact so you know it's that whole is a kind it's quite an extended beat but it's it's culminating in the button and that has to we had to give that such significance because it's such a driving force in the relationship and it's the symbol of that of that pact between Alan and Davie and living as a soldier in this kind of guerrilla warfare and kind of chooses to dine out on that for the rest of the time that he spends with Davie if it's like well I can I can treat you however I want because we made that pact and we've sworn to do this and so I'm gonna have us framed for the murder of someone we're going to be hanged and that's fine and you have but you have to come with me because we made that pact...

...we've got the silver buttons!...This is how it goes you've got the button I'll get you anything you need don't worry about it you know in those arguments and Alan pushing everything was to lead up to that moment of now we're going to break the pact and after Cluneys that being broken that's almost a fate worse than death. Davie is such an emotional person but he's very good at going away and coming back and being like, actually you know, like the clearing scene and then making the decision to help you when you be captured and stuff that goes he's like he's raging but he can he can go away and realise the bigger picture actually brings a different sort of like Davie is quite sensible and I mean he's totally naive and trusts the wrong people but I think he's got that sense where if I well if I trust this person that's really really liking me back and trusts me back then that is an absolute okay thing for me to to let go of for Davie to let go the emotions and and again help him out do you know what I mean so and then at that moment of button I'm sure Davie would have went 'ah just chucked the button to him, I'm away, I shouldn't have chucked the button to him damn it why did I chuck the button to him I really want that button back, you know, 'Alan where are you?' and then you know when it gets when Alan gives Davie the button back it's just like 'oh my gosh right okay I'm sorry again you know I'm an idiot and I shouldn't have done that I shouldn't have been speaking to these' so that that yeah that button alone plays a massive part in our journey and it's such a good visual representation of a reminder of actually what what it is that we've got a show can be intellectual but also something that people can take at face value and I think Isobel understands that and

that's what she strives for you could have people who absolutely love the story and loved different adaptations of the you know from the TV show or films that existed and they're getting they're getting little gags that are just for them and also you could not know anything about it and go in and absolutely love it because it's a riot this could be your first night at the theatre or your 100th night at the theatre, like, it should be for everyone.

KIDNAPPED | FATIMA AND KIM

I would say one of the main characters I play is Ebenezer Balfour who when you first meet him, he's this very fickle man he's very isolated from the rest of society- it turns out he's Davey's uncle. At the start of the play we see him very lonely, very greedy, penny pincher, he's raising the rents of the estate that he owns he's-
deeply unhappy-
deeply unhappy,
deeply unhappy man
and besides that yeah I play pirates, I play highlanders, I play people from the borders, here there and everywhere yeah.

And I play Francis Stevenson who was Robert Louis Stevenson's wife Francis serves as a kind of a narrator and an overseer of the piece, occasional very slight puppet master which links through to real Francis- she and Robert Louis Stevenson used to write at the same table and right at the same desk and they would literally lean over and make corrections to spelling, syntax but also say well that won't work because you haven't said who that person is and he would do the same for her writing because she was a well-published author as well so it's almost like she's a narrator and she links the different things together and her story mirrors the story of Alan Breck Stewart and Davey Balfour, they they kind of work in parallel, they're not the same but they work beautifully in tandem.

I always joke and I say I lean on things do moody walking and sing at people and that's - but I do sing to people, they can't hear me, they can't see me ut I kind of sing them through things sometimes and it's the same as you play them through things and you walk with them on their journey sometimes I'm in a scene but don't do anything which is like a little presence running through it's lovely, it's lovely the way they found a way to make that work in the melee of everything else.

So I play a pirate called two-legged Barry who's the complete opposite he's just this very happy sort of fella who you know just loves being where he is, he's he works for a Hoseason one of the one of the Pirates. And it's very difficult I think for people who are who play multiple roles you don't have time to build your story you have to come in with the story 100%, first foot on the stage because otherwise it's unclear if you're only on for a short space of time with that character, you don't have the luxury of a through thread.

I have the luxury of the same person all the way through but it's as it's quite disjointed I have to make sure that each appearance of Francis has its own arc so it has its own journey and then you also have multiples of those for the whole thing so I have to make sure that each arc has its own journey but the whole thing also has a through thread and its own journey and she's fascinating.

And I've never worked like this before- I don't think any of us well apart from people who had done Pride and Prejudice Sort of which is another sort of collaborative piece, I never had a rehearsal where everything had to go the same sometimes the dancers will go off and do one thing the musicians will go off and do another thing and the actors who don't sing will be in another room and and but this was all of us rehearsing all of it all the time and it was it was fascinating though. I mean all of us did the fight call we had we had a big fight day didn't we where everybody was learning to handle pistols and swords and throw themselves on the floor and of course Francis just stands there in a corset leaning on things and and doesn't fight at all or get involved with any of that but we all did-

but yeah but that's kind of again as an ensemble piece that yeah it feels like and it's really important we're all in it together yeah doing all that early on I think has made us as a cast stronger and I think

once that foundation's built then that's also- you can see it in the work that we can lean on each other and help each other, trust each other when- that relaxed trust when you know, that you know you're going to be in the right place and you trust implicitly that someone else is going to be there I mean almost literally to catch you when you fall, almost literally sometimes but you know you we all keep an eye out all the time and sometimes you can see something that's about to happen or that has happened that's not quite where it should be so everybody just moves around and just does the thing and we've got everyone's got each other's backs it's great.

Yeah but yeah it's a very- due to being a very technical show and due to us having to be so integrated in all the technical work I think all the technical stuff was happening at the same time as all the kind of thought processes of all the characters, which you know you do one first and then the other but it felt both happening at the same time which you know you had to really be engaged and switched on for that but yeah-

I think it helped in the end though because it became when something's linked from the start it's much much easier to keep it in you in your bones rather than thinking I know the song but I have no idea where I'm supposed to be or which thing I'm supposed to be holding but if you've always done it from the beginning and you've always been over there or you've always moved that staircase on those lines then you know that that's it makes it, yeah easier is the wrong word- less stressful more confident, yeah more confident in doing it because you've-

In an ensemble piece whether you play one or 24 characters- seems like 24 ,you're always changing in the wings- it's an ensemble piece this we're we're all telling the story of Davey and Alan so it's like a jigsaw where all the different pieces of the jigsaw and we make the picture of Davey and Alan and so we're all aware as an ensemble that your energy has to go towards that storytelling. Everyone has a moment of focus, that they're the focus of the piece- Ebenezer is has that fantastic scene in the House of Shaws at the beginning which always makes me laugh- everybody has that moment but the focus of the story is Davey and Alan and I think that collaborative energy in an ensemble piece is what drives that.

We as the ensemble kind of build the world ourselves we do all the set changes, we do all the musical like little instrumental pieces off the sides, yeah all of that kind of needed to be integrated so early on and it had to be so sharp and so precise even to the way that like it all feels very musical all the dialogue feels very musical to kind of make it all fit, and feel feels very rhythmic I think as a piece.

Sometimes it's so 'chaotic' in inverted commas on stage I would like everybody to know how rehearsed all the chaos is organised the chaos is and it has to be played straight, you have to play the chaos for its absolute truth at the minute you start buying into- it the stakes- that's exactly always there for each character -exactly- no matter how ridiculous it feels on stage-

Yeah because if you play the lunacy it would be carnage you have to absolutely play the truth of the lunacy yeah and then it's then it's funny and clever.

TV is easy because you have an editor who cuts a camera angle and tells you where to look but on stage the actors, especially in an ensemble piece have to be the they have to be the editor so if you're on stage not concentrating then nobody's going to know where to look but if everybody looks at one person and directs their energy selflessly to them then everyone knows what's going on it makes it clearer for the audience. You see Alan and Davey meeting- the first time I see him swing on and drop, I've introduced him he swings on very valiantly on a rope, it's very glamorous and exciting moment and Francis knows it's going to happen and I know it's going to happen. Francis and I both have to see it for the first time and not go 'oh there's the bit where he swings on' because if I just give it that energy it's not going to help, it's his moment so I have to give it as he swings on that 100% concentration and you can as you say you can be on the scene and not say anything. Listening and

stillness are the two things that are most underrated when you're learning to be an actor everything for the first time when you step onto the stage it's the first time, even though you know what's going to happen you have to know to the nth millimetre because otherwise you might get hit by a bit of scenery or you might step on something or you might trip over a thing or get in someone's way or forget what you're doing. You have to focus obviously and concentrate and not vague often think 'what shall I have for tea tomorrow' you have to listen and if you listen to people as if this is the first time it's ever happened you really can't go wrong if you can remove yourself from a scene and the scene can -as an actor- as in if you could go off stage and the scene would go on perfectly well without you then your job is to do that focus thing that I was saying and point everybody's attention to the thing that's happening- what's going on on the stage- and that's your job otherwise you'd be in the wings so you're there for a reason but your reason is to focus on somebody else and just listen and observe actively.

Switching characters has been it's been you know I've I've had multi-role shows before but never at this pace you know, I've had moments where I've gone from one character to another in mere seconds but the way that it's all been done you know we all come on in this base costume and it's very 80s it kind of reflects the music of the time and it's kind of building, building the costume around it very small things like put on a hat you put on- you know for Ebenezer I just whack on a dressing gown and some slippers and I think the costume is really helpful for me because you know the weight of the, for example the weight of that dressing gown can help with my posture. Finding the voice in mere seconds is something I've really found interesting I think that's just something that you have to really be on the ball for you just have to you know just go right here I am- I'm here fly yourself on the stage and -yeah absolutely- but I think what Izzy has done really well is kind of given this story of hope and you know at the end I think Ebenezer does reflect on what he's done and reflects on how he's taken this heartbreak and has turned it into greed and is very possessive of items as a way of as a way of replacing love almost, and at the end he does get that redemption in the end, which I think it's probably the main difference from the original sources, I think that's something that also reflects the Davey and Alan story. I think that lovely message of hope and you know working on not only the really, that relationship between each other but also themselves you see you see Davey going from this naive young boy, I wouldn't even say naive, just inexperienced young boy to who he becomes at the end and he's very strong, and he's, and he's, he feels- he's himself really and he's discovered himself and that's it's the way it's done it's so beautiful, every time every time I see it at the end I'm just like I can cry just so beautiful,

Yeah I love that Francis says you will you will come into your kingdom and she doesn't only mean his physical kingdom of the House of Shaws and his lands but also into yourself we all come into ourselves at different times in our lives some people are born ready-made and they're ready to go and I took a long time to grow into me to to this and to feel comfortable in my own skin and happy with what and who I am, and I think Davey starts off having no clue he's been very insular and Alan Breck Stewart is the complete opposite, he's traveled the world, he lives in France, he fights with swords. Davey hasn't hasn't a clue about anything outside of his own town and it's a tiny town but as they go through that, as you say they he grows but also their power there's a little bit of a power swap. In, at the beginning Alan is the driving force in their relationship in its entirety and of the word but there's a, there's a moment where they just start to swap where Davy starts to take the driving seat he grabs the reins slightly and then they've got the reins together but then Davey takes over and in the end he is the man that is, he's the man not the boy.

Her first moment of vulnerability I think is when she talks about not being able to protect her children when she took them to places they shouldn't see and she says so I learned how to shoot a gun- which she did, that's her first chink of vulnerability, that the only time she really shows her vulnerability is at the end when she talks about when Louis died and the only time she truly relaxes physically, which is the thing that I was able to do as a physical actor I decided that the only time she truly lets her energy drop is at the end.

I think for Ebenezer in particular one of the key moments for him is not just meeting Davey but it's the emotional impact that Davey's arrived because both his parents have died which I think is a big shift in Ebenezer because not only has he found out about his older brother but also his partner and the reason that Ebenezer is so bitter is because his brother Alexander were both in love with the same woman and she was in love with Alexander and Ebenezer was so heartbroken by this and lost all trust and Alexander felt so bad that he gave him all of, you know that he gave in the House of Shaws, he gave him this massive estate, he gave him all the money just so he can run off and be in love and I think Ebenezer took that bitterness and or took that you know, took all these physical things and that replaced his love and I think for him hearing not only that his brothers passed away but the love of his life has passed away I think for him it's probably the only time he has actually almost lets his guard down and then just switches it back up and he's like nope I need to that's when the tactics are in that's when I need to get this boy away- as far as Ebenezer knows that's the one thing that's that's going to take away the what he's built this whole time and the one thing that he's kind of grown any form of attachment to so I think for him that's kind of his main switch and from then on it's tactic based, tactic based he realises kind of he's trying to figure out what to do on his feet he's a very on his feet thinker and then when he realises I can get this boy away to at least get him kidnapped and possibly murdered and of course at the very end when he does get caught and Davey gets all the all the inheritance and I think when he has that moment at the end when that love can be placed where the love was meant to be and it isn't meant to be possessions I think that's a moment for him as well of not only guilt but a way of being able to open up a little bit more.

So used to seeing a queer story that whether it's on film or TV or just most media's queer stories always have a tragic ending and it's just so refreshing to see a happy queer story.

Yes and just a normal one, it's just normal and it's yeah and it's a number of people have said to me 'oh is it's that's been sort of is that been put on to it because it's not in the book' and I always want to say when you read the book which you can do quite easily go back and see it with that eye because queer stories weren't written for the wider public then, it was very minimal on the on straight romance and descriptively and there's no way that it would have been allowed to be published had it been spoken, it wasn't done in the time but if you read it with that eye it's there. I honestly believe that it's not shoehorned, it's not applied, it's not separate and pasted on it is there. Davey constantly talks about how much he admires Alan Breck Stewart, he's never seen a man like him and even though his skin, the original Alan Breck Stewart apparently had bad skin, he says even though his skin was bad he was a such a viscerally attractive man I'd never felt this way about another man before and it's all there, it's just they weren't allowed to say and I really fancied him.

Yeah it's handled, so everything in this the fighting, the violence, the romance, the loss, the grief it's handled with such a delicate touch such a thoughtful touch that nothing seems shocking I don't think nothing is shocking and nor should it be, nor should it be and I think it's as you say it's really lovely to have a tender, positive and hopeful queer story. It's- it's- it's joyous.

KIDNAPPED | ANNA

There was a lot more creatives to begin the process with rather than - Its normally just me and a director for the first like sort of 4 or 5 months before then you know a lighting designer, a sound designer gets involved.

It was kind of all in at the beginning and I think with this one, one thing that was really massive was the locations you know we kind of go all round Scotland, we end up in a sea, you know we do the full circuit and come back and of course immediately you go - How do I represent those things was my first thought whilst reading the script and that becomes sort of like using the problems as the starting point for the design I think is quite often the way that I think about it so and the initial conversations it was, we knew right it has to be really light on its feet we have to let the actors bring us to these places because we are never going to be able to change the scenes this many times, we are never going to be able to get those locations so we need to make it quite adaptable, yeah light on its feet so it can take us places, the storytelling can take us to those places rather than me sort of visually trying to do that.

If its an adaptation or if its from a classic, I like to understand the point at the time of when it was written, so the history of that. Why we are doing it now is also an important kind of understanding in the design language.

With Isobel's writing you know its an old classic but the way she has written it isn't an old classic so I knew I had to draw a reference to a kind of very classical Scottish- I sort of describe it as a shortbread tin image of Scotland you know this sort of idyllic landscape but also like how else do I hold Isobel humour and the songs and so it almost had to go somewhere a bit more Kitsch, it was finding a fine line between this very traditional Scotland with this kind of Kitsch language so we could take people with the writing to all these new places, nothing would be too much of a surprise if we kind of crossed the languages over but then also we can drop into serious if we need to. And then still allow the comedy aspect to kind of continue as well so like a sheep on wheels goes past and the pirates are all 80s dressed but then when there's this really kind of solid love scene as well like we can still hit that because we've kind of done the languages the right way. Poor theatre language as well and in that sense, it sounds like its giving something a bad name but actually 'poor theatre' is using one object and using it as creatively and as much as possible so it doesnt just become the one chair in that scene it becomes a table in the next scene or it becomes the edge of a boat in another scene or its about reusing, utilising and I think that using that skill and that technique then allows the storytelling to kind of breathe a bit more because we get used to a language thats been set up and I think with Isobels story, you change so quickly between places that you don't want to keep getting too surprised by aesthetic choices or things that you know take you out of that place, you've got to really stay with the story.

So the likes of you know the blue ladders that keep appearing in the piece you know getting them into the rehearsal space Day 1 and seeing how many times we can reuse them, what needs to be adapted to it so we can keep reusing them you know in in the beautiful love scene there's a blossom tree that's that's on them, and but they're also used as like the ship sort of lookout point as well yeah there's lots of different languages that cross over.

You know we went through the piece and we were like okay so poor theatre here, poor theatre here, magic theatre here and I mean I don't think that's a term but we can't we kept doing it because we knew that although we we wanted this sort of utilised language there was also points where like we just had to have magic that broke all the boundaries and I think again that's that kind of idea of like a traditional Scotland with quite a kitsch Scotland you know we just it's it's something about the contrasts when they hit each other that's when I think like something really exciting happens.

I think that knowing that it had to tour we had to stay within the green handbook so we had to keep things within a small kind of footprint I think the oval floor can tour really well I think if you have a straight floor or lines then that starts feeling like it doesn't quite belong in some of the bigger spaces because it feels more kind of cut out you start um kind of replicating the the front of the stage whereas when we kind of started looking at this oval floor it could sit almost anywhere in the stage and like as close to the stage or the audience possible or really far back and it didn't feel awkward so it helped us out quite a lot in a lot of the spaces but then it also it didn't feel too wrong when the actor stood on the black stage floor around it so although we had like most of the and you know well all of the important kind of acting happening on this wooden floor a lot of the music was played on the black stage floor and it still held its own it still held a language, whereas I think when you're touring and you have a very kind of structured set it can quite often feel quite heavy in spaces or it can overpower it or feel lost or yeah it was about trying to find something that could hold the space but give as much space as possible as well. So having this kind of goal posts as well with the with the backdrops that would just hold like all the audiences eye as well in perspective it was just so open for sight lines as well I think that was also a really important thing you're cut you're going to all these different venues where you've got quite a lot of side seating you've got audience quite up high so it's constantly thinking about like if if somebody's below what are they seeing and somebody's above what are they seeing down and that kind of the goal posts were just at the right space where you know it kind of just held the space and didn't obscure anything, but I'm quite interested in that as well like how you design for a space I think like I enjoy that, I enjoy looking at like quite site-specific things so figuring out how best the space speaks with something in it.

We had this beautiful floor we took the wooden floor from the idea of the Grand Old Opry which is kind of country feeling so we kind of took this wooden stained floor for that language and we are faced with a red old, really old style kind of Cabaret curtain when it opens and we've got the words kidnapped at the bottom. The design was about like unapologetically saying you're here to hear a story and I'm the narrator and I'm going to bring you through, so the the backdrops almost started becoming like pages of a book so the first one being kidnapped was her like her front page and then this giant rock comes on. At the beginning it just looks like kind of three-dimensional rock and then there's a point where it turns round and we have a whole band in there. MJ just went you know well we need a drummer but we don't want to put them in one place all the time what if he's inside the rock and we always just like it was just an amazing moment you know and that's that's the thing with with the collaboration like you know you you'd never really get to these places individually because you're too busy going well what does a giant rock look like on a stage and then somebody's going oh we should have a band in it and then just immediately it starts taking a a collaborative form, fantastic.

We then move into the borders and we have a big landscape of Scotland and that landscape that's the backdrop we use mostly throughout the production so they're like they're the main things this floor we've got I think there was about five or six backdrops in the end and then this big rock everything else kind of comes on and off, smaller props you know we've got everything, like the ladders do stay there for quite a while they become different points and they give us a lot of height to play with which is really helpful.

You know in the love scene they had to climb up a tree and you know when you're reading that and going well what is this tree how do we get it on the stage and how did they climb up it you know so immediately you have to start being really creative and the the ship was a tricky one um we knew we had the ladders and we needed ship paraphernalia so we got that in the room but we also at the point of designing didn't really know who was going to be playing music then so we didn't know how many hands we would have free to make things or to bring things in and out so that one was very much built in the room.

We had a really good production manager he was really good at sourcing like basically we made a

list of everything that would be helpful in the room before we start rehearsals so we could do this utilising language for a theatre, reuse, reuse yeah he got a connection from I think it was somebody in Outlander that had just done this massive photo shoot with a ship and and they said do we want all the stuff from it so we're like yes it's exactly what we want so at one point we had this massive ship but then of course we couldn't get that on and off the stage and it was bigger than our stage floor anyway so we ended up just taking all the masts off it and all the fabric of it so we got things in the room so that they could build it once they knew what hands they had who was going to be playing music and how we land going into that world.

With the likes of the house it definitely felt like we had to- that was a real change in like we weren't so much in a landscape anymore we had to really land this sort of grandeur but it was grandeur but also not looked after and it was falling apart you know quite often do that thing like what is the least amount of things you can bring in to make it feel like you're in that place, so at first it was like is it doors or is it and then we kind of went to this window idea and at one point it was these three massive windows quite far back and so we would have like the depth of the stage to make it feel grand but they would be battered or old and then that kind of ended up turning into one window and a chair and then amazingly you know lighting can do so much more to that tone as well, so they make it very cold and empty feeling and likes with Cluny's as well like we're like what's the you know the one or two things that we can say right we're underground in a casino. So getting the big Cluny's writing and kind of Lights that had to be like quite an early decision as well for the make process.

The Green Handbook is trying to think responsibly about our footprint in in theatre and about wastage and usage. So there's three stages in the green handbook there's like the sort of the base that everybody wants to be hitting within the next few years and then there's the kind of middle one so we were doing the middle one and so I think we're using it as a bit of a trial to see if it's if it was feasible. I've done a couple of projects with the green handbook in mind as well so it didn't feel like I was coming to completely from from scratch, I think what was really helpful is that when we started the process there was a big discussion with me and the directors about like whether we could hit this and whether that like we're collectively wanting to do that together and I think that felt really helpful in order, like for us all to know where we stood with it and that it was something that we all wanted to do together rather than something just the designer has to kind of troubleshoot and they were really the the directors were really helpful and supportive and if there were things that we couldn't quite manage because of it they were really understanding. So I always quite often try to make the trouble things the start of the design anyway so we already knew it was a huge cast going to all these different locations that had to be really light on its feet so I knew it wasn't going to be a massive build anyway there was one point I got very stuck on this ship because it was free and it was a reuse and I was like this is amazing until you know the head of production here Gemma was like you know you don't have to use the ship just because it's free and that actually freed me up a little bit because it so, yeah you can get a little bit into these things again that's why you're working with so many different people, you're all doing it collectively.

I think the big thing for us was about getting getting as much in the room as possible we knew the way that the directors wanted to work and we knew that that wasn't going to be quick in terms of sourcing if we're having to keep the green handbook so we filled the room with you know we went to all the different theatre stores in Scotland and borrowed lots of things, at first they were stand-ins so then if they got used then we could either buy them off them or we could replicate them, if we needed to and that was really successful actually and then there was a lot of things that we've kept that we kept from there or bought off the theatres that we borrowed them or there's a really good relationship in Scotland now that's happening and you know there's a lot of swapping going on anyway. I think the real the real problems for me that I found difficult were like greenery I mean on stage anyway it's quite difficult to do outdoors kind of grass or trees or foliage and I think they're always quite difficult thing to get depending on the tone of the piece and then some of the scenes they could be really plasticky and silly and kitsch and they were fine but there were some points where like the

love scene where that had to be really sensitive and that had to be quite beautiful and like we said they you know they camp under this tree and then they climb up this tree and this tree was just like it was such an annoyance for such a long time because I just couldn't figure out what this was or you know is it something that we make, we can't buy anything and then our production manager Gavin just brought loads of twigs in from home like he cut he'd cut down a tree in his back garden and just brought all those in and then I started like taping them together and then we started putting them on the ladders because they were like what can they use the ladders to climb up and pretend they're in the tree you know we've got that language now and then there was all this old foliage lying around that we've taken from like every place in Scotland um because we we couldn't buy new plastic flowers. They had this little yellow flower all over them so I pulled off all these yellow flowers and put them on all these twigs- this took me about a whole day but that's how we made the blossom tree so it's yeah it's a mix of it's real big branches and then these old kind of yellow flowers are stuck onto these branches and then the foliage in that scene as well, it's all dried foliage it couldn't be plastic, we couldn't buy new things but then they're much more delicate for touring so then we've got to keep an eye out and how they're handled and if they're gonna last the tour so I think foliage was the hardest impact and it's a play based in Scotland so you're gonna have foliage and then obviously the end scene where you know the last curtain goes down and in my head it was like a sea of Heather that we'd see at the back but then of course in most of the um venues you're lucky if you've got half a metre behind that point anyways it was like two rows of heather and this was all the foliage that we'd collected for months and we'd handed it to scenic painter with some references going is there any way you can make this look like heather you know it was bits of Christmas tree it was like so many random bits of plastic, really old things as well and she did an amazing job of like making this look like heather as well so yes there's in a way it's quite exciting because there's a lot more people you need to- like labour time that you need for hitting the green handbook like there's a lot more scenic help you need there's a lot more carpenters a lot of the sign posts we reused but we had to change them slightly so they'd point different ways or say different things. Money is going more to people and less on things like that we don't need or are wastage so in a way it's kind of the ideal but it just does take just that little bit longer and a little bit more of a creative head.

I think it takes people by surprise that there's over 70 costumes in the piece because they yeah I just don't think you're expecting it because it's so smooth and they and they deal with it so easily. Do you know the cast were wonderful we do this thing where it's called, writing their tracks so you take one character and then you see who they are at that point then if they they go off stage and you then you have to know why they're going off stage, is it to play an instrument or is it to change a scene or do I have time to get them into a new costume so you do that all the way through the play which I think took me in the costume supervisor a good like two days to figure out because it's so intense and then from that I kind of I drew up each of the actors tracks so they were aware like what their costume routes would be, from character to character and again sort of trying to stick to the green card as well a lot of this is like dependent on what we can get our hands on so we didn't want to just go out and buy lots of things from the high street we it's about reusing, using other theatre stores so the tracks that I'm drawing up is kind of like a wish list and it's also as simple as I can do it so I don't design too heavily and then we can't find anything that fits into what it is I really want to do and so then on their first costume fitting I would go through their tracks with them in one to one rather than kind of doing it in the room and they were really good at bearing that in mind so when they were in a piece and then went off and everything was on the rehearsal wall as well so they could go over and refer to things and you know there was a few things they'd then come back to me and then go Anna I get pulled across the floor at that point, so my jacket with all the feathers all over it isn't going to last and so like right okay so then I'd discuss with EJ with movement or like with the costume supervisor and and discuss like right how can we change this or troubleshoot it together and so yeah I think they were really I was really impressed at how well they managed to keep referring back to the costume and keeping that in mind for going throughout the piece I mean still with that in mind you know we did we first dress runs, tech and even the first few previews you know you'd

go backstage and at the interval theres two quick dressers at either side of the stage and you know they're just in front of this pile of clothes there's like up to their arms they just everyone just comes off and just throws everything so then they've got to get out and but by the end of the run you know it was so simple they could do it things would be back on the hangers and you know we tried so hard to like, can she just wear a hat and a scarf and if she could then or he could then we would go with that language but there was just quite a few of them that just needed that little bit extra as well.

KIDNAPPED | ISOBEL AND MICHAEL-JOHN

I think the idea came from speaking to folk at the National Theatre Scotland who were interested in an adaptation of something which is kind of theatre work that we've done together before and as it was a commission for the National Theatre Scotland, I was interested in Scotland and Scottishness and Scottishnesses, plurality of Scottish identity I've always loved Robert Louis Stevenson and I think Kidnapped is his book about Scottishness and I wasn't aware of any theatrical adaptations of it and then starting to read it I found it really very charming indeed but in particular I was drawn to an introduction in one of the editions of the book that I came across which was by Mrs Robert Louis Stevenson who's someone I hadn't even heard of and this set me off on a course of research so intrigued was I by who this woman might be I couldn't have even told you if Robert Louis Stevenson had a wife and he turned out not only that he did have one but she was one of the most extraordinary people you could ever come across so that was where the sort of kernel of the idea came from.

And I guess the story that takes place in Kidnapped is set you know in the immediate aftermath of a very divided moment in Scotland and I guess I suppose the last 10 years maybe post referendum we have been dealing with this sense of a country where one half of the country feels differently to the other half of the country about something so not to overplay the similarities but I think the sort of political backgrounds of Alan and Davie do you still speak to something present in Scotland albeit you know the details are different but I think the the core of it is quite similar to what it was you know 270 years ago.

I think big conversation about sexual and gender identities has ended up being part of that conversation about Scottish identity whilst being a story about Scottish national identity also a story that features centrally a really beautiful gay love story and so that felt like Kidnapped was right for now as well.

I find development is crucial for making theatre for me I definitely couldn't sit alone in a room on my own for months write a papery document and go that's the show it just wouldn't it's not something I'd be able to do so we had a two-day development initially we did which looked like sitting in a room with six actors a few musical instruments yes and just yourself and myself, yeah, with maybe three or four songs on three or four scenes and that was just really gentle exploratory work over the course of two days to see if any of those dogs would hunt basically and if any of the ideas caught fire if the actors could relate to what we were talking about and what jumped off the page what what didn't work at all and then we had a subsequent development which was similar but bigger-

Yeah more actors more material I guess as well-

Yeah so this would be half a year later yeah yeah yeah and everybody works differently but I think something that you want to ultimately feel comprehensive that is that every department can have its stake in and that really works can only really be born out of a process that can work in that more gradual literally developmental way rather than you know day one rehearsals we've got six weeks to make this thing. I mean if it's helpful to have that idea of time scale and of course we weren't working on it full time it's all across that time we were all working on other projects but our first conversation I think our first concentrated conversation about it was September of 2020.

And then our first development with actors was June of 2021 and our second development was May of 2022 and it finally got on stage at the beginning of April 2023 so that was the kind of the timeline the development periods were and ought to be full of so many surprises. I'd find it really difficult to enumerate how many surprises there were small and big but I think the objectivity crucially that those development periods offer that's the gold dust because you go so the character in the book is 17 so he's 17. So we've got a 17 year old and everyone's going whoa 17. that doesn't feel quite right he's

doing this and he's saying this and he's going here and he's falling in love with his 26 year old and is there something this is a bit queasy and we're not sure about that and I'm like what if he was 19 everyone's yes like really yes he really feels like he's 19. That's not something I could have ever arrived at on my own but they're small but crucial details that really start to colour in the whole world and then before you know it they are some of the most precious creative hours I know are being in development rooms with actors and other creative professionals.

I think in terms of music and the choice of repertoire there were maybe sort of three key points that we were drawing from, the character of Frances come from America growing up in America growing up I guess a kind of a what we might think of as a frontier like style is that fair to say? that seemed to lend itself to this world of country music and Americana very early on we sort of hit upon her as a sort of female Johnny Cash type figure this is a description of her we came up on where she was essentially The Woman in Black not the play Woman in Black but the female version of Johnny Cash is the man in Black and that opened the door to yeah Johnny Cash's material and The Gambler and some other pieces of Americana and then the second point of departure musically was I suppose this idea of music coming from groups that originated at the fringes not in the mainstream because I think subculture like the for example the pirates or perhaps even the Highland cult which is a culture of course but is treated as a kind of subculture in many ways you know we spend a lot of time with various subcultures in the book and in our adaptation and so music that comes from bands that started out in punk and postpunk a new wave albeit in sort of fought their way into the mainstream seemed like a good point of departure so that's bands like Big Country, Talking Heads even some of the more pop material Eraser and then I guess the third thing was that yeah an amount of the repertoire is Scottish and is and and the artists have the roots roots in Scotland even some you mightn't expect like The Road to Nowhere by Talking Heads, David Byrne was actually born I think in Dumbarton so yeah so those are the three the sort of the country/Americana frontier for Francis, kind of subculture/post-punk/new wave pop and then the idea yeah that's a sort of Scottish repertoire.

When rehearsals actually start it's just foot on the pedal yeah to the floor and that is the biggest transition for me I certainly noticed that suddenly being a directorial role it's just you just have to be able to answer literally every question and someone's like that twig or that twig? Eh that one! Okay those stairs are unsafe they're shoogly we need to order new stairs, get the stairs, would he wear that jacket? or would he wear um I'm gonna say no, he wouldn't wear that jacket. Is she from Aberdeen? maybe not? see it's okay and and they've got a headache, quick can we get some paracetamol? and you're just you're just spinning plates like but somebody needs to be that person everyone can descend on with the question that they need answered and that's the insane thing about working on a play that is brand new is that there are potentially an infinite amount of answers to any of those questions and you need to pick hopefully the right one. The choice to have Frances part of the story for me was from from the off and because that edition of the book began with her introduction I thought this piece has to begin with her introducing the show it there's no other way to do it she's a Master of Ceremonies but when you read about this woman Frances Matilda Vandergrift Osborne Stevenson she has lived a life as wild and adventurous as as any adventure novel you could pluck off the shelf and as badass, as swashbuckling, as hard as any adventure action hero of course like so many women like her she's more or less been written out of the story, the story that is the academic processing of Stevenson's life and biography his novels how they got written but I think what we can say categorically is that without her so many of those books either wouldn't be the way they are or wouldn't exist at all because it was so often her job to keep her husband alive and I was especially drawn though to her strident and bold and beautiful assertion of her identity when you read about Francis in letters and reports in terms of her relationships the people around her and besides the fact that she's survived so much hardship it's also clear that she defied a lot of cut and dried gender assumptions of her day and although they didn't have language beyond calling her a tomboy at that point it's certainly the case that a lot of those self-defined and really, really truthful identifiers that she has as an individual they have as a married couple as well between that and Davie's relationship with Alan it suddenly became clear that there were all these parallels between

the marriage of the Stevensons and Davie and Alan's romance and so then the two stories started to seem inextricable like one really really wouldn't make sense without the other and so it felt like a really natural choice.

Yeah I've been asked the question a couple of times about whether making Alan and Davie's relationship as romantic is a radical or departure in some way, I really don't believe it is, in the sense that I wouldn't put anything in a play adaptation of any book that I didn't think was there in the book in some form to begin with. I think what is the case though is that this book was published in the Victorian age and has been processed and taken to bits and analysed by various predominantly straight white male academics and in the interim they've told us what that book's about and what happens in it and what it means and we've learned about that in school and then we've made our films and so on and our other adaptations on the basis of all that thinking, whereas actually if you return to the source material what you see is two men who see each other for the first time and immediately offer to lay down their lives for one another and then very quickly this is put to the test and they have to defend each other with their lives at which point they kiss and declare their love for each other and then agree never to leave each other's side until the end of the book all I can say is if it were a man and a woman there'd be no question that this was a romantic story and so I felt that it was our obligation to make this explicit in our adaptation of Kidnapped and yeah I'm delighted that we that we live in an age when we can.

I think all of our work is a total two-way street. Yeah absolutely. Although we are respectively responsible for our own departments there is nothing exclusive about our departments and so there's no part of my work that MJ can't stick his oar in (and does frequently!) and vice versa and I think that is only to our benefit because we don't waste any time going 'oh I wouldn't want to tread on any toes' but yeah so we have a shorthand, we do, and a directness, yeah, that I actually think economises our collaboration it's ultimately MJ's in charge of selecting music but there are always musical pieces which are which are my suggestions and there are often some which emerge out of conversation together and often where those pieces go and how they move around and their suitability the edits the style the tone it's all it's part of the process.

It's true and there are songs that maybe one or other of us suggested for a particular moment in the play that this is perfect for that moment and it ends up getting shuffled around - Big Country was an example I think I first suggested Big Country but I'm sure I suggested it for a different moment and then Isobel said 'but what if'

Yes! it is always a two-way street I think what was exceptional perhaps about Kidnapped was because Isobel advocated for me to be brought on board as a co-commissioned partner or co-creator from really early in the process before there was even a draft of script I think we had a playlist of songs or you know a kind of a certainly a line of story beats and then a series of songs that might match up with the story beats so it was it was even more interwoven than our collaborations often are and I suppose the other aspect of that then was in figuring out the makeup of the company, the performing company in terms of musical ability and instrumental ability it informed the structure of the written piece again from I think quite an early stage by comparison with a lot of I would even say kind of well plays with songs a lot of other plays with songs because I have worked on a number of those and quite often the composer or the you know musical director / musical supervisor get brought in once at least one if not several drafts of the play have been written and indeed sometimes gets brought in very sharp before the start of rehearsals and so all of a sudden you're making a lot of decisions very quickly and there's merit in that approach as well of course but it's lovely in this instance to have had the the luxury of of time to give it real thought and kind of grow it over a period of months really.

You just you can't actually get what you want if you if you can't work that way yeah and if you invite your builder over and say 'I'm so glad you're here I've got all the building materials months ago even

though I don't know how to build a house and what I need is a Swiss Chalet so here's the stuff' and they're like 'well it's a bungalow at best I'm gonna be able to give you out of this' then that's what you're going to end up with some kind of hybrid, it's true, but yeah if you you get that stuff together and yeah you can build what you want.

The key points of interest for me in that novel were about self-belief, self-love, self-understanding and how those things work for that central character Kidnapped is written from Davie Balfour's point of view and so there's quite a beautiful window into his soul as he goes through this journey and then when he feels affronted when he feels like he's on the back foot he's a perfect anti-hero and that he's not a fast runner he's not strong he's not brave, he can't fight, he's so lacking in life experience and I think that's why we buy him and believe in him and back him and that's a really brilliant move on Stevenson's part I think compared to what could be the young swashbuckling lad who can just do it all and Davie's the person not who we wish we could be but who we actually truly all are and so that was something that I really wanted to lean into was the kind of gentle absurdity and big-heartedness of that character choice on Stevenson's part and but also Stevenson's own identity as outlined through his wife and how she talks about her identity and the nature of their marriage and so I think relationships and identity were were really crucial themes that we wanted to tease out and indeed sort of introduce a new into this story because in our version of Kidnapped Frances is the narrator. Certainly Scotland, Scottishness and Scottish identity are all key themes that we're able to explore in ways that Stevenson can't because of the restrictions of novel writing including linguistically and musically which is a real boon.

KIDNAPPED | ISOBEL AND GARETH

Co-directing on this project felt really important because Gareth's a director of many years' experience and a theatre director first and foremost and I'm an actor who became a playwright through a set of a series of circumstances that I couldn't have predicted so this is a very new experience for me directing theatre and I'm quite green and new to all of it so I think my knowledge of the text and the interpretation that I created and Gareth's knowledge of his craft meant that we made a good team and collaboration is also something that we're both fond of and good at.

I mean my first response to the text was like hearty laughs I found it incredibly funny you know and so that spark of that first read that's what you've got to try and find again haven't you, you, know once you put it on your feet and things like that I came to the process a little bit later than Michael John and Isobel so I wasn't involved in any of the developments so it had already developed into a pretty decent script actually at that point So I was coming to it with fresh eyes I found it really funny I found it very moving at points and as a director like incredibly excited to stage because it's quite bonkers actually you know they go from a small rural town in the borders through to a pirate ship underwater they trek throughout the highlands and islands so it felt like a real challenge that felt exciting we nearly always had the same idea and if the ideas were different it wasn't that one was uh right or wrong it was like well let's try this for now or let's try that for now so actually we've settled into a rhythm pretty quick I would say and I think the capacity you have to collaborate harmoniously is less maybe about you always agreeing for example and more about you sharing a philosophy about what collaboration looks like and what rehearsals actually ought to be and rather than them being some kind of top-down dictatorial process where you come in with your vision and you just need all the people to realise it and not come with any ideas of their own and we both I think really actively believe that rehearsals a period of live discovery and so it's the whole thing is a conversation up until the point that it all comes together and I think as a result of that it felt very organic so I came on board right from the beginning of that casting process worked with Isobel and Michael John McCarthy, Michael Howell who's our casting director as well and yeah we discussed each of the characters but actually it's an ensemble piece so you need flexibility and a kind of generous spirit I suppose and also we wanted to create a room that was really playful in terms of creativity and ideas and it goes on a long tour as well so we always said let's find nice people who care about the work but also want to come to work with a smile on their face so again it's about having that shared philosophy in terms of the type of actor we're looking for and because this type of work is not for everyone you know there's they're running around backstage constantly they're changing costumes they're pushing bits of scenery on stage they're getting thrown a double bass and they've got to play it for like five seconds and then pass that on so actually there's a kind of self-selecting quality to who wants to put themselves forward and pretty quick you kind of whittle it down to a whole bunch of brilliant actors and in Scotland actually we're blessed with loads of brilliant actors who are multi skilled.

I think the the joy of it is you're exposing the mechanics of what you're doing on stage and sharing that with the audience so if the vast majority of the music is played live if what we call the push and pull the sort of scene changes and costume changes are done by the actors themselves often in view of the audience then you are demonstrating the work that goes into making a piece of theatre live and move and that can be a really joyous thing for an audience to watch there's something really impressive about the resourcefulness required for any one member of that ensemble to play a reel sing a song play three different characters, hat swap, tell a joke and then flip a piece of scenery around to begin a new bit of storytelling but it's incredibly slow work to rehearse and because you can't say our fantastic stage management team will deal with that once we get into tech you have to say no The Ensemble need to be able to move through this whole piece of theatre essentially like a dance so they need to know exactly where they're going to put that whisky bottle down who they'll receive that violin from and then how they're going to get into that jacket in order to be there for the top of that bar although Kidnapped! is a play with songs there are parts of it that are as technical as

making a musical and and that meant logistically it was a real challenge in rehearsals We approached discovering the characters through chat first of all I suppose just like really open chat about who we think these characters are and the style of work as well because it's a it's a it's a heightened piece it's not naturalistic so we we spent a bit of time at the beginning of rehearsals talking about the tone of the piece it's a it's a piece that needs real forward momentum, the rhythms of the text technically need to be quite fast and have a sense of drive and we've talked about things being front footed and full bodied and I think we noticed quite quite early on that actually if you kind of lean back on the text and uh I don't know quiet or something kind of doesn't work does it? you gotta be front-footed and give it some and then the text kind of starts to come together and through those discussions about about technically the text but also who these characters are things started forming and also just that ability to play yeah well I mean we mucked about with accents loads we were like we'll try in a cockney accent ah that doesn't feel quite right in terms of I don't know...class let's try it in kind of a high status accent what would that be? so we just tried lots of different, lots of different versions I suppose in the first couple of weeks and then soon we started each person started to settle on a version of a character which I suppose works both individually but also crucially helped in terms of the whole and it's a bit of give and take sometimes because sometimes individually a certain characterisation might work wonderfully but something doesn't quite sit right in terms of the overall makeup of the ensemble I suppose that's our job just to go give it a nudge this way because we need this to work over here so it's about playing I think characterisation I think there are various rehearsal techniques that you can use to help actors really define their characters one from another and I think that's something that was particularly important in this show because it's a multi-rolling ensemble show so and for various actors they're playing eight different characters and they each need to be really clearly defined for an audience equally because it's an action-adventure story all of those characters need to be memorable they need to be worth our while having spent the time with so in a way it's almost that like Spielbergian tradition of the adventure story where every Crazy Character our hero meets along the way is either going to help or hinder their progress and so for some actors it's about nailing the voice for some it's about the physicality and for others they want to think much more about the bigger picture the story and what part they are of it and then for others they really need to think about a complex emotional internal world in order to really nail a character I think one thing that we did in this piece which is dear to me certainly is allow actors to play out with their casting type so there's absolutely no need for us to look at how an actor presents and say you're going to play a character who might traditionally present as you do in a play like Kidnapped! anybody can be anything and so that often means people really stepping out of their comfort zones as actors and that can make some people feel very vulnerable or emotional but once you break down those barriers you realise that the possibilities are endless for an actor and that's a really liberating thing to be able to land upon.

The challenges were time management actually I think that was a big thing the logistics of it we had so many different departments vying for the time and of course they're all really important because this piece is a kind of it's it has everything in it doesn't it I'd like to think either the musicians and the singing and the live music but also there's the movement department so EJ Boyle did brilliant choreography and movement direction but we had both big set pieces and then also movement which was kind of more subtly woven throughout the piece the scene work kind of rehearsing the scenes with the dialogue that doesn't involve any x y and z there's all the sections about the transition so there was maybe 30 scenes and each scene there was a bit of scenery moved but we wanted to make sure that was properly integrated into the storytelling actually so we needed to treat each one of those with as much reverence as any scene any piece of music so I mean yeah time management was the the biggest challenge for me I think probably for both of us exactly time management and because ultimately at the end of the day the the you know the clocks strikes six and you've got to dismiss people because that's the end of the working day and that can work and scheduling can be really rigorous if everything goes exactly to plan but by the time we're in tech on stage there was for example a single wire that went across the stage from one particular object into the wing and this wire caused like, I mean, we lost hours to trying to negotiate like how it would

get moved around the stage and it only takes one thing like that for suddenly a schedule to unravel and then a show can get into trouble so yeah it was nippy yeah I've not even mentioned fight direction I said this huge big fight sequences as well yeah so just like there's a lot in it and we're fighting, flying things, like this are concerned obviously safety is such a major concern and you can't rush safety so that is something that necessarily takes up a huge amount of time as well so.

We grappled with how we would show travel in the play through the design process initially working with Anna Orton and just playing about with ideas and talking a lot about traditions of Scottish theatre as well and this notion of poor theatre and how we can use our imagination geographically the play travels on land, on sea, from the highlands to the lowlands it covers a large distance so we knew we would have to keep it simple in some ways problem is in simplicity often it becomes really really complex so we try to approach something that felt simplistic but the technicality of it was quite it was quite complex in the end but we're both interested in how you can have scenography that starts as one thing and then transforms into a different thing and so with us we had something that appeared to be a big boulder that turned into a kind of music hut for a drummer and then that turned into a cliff edge in the highlands, it turned into the cabin of a pirate ship, so how we could sit single objects and really milk them for all their worth in terms of the effects they have in terms of the design so yeah we kind of took that philosophy and tried to do everything in that way didn't we?

I think that's it and if things like travel and passage of time are really difficult in theatre because nobody wants time to be passing and nobody wants to have to wait for a journey to be over and although so much of Kidnapped the novel is about and then we had to begin this journey and that took days and the many many days or the weight felt like this but in the theatre we're sitting down for a limited amount of time and we want it to come at us so these can be really tricky things to depict interestingly and well but I think the bag of tricks you've got at your disposal or anything between making an actor run on the spot to a beautiful bit of projection by our designer and projectionists set across Scottish rocks so that we actually see figures traveling along a little line to what the lighting designer can do to make day turn into night what music can do to denote a passage of time and what the ensemble doing the push and pull and moving the set can do - so often it's about having a still point and then a moving point around that something still and something that moves to create contrast - movement by contrast whether that's of time or or across space so there are so many ways to do it discovering how to do it is definitely the the hardest and the most satisfactory part of the process

[Music] I think principally it's a play about Scotland and Scottishness and therefore it's a play about identity and that identity extends to all different aspects of identity the single person in which all of that is encapsulated is Davie our hero it's really about who we all are and what team we feel we're part of what Scotland we feel we're part of and the many Scotlands within Scotland that there are so so much of it is about travel, borders, boundaries within the self and on the kind of Scotland that we inhabit so I think so much of what we try to tease out from the script and the work with the actors was to do with that sense of identity and purpose .

Some of the really key relationships in this story are David Balfour with himself so he's a frustrated young man who is a tricky age he's 19 in our adaptation of Kidnapped and so although he would love to be taken completely seriously he still can't quite take himself completely seriously he's really lacking in any life experience and so he feels he needs to prove himself but how can he possibly prove himself if no one will give him the opportunity to so he's trapped in a difficult place where he's not really sure who he is yet and by the end of his character arc his journey that he goes on he knows exactly who he is and he's become an adult and some key relationships that he has are that with his his uncle, his only surviving relative at this point and I think it's through that relationship that David's limits trust naivety all started to get tried and tested and then the fundamental big event in his life when he's kidnapped and he finds himself as part of a a subculture , a culture unrecognisable to him so he's grown up in the Scottish borders surrounded by people who to him they remind him

all of each other it seems like a homogeneous culture which can't possibly be true they must all be individuals but they're repressed by the culture they live in suddenly he's on a pirate ship where this completely wild bohemian other lifestyle plays out and and these larger than life characters surround him and so in the context of that he's then Other and he has to figure out who he is there but the the single most important relationship of course is between him and Alan Breck Stewart because what this represents is the first time Davie falls in love but also the first time Davie finds himself in a relationship of mutual dependence of some kind and it's through these two men figuring out what it is that are their respective strengths and weaknesses and how they're more or less directly in opposition those strengths and weaknesses that they're able to really discover who they are and therefore fully realise themselves which is the only way that any of us can really actually love and be loved.

There's ancient and folkloric Scottish culture but then there's also the Victoriana of the period that the book itself is actually written in and crucially of Robert Louis Stevenson's wife who literally speaks to us from that period on stage but then there's all the pop cultural and musical influences.

80s music like a whole host of kind of 80s tunes that are mostly very recognisable and probably some that are less recognisable I think it's all of that jamming up against one another which made it an exciting piece and kind of recontextualise the original work for against a new story actually it made you think about each of those different pieces from a different era in a different way. and that's what Stevenson's doing he's going it's mid-18th century but I'm writing about it from a Victorian perspective and then we are distilling all of those through you know 21st century perspective but also they are able to manifest ourselves in a piece of theatre in far more ways than they can in a book in the sense that Anna Orton's design that's borrowing from so many different eras she had Victorian elements loads of 80s elements but 90s as well, MJ McCarthy's score and also the language that we use in the piece which includes lots of modern language and lots of truly ancient language because we were able thanks to Alistair White's Gaelic consultancy to have a lots of beautiful Gaelic.

I'd like audiences to come away having laughed a lot, having been moved by any aspects of the piece actually and just with a sense of giant hope as well actually I know that sounds really simple in some ways but genuinely I think there's I think if you can do that to an audience you run through a winner because that's what theatre should do it should make you laugh make you cry move you it might make you look at the world in a different light but it needn't, it might just make you feel good about yourself for a couple of hours that's enough sometimes do you know?

Yeah and in fact if it's made you feel bad about yourself it's going to fail to do anything else besides so I think that's the thing is that we we are honoured to get to make theatre and we have an obligation to entertain audiences first and then anything that follows is exquisite I suppose the central characters stories about survival even when it seems highly unlikely that you can survive and a belief that you can rely on yourself to survive that there's enough love and goodness in you that you can get through the hard times to better ones and so yes hopefully they leave with a sense of that hope.