



DST FIRST NIGHT

Michaelmas Term Round-Up

2016/17



[BLOGS](#) [INTERVIEWS](#) [DST ABROAD](#) [EPIPHANY EXCITEMENT](#) [...AND PLENTY OF THEATRE!](#)

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MESSAGE TO ALUMNI

Over to you... we want to hear what you're up to!

Want to be a part of DST legacy and receive a number of exciting exclusives? Then why not take your seat in The 100 Club, which includes regular updates on DST and your name fixed on a plaque in The Assembly Rooms Theatre.

If you have any questions, want information on being part of our active alumni network or would like to be included in our next issue, contact Kate at theatre.
coordinator@durham.ac.uk.

For more head over to our Alumni website at www.dur.ac.uk/development.

Talor Hanson performs in Lion Theatre Company's *East*.
Photo credit to Grace Tseng.

FEATURES

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With thanks to: Kate Barton, Experience Durham, Hannah Sanderson, Genevieve Burns, Tom Harper, Alena Kopečna, Corinna Harrison, Mike Bedigan, Naoise Murphy, Hetty Hodgson, Josie Williams, Theo Holt-Bailey, Owen Sparkes, Harry Twining, Kabir Jhala, Nikki Orrell, Mo Simpson, Adam Simpson, Julia Atherley, Carrie Gaunt, Sophie Wright, Lucy Knight, Sophie Allen, Charlie Keable, Ambika Mod and Annie Davison.

Front cover photo credit: Anna Iermolaieva (Penelope) and Samuel Kirkman (Sweeney Todd and The Durham Revue).



DST



EDITOR'S NOTE



Hello and welcome to the inaugural edition of DST First Night's termly newsletter.

My name is George Rexstrew and I am First Night Editor on this year's DST Committee. I am very excited to present this newsletter to both current and former DST members. It has been great fun putting it together and I must say a huge thank you to all those who have contributed.

Last term was long, cold and at times gruelling, but there was still a phenomenal amount of success within DST. Over ten weeks there were a whopping 30 shows, and it is delightful to see so many theatrical creatives at work... all the while balancing drama with their degrees!

There's lots to look forward to next term. DST will finally be launching a much-anticipated, brand-spanking new website. In February, we will be welcoming industry professionals to the bubble for the 42nd Durham Drama Festival. There will even be developments on DST's first-ever Gala show, *The Canterbury Tales*, which will take place in June. And, as ever, there will be plenty of shows to get involved in. Whether it's marveling at new writing from our very own, dancing with the girls from Dagenham or toe-tapping to DULOG's biggest production of the year—there's something for everyone!

But for now, put your feet up, have a browse and enjoy the final few days of this winter break before the madness of Epiphany kicks in.

A very Happy New Year to you all, and here's to a great 2017.

I'll see you next term!

George

Meet The Exec

WE SPEAK TO THIS YEAR'S DST ASSISTANT TREASURER AND PRESIDENT OF THE DURHAM REVUE: AMBIKA MOD.

When did you start at Durham and what do you study?

I started at Durham in 2014 and I'm currently a third year studying English Literature.

Did you know when you came to Durham that you wanted to perform?

Absolutely! I've been acting since I was really young and the drama scene in Durham was one of the main reasons that I was attracted to the University. I was also really interested in doing comedy, and particularly being involved with The Durham Revue, and as it turns out that has been my main involvement in DST during my time here.

How did you find your feet in DST?

At first, I actually found it really hard to get involved in DST. As anyone will tell you, it's a very competitive environment and as a fresher that can be really intimidating. In my first term of first year, I auditioned for everything (it must have been around 15 shows) and only got into the Revue. It was only until second year that I started to have more luck with auditioning and being part of shows in a non-acting capacity. That being said, it's also an incredibly supportive society that I'm so glad I persevered to be a part of.

What's the best thing about being involved the Revue?

I have been involved with my fair share of shows in Durham—as an actor, director and as part of the tech team—but my experiences in the Revue have by far proven to be the most exciting and rewarding. The Revue



offers the most exciting opportunities in DST, in my opinion. Every year, we have major shows in The Assembly Rooms Theatre and at the Gala, as well as performing in Oxbridge and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Of course, the best part of it all is getting to share these experiences with a small group of people, and as the year progresses, everyone in the troupe becomes great friends.

What's your biggest challenge as President of The Durham Revue?

Being President of the Revue ultimately means being theatre company President/director/producer/head writer all in one, which is both very difficult and incredibly time consuming. Writing the show can be tough and I often find it hard to motivate myself to keep on writing, let alone the rest of the troupe. Luckily I have a really committed group of people this year, and I am excited for what is to come. The hardest part of the whole process is definitely the day of the very first show when you never know how well the new material will go down.

Anything exciting coming up for the Revue this year?

Our Assembly Rooms show is fast approaching and shortly after that, we'll have our Gala show with the Cambridge Footlights and the Oxford Revue, which is always great fun. I am also hoping to put on an exciting show after exams, but all will be revealed later on!

Name: Lucy Knight.

College: Trevs.

Year: Two.

Describe yourself in three words:

Clumsy, excitable and hungry.

What is it you love about theatre:

I love the way that theatre combines so many different art forms—literature, music, visual art, textiles—and brings them together to create something which has an immediate and immersive effect on the people who witness it.

Favourite show you've been involved in:

Rumpelstiltskin by Wrong Tree because it was a devised piece, which meant that we all got to have a say as to what the performance would turn out to be. It was very exciting to be a part of, as I felt a real sense of ownership over the project.

Favourite show you saw last term:

Party by Pitch Productions. It was a short, sweet and well-polished hour of hilarity—a light-hearted comedy that poked fun at the incompetence and idealism of young politicians, which was amusing and relevant to its student audience.



Name: Naoise Murphy.

College: Castle.

Year: Four.

Describe yourself in three words: Nerdy, pensive and picky.

What is it you love about theatre: How one week a play has me bouncing with excitement and the next week's play leaves me questioning the nature of my existence. And also those plays that do both.

Favourite show you've been involved in: *Monstrous Regiment* by Ooook! Productions for the wonderful, talented and wacky cast and crew.

Favourite show you saw last term: *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* by Castle Theatre Company for the combination of incredible acting, the perfect location and a harrowing script.



Meet The Writers

SOME OF FIRST NIGHT'S CONTRIBUTORS DISCUSS THEMSELVES AND SOME OF THEIR THEATRE FAVOURITES.

Name: Tom Harper.

College: Castle.

Year: Three.

Describe yourself in three words: Absolutely positively insane.

What is it you love about theatre:

The sheer variety of things you can see, and the simple fact that there are some things that are so much more impressive on stage than on a screen.

Favourite show you've been involved in:

Sweeney Todd by DULOG. Musical theatre is something very different to regular drama and it is a lot of fun.

Favourite show you saw last term:

Swallow by Piccolo Theatre. It's always nice to see new writing and the performance quality was very high.



Shows... Assemble!

WE TAKE A LOOK BACK AT LAST TERM'S PRODUCTIONS IN THE ASSEMBLY ROOMS THEATRE.

WEEK ONE: *The Durham Revue - Returners' Show*

Description: Tackling themes such as politics, technology, relationships and the endless drudgery of everyday life, The Durham Revue brought *Gigglebox* back to the university bubble following an extremely successful Edinburgh Fringe run.

What the reviews said: "Sketch after sketch received guffaws galore from an enraptured audience, to the point where members only had to pull a face to elicit a huge reaction from their adoring fans" (Palatinate) and "extremely enjoyable" (First Night).



WEEK TWO: *East* by Lion Theatre Company

Description: Written by Steven Berkoff, *East* is a masterful black comedy in the form of stylised physical theatre, which showcases the beauty and hardships of five characters living in a harsh working-class environment.

What the reviews said: "It was exciting to see the technical scope of The Assembly Rooms Theatre wholeheartedly incorporated into the direction" (First Night), "groundbreaking" (Palatinate) and "a visual feast for all audience members" (The Bubble).



WEEK THREE: *Mojo* by Pitch Productions

Description: In this Jez Butterworth tale, Silver Johnny is a rising rock 'n' roll star in 1950s Soho until he disappears, and Ezra is murdered. The men of the Atlantic struggle through the following day, in fear of their culture, lives and each other.

What the reviews said: "An expertly-delivered and hilariously funny piece of theatre" (First Night), "powerfully acted" (Palatinate) and "a constant anticipation of dramatic outburst" (The Bubble).



WEEK FOUR: *Swallow* by Piccolo Theatre

Description: A painful yet playful commentary on contemporary society, Stef Smith's *Swallow* powerfully tells the story of three strangers as they struggle with their lives. Anna hasn't left home for months, Rebecca is so furious with her ex-partner that she turns that anger on herself and Samantha is struggling to become Sam.

What the reviews said: "Shook me to my core" (First Night), "extraordinary" (Palatinate) and "a show that will stay with the audience long after the final bow" (The Bubble).



WEEK FIVE: *The Ladykillers* by Ooook! Productions

Description: A classic English black comedy, Graham Linehan's *The Ladykillers* is about a gang of eccentric characters using an old lady's house as a base of operations for their heist while they pose as a string quintet.

What the reviews said: "One of the funnier comedies I have watched in Durham" (First Night), "classic entertainment" (Palatinate) and "a thoroughly laugh-out-loud production" (The Bubble).



NOT FORGETTING...

DIM's *Spooktacular Special*, Shellshock!, DUCT's *Journey's End*, CTC's *The Crucible*, HBT's *The Graduate*, DOE's *Tenth Anniversary Concert*, BTC's *End of the Century*, Pitch Productions' *Party*, FTC's *And Then There Were None*, HBT's *Tartuffe*, LTC's *Madame's Late Mother*, CTC's *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, LTC's *Penelope*, Woodplayers' *Arcadia*, Green Door's *The Flint Street Nativity*, DIM's *A Christmas Cock-Up*, Wrong Tree's *Tales of East Wind*, Buttered Toast's *The Spread*, HBT's *Coming Home: A Concert* and 1TC's *After The End*.



Sweeney Todd

WEEK SIX: *Sweeney Todd* by DULOG

Description: A wretched barber returns to London after fifteen years of exile on a false charge. Taking on a new alias, he embarks on a blood-spattered revenge spree in order to destroy the man who turned his life upside down. With the help of the enterprising Mrs. Lovett and her gruesome pies, Sweeney Todd attempts to reclaim the tatters of his former domestic bliss.

What the reviews said: "A masterpiece" (Palatinate) and "how Sondheim was meant to be done" (The Bubble).

WEEK SEVEN: *Alfie* (DST Freshers' Play)

Description: The ultimate amoral "swinger", Alfie swaggers and philosophises his way through a parade of 'birds' in 1960s London, allowing the audience to eavesdrop as he goes. When one carefree entanglement proves too close even for Alfie's comfort, however, the "swinger" lands with a sharp thud.

What the reviews said: "Hodgson and her team should be proud of their endeavours, and this production of *Alfie* has shown that the future of DST is in safe hands" (The Bubble).



Alfie

WEEK EIGHT: *The Seagull* by Fortnight Theatre

Description: A hugely influential piece of writing, Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* is seen as one of the first examples of the naturalistic form of acting which has become so commonplace today. Its themes include unrequited love, the pitfalls of fame, the perfectionism of the artist and a dead seagull.

What the reviews said: "An enjoyable break from the mounting essay deadlines" (First Night), "compelling" (The Bubble) and "thought-provoking" (Palatinate).



The Seagull

WEEK NINE: *Get Your Sh*t Together* by Tone Deaf Theatre Company

Description: Alex's girlfriend has just left him for Dave from 'Eggs 'n' Bacon Britain', and it's now time to move on. Luckily, his two sisters are on hand to help, but it may not be just Alex who has something to learn from this break-up.

What the reviews said: "One of the most technically sound productions I have seen" (First Night) and "left very little to be desired" (Palatinate).



Get Your Sh*t Together

WEEK TEN: *A Christmas Carol* by DUCT

Description: When the miserly Scrooge refuses to indulge in the festive season, he is visited by three Christmas Spirits to be reminded of the perils of living without care for his fellow beings. Paul Sills' stage adaptation of this timeless Charles Dickens classic provides a timely reminder of the important things in life, namely the cherishing of family and friends.

What the reviews said: "A nice way to spend a cold winter's evening" (First Night) and "vibrant" (Palatinate).



A Christmas Carol

Across The Pond

**WE LEARN ABOUT CASTLE
THEATRE COMPANY'S RECENT
SUMMER TOUR ACROSS THE
ATLANTIC.**

BY THEO HOLT-BAILEY.

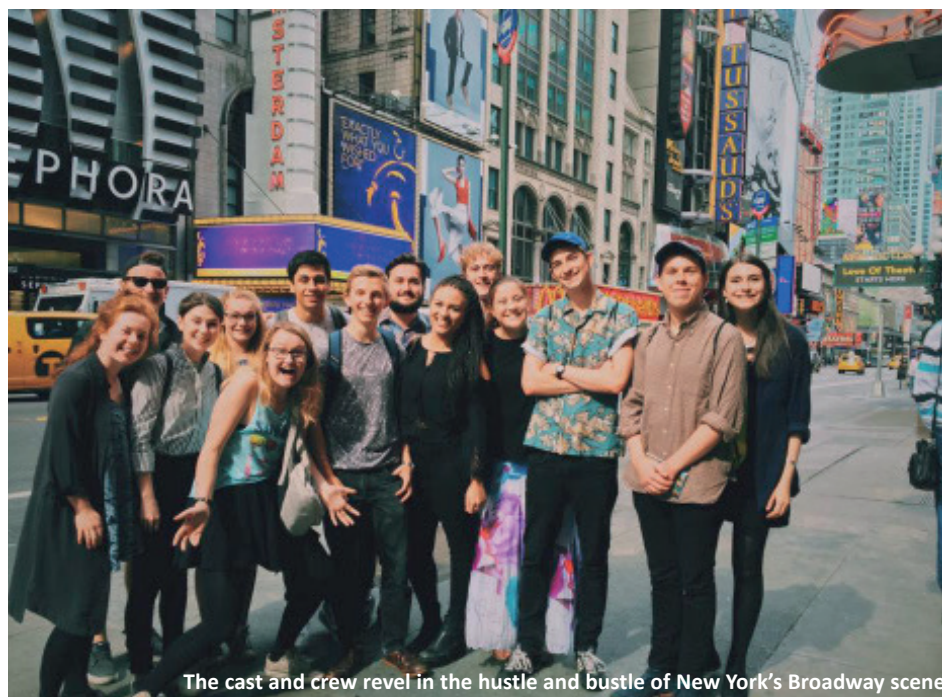
Back for round two after a successful UK tour, the cast of Castle Theatre Company's *Much Ado About Nothing* went bigger than ever as we toured New York and North Carolina: making friends, running workshops, visiting Durham and performing across the pond.

September 4th – Heathrow to Brooklyn

The cast assemble at Terminal 3 and jet off to the new world, enjoying many plane films along the way. Arriving on American soil at 7pm EST, we had little time to rest before entering the labyrinth of New York City's subway system. The way was long and hot, but we finally reached our AirBnb in Brooklyn.

September 7th – Road to Armenia

After spending a couple of days settling in, which included rehearsing in Central Park, we made our way to Grand Central Station to head to our first performance venue in Upstate New York. Two trains and one taxi later, we found ourselves at Wethersfield Gardens in Armenia, a country estate and farm surrounded by rolling hills and forest. The gang ran the show in front of the Wethersfield House ready for the following day's performance, before being treated to yummy spaghetti cooked by our hosts.



The cast and crew revel in the hustle and bustle of New York's Broadway scene

September 8th – Wethersfield Gardens

Our first performance day had arrived at last! A group of cast members ran a two-hour *Much Ado* workshop with some local students, reporting an enjoyable session with a bright and enthusiastic group. A Mediterranean heat informed us that we had visited New York during



Post-show glee at Wethersfield Gardens

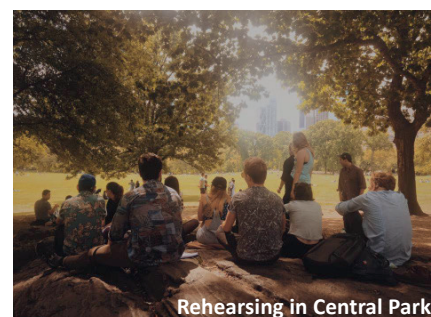
a heatwave. But despite the heat, and a mild panic over a tick insect, the first show was a great success, with the only complaint being that we don't visit Wethersfield more often!

September 9th – Road to Staten Island

Beautiful views of lower Manhattan and Lady Liberty were enjoyed by all on the Staten Island Ferry before arriving at venue number two: Seguire Mansion—a historical antebellum mansion. The cast met with some friendly horses and a troupe of local actors.

September 10th – Seguire Mansion

The cast were treated to a tour of Seguire Mansion's beautiful artwork by its owner and our host George Burke, which suitably got the gang into the acting mood. The planned workshop was unfortunately cancelled due to the incredible heat (supposedly only one degree cooler than the island's



Rehearsing in Central Park

record!). Ice-cold water was on hand in both wings, and the audience were comfortably settled under a neat gazebo. A second performance went off without issue.

CTC'S US TOUR: THE TEAM

Director: Kate Barton

Tour Manager: Tom Harper

Tour Manager: Ellis-anne Dunmall

Troupe: Abigail Weinstock, Dominic McGovern, Ellie Bowness, George Rexstrew, Georgie Franklin, Harvey Comerford, Jenny Walser, Rohan Perumatantri, Sarah Slimani, Shona Graham, Theo Harrison, Theo Holt-Bailey, Tristan Robinson

September 11th – Madoo Conservancy

Upon arriving at Long Island's Bridgehampton, we were whisked off to Madoo Conservancy, a stunning two-acre garden containing houses designed by the late Robert Dash. Our neighbours included Madonna, Sarah Jessica Parker and one of the producers of *Hamilton*! The gang were just in time for our third performance, and the intimate nature of the garden proved to be a wonderful treat for both the cast and the audience. Our hosts Alejandro and Paul cooked us a lovely dinner and we spent the remainder of the evening with them.

September 12th – A day off in Sagaponack

Today was a much-needed day off. Everyone spent the day lounging or exploring. Sag Harbour and Gibson Beach were beautiful and offered a great opportunity to recharge everyone's batteries.

September 13th – Road to Durham, North Carolina (Part One)

We said farewell to the paradise of Madoo, railing it back to Manhattan. Dropping our bags into storage we were let loose on NYC once more, waiting to catch a Greyhound bus. Some headed to Broadway for viewings of *Macbeth*, *Matilda*, *Fun Home* and *The Color Purple*. A few hours later and we were on the Greyhound, heading across the various states towards North Carolina.

September 14th – Road to Durham, North Carolina (Part Two) and The Forest at Duke

Once in Raleigh we met Sam Miglarese and Eliza Mathew—Duke University staff and our keepers while in North Carolina. The company were taken to The Forest at Duke: a beautiful retirement home in Durham, NC. Shortly afterwards we performed inside to a packed hall of The Forest's residents. The show was enjoyed by all, with a 100-strong audience. After the performance, the group split up and were taken home by their host families.

September 15th – Duke University

The group were treated to a campus tour of the University's drama facilities (which made many of us envious), before we took part in an improvisation workshop led by Jaybird O'berski, an Assistant Professor of Theatre Studies at Duke. The cast were then escorted to an amphitheatre in Duke Gardens—our fourth performance venue. Despite being the noisiest spot we visited, with buses, cars and two helicopters making guest appearances, the show ran smoothly, and was attended by many students, our host families and even alumni from Durham, UK! We ended the day in a local bar, meeting another troupe of Duke University actors.



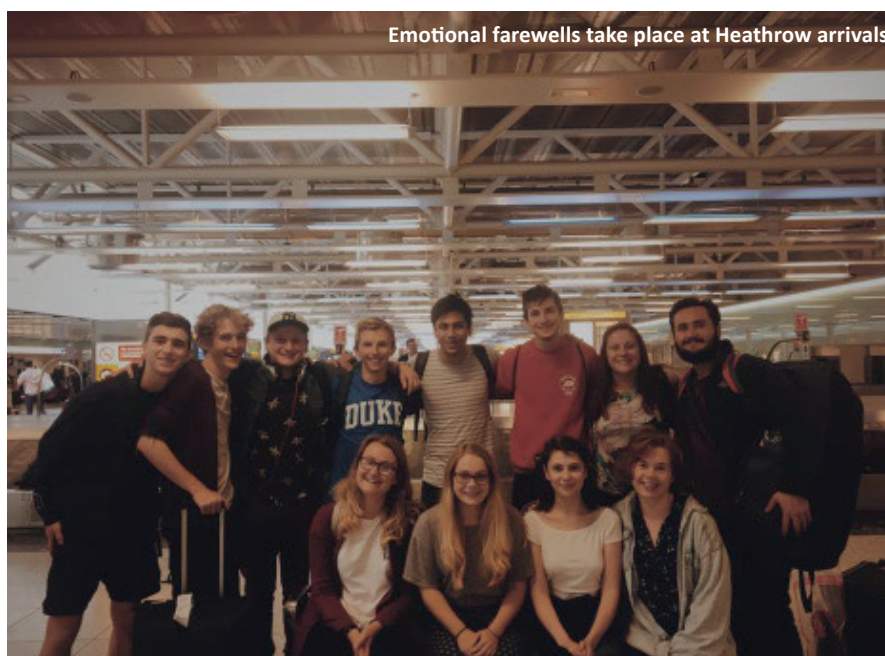
September 16th – Durham School of the Arts

The cast gathered in downtown Durham for a historical tour of the area, before crossing town to the Durham School of the Arts. The group ran a Shakespeare workshop for a group of 40 students aged 14-18.

Our most successful performance of the tour followed on DSA's *High School Musical*-esque stage, and the audience followed every line with great enthusiasm. We were even treated to a post-show celebrity greeting as many of the audience wanted signatures in their programmes. We headed briefly to our Homestays for a heartfelt farewell, before taking a bus to Raleigh Greyhound Station where we waited for the coach back to NYC.

September 17th/18th – Back to Heathrow and reality

A long coach ride and an overnight flight later and it's suddenly all over: it is finally time time for hugs and goodbyes. Twenty shows, six months and two continents later, Castle Theatre Company's Summer Shakespeare Tour 2016 at last draws to a close, with glowing reviews and positive comments streaming in from both the UK and the USA. It was a brilliant experience for all involved, and we thank everyone who came to see it. The generosity and hospitality we experienced throughout our tour astonished all of us. We are grateful to every one of our many hosts at Wethersfield Gardens, Seguire Mansion, Madoo Conservancy, to Sam, Eliza and everyone who looked after us at Duke and above all to our Homestay families in Durham, for taking us into their homes. The tour will not be soon forgotten by any of us.



from Alnwick to **AFRICA**

FROM LEADING SHAKESPEARE WORKSHOPS TO GREETING ELEPHANTS DURING THE DAILY COMMUTE, ONE DST MEMBER DESCRIBES HER EXPERIENCE ON THE ANNUAL ZAMBIA PROJECT.

BY ANNIE DAVISON.

Hi, I'm Annie! I'm a third-year student of English Literature at Trevs. I have always had a huge passion for drama, and during my time at Durham University I have performed in 15 shows. As Festivals Secretary for DST and Social Secretary for DULOG, I'm also on two theatre company committees. I care immensely about Durham Student Theatre, often to the detriment of my degree and the worry of my parents, and I have always been an active member within the 800-member strong society.

Over a year ago I heard that I had been lucky enough to be accepted into Durham Drama Outreach's Zambia Project. It is a six-week cultural exchange where myself and five other girls from Durham University ran workshops in drama, dance and music to underprivileged children and adults. Last August, following much fundraising, several injections and a haircut resulting in 15 inches less of curly hair, we were finally ready to leave for our adventure.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

We spent three weeks in Livingstone and three weeks in Lusaka, visiting schools, orphanages, refuges, camps, hospitals, old people's homes, villages and even a peanut factory. The aim of the project was to promote confidence, self-esteem, imagination, creativity, education and communication skills through the medium of drama. I must admit I was initially a little unsure as to how successfully the project was going to achieve these aims, but after the first week of working with Palm Grove School in Livingstone, where we delivered three-hour workshops each morning on movement, voice and Shakespeare, I could already see such

a difference in some of the children in my group. There was one girl called Yvonne who still sticks in my mind. When I first met her at the beginning of the week she had quite a defiant and uninterested attitude, but after giving her some responsibility and encouragement, she stood out as a notable talent in her performance as Lady Macbeth during the end of week production. Each session at Palm Grove School would end with a 15-minute dance class—but this time it was our turn to be the students. The Palm Grove schoolchildren taught us a handful of traditional songs and dances, and let's just say that we were nowhere near as talented as them at dancing. The way they moved their hips was, quite frankly, incredible.

DOWN TIME

We had the day off on Saturdays to do as we liked, and even though the group was always exhausted from busy days at Palm Grove, Lubasi Orphanage and the Church Groups, we never wanted to waste our time lounging by the pool. Instead, we decided to bungee jump, or zip line, or swim across Victoria Falls. We loved exploring the beautiful Zambia, and I particularly loved going on safari and seeing my favourite animals: elephants!



NAMPONGO

Another highlight of the Zambia trip was our stay in the rural village of Nampongo. For two nights and three days we lived with the village women and their children. There was no electricity, no toilet, no beds, no running water. We swept, killed and prepared the food, washed the dishes (with sand), taught the children, played with them, sang them songs, ate with the rest of the village and met the chief of the land. It was an incredible experience—the friendly people, the breathtaking stars, the chance to live for a few days free of modern technology—and offered total immersion into someone else's way of living.



All smiles at Newcastle Airport departures!

LUSAKA

During our final three weeks we stayed in the city of Lusaka, which itself was a stark contrast from the town of Livingstone. Lusaka was loud and huge, and seeing the difference between the country's two most illustrious areas was fascinating. In Lusaka, we spent two weeks at Barefeet Theatre Camp: a drama-based organisation that had a campsite where, for two weeks a year, 50 street children would be invited to stay with the intention of being educated and rehabilitated into centres or, where possible, back into their homes. It was called the Uncle John Project, and each morning the children would have lessons and workshops based around a fictional character called Uncle John, who had left his rural village, travelled to Lusaka, and seen street children

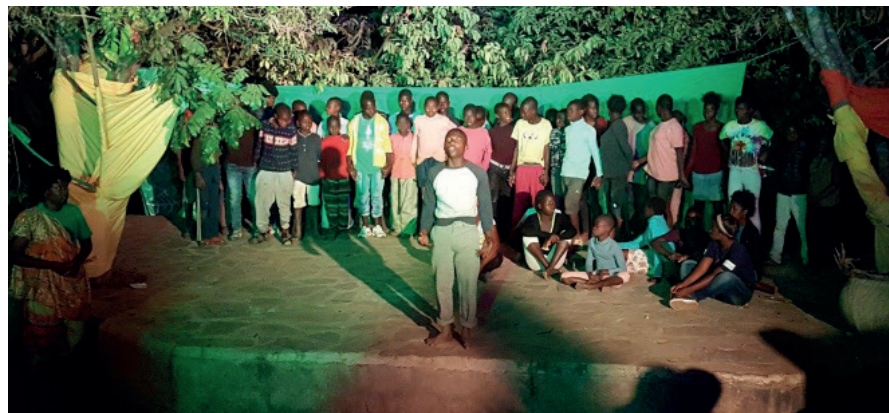
for the first time. Uncle John and the 50 street children learnt together about the troubles of living on the street: drugs, prostitution, abuse, rape, hunger, exploitation and so on. During their stay at Barefeet Camp, the children had full medical check-ups, and were given food, clean water, clothes, beds, medication, education and friendship. By the end of the week the project aimed to reintroduce children back into their homes or have them rehoused in a facility for orphans or homeless children. When we visited, we delivered drama workshops and played with them, but mostly we just talked to them about their lives and their stories.

These children were absolutely remarkable. They were fiercely intelligent and grilled us for answers about England and our university

and education. They joked and often left us in fits of laughter. And yet, I was still lost for words when they so casually mentioned that they had been gang-raped, or prostituted, or beaten up, or that their families had been murdered and they were the only ones left. It was an incredibly emotional experience, and I still email the camp facilitators to ask for information about the children's current whereabouts. Most of them are now back with their families, and quite a few are in the orphanages or the centres which they were assigned to, but inevitably some of them remain unaccounted for. Barefeet Theatre opened my eyes to many things, including the true face of poverty in a third-world country, but it also demonstrated the genuine power of drama and theatre.



Annie at Victoria Falls



Children delivering a performance at Barefeet's graduation ceremony



An experience like no other

Going to Zambia was more rewarding than anything I've ever done in my life. I cannot quite articulate how much I learnt in those short six weeks. I think about it every day—partly due to the patchwork quilt that I bought whilst out in Zambia that is on my bed and is the first thing I see each morning—but also because of how many incredible memories I made. The Zambia trip was so influential and rewarding to me because it altered the way I perceive something that is so important to me personally: drama. I love theatre and acting, and I aim to go to drama school after university. But the Durham Drama Outreach project proved to me that drama is not simply a form of entertainment, nor is it 'just' art, it's more than that. It is a way of connecting with people from all parts of the world, and in the case of Yvonne, positively affecting people's attitudes and futures.

Durham Drama Outreach Group 2015/16:

Annie Davison	Rhiannon Hill
Claire Forster	Ruby Barrett
Elizabeth Hoyt	Stine Svellingen



Simon Lynch

FROM PERFORMING WITH DULOG TO DREAMING A DREAM IN THE WEST END, WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES TO SPEAK WITH DST ALUMNUS SIMON LYNCH, WHO TALKS DURHAM, THE X FACTOR AND LES MISÉRABLES.

Whether it was from playing Nicely-Nicely Johnson in *Guys and Dolls*, Franklin Shepard in *Merrily We Roll Along* or J. Pierrepont 'Ponty' Finch in *How To Succeed In Business (Without Really Trying)*, Simon Lynch has established himself as one of DST's most notable alumni. After reaching the Judges' Houses stage on *The X Factor* last year, he has now traded in The Assembly Rooms for the West End's Queen's Theatre, performing as a regular in the world's longest-running musical: *Les Misérables*. In an exclusive interview, we go backstage to speak with this rising star.

When did you graduate from Durham and what did you study?

I graduated twice actually! I completed my BA Geography in 2013 and then finished an MSc in Marketing Management the following year.

Did you know when you graduated that you wanted to perform full time?

Absolutely not! In the back of my mind there was a part of me which was rueing the fact I never bothered trying for drama school, but I spent the following 12 months after graduation working in marketing at home in the Isle of Man whilst applying for graduate jobs in other industries.

Describe your experience on The X Factor.

The X Factor was manic, eye-opening and fulfilling, and without wishing to sound too pretentious, I honestly grew a lot from it. I'm not in the position to criticise the show as it gave me an incredible platform and opportunity. However, I was wise to the fact that it was first and foremost a television show. Sadly, I feel like a lot of contestants forget that. Being aware of that 24/7 helped me a lot during the process.

How did you get involved in Les Misérables?

The casting team for *Les Misérables* actually contacted *The X Factor* asking about me, and they invited me in for an audition and then I joined everybody else in the typical audition process.

What's your favourite song in the show?

When I'm in the ensemble, I love the opening convict scene ('Look Down') or 'At The End Of The Day'. As Marius (the part I cover), I love the whole of 'ABC Café'.

Is it challenging performing the same show night after night?

Yes and no. It can sometimes be hard to maintain focus to the highest degree, but quite simply it is our job to do so. Occasionally you get these "Les Mis moments" where you still have to pinch yourself about the job you are doing.

Which three guests would you invite to a dinner party?

I'd have to go with Adele, Alan Carr and Sir Ian McKellen.

What was your Durham highlight during your time here?

Without a doubt, my involvement with DST and DULOG. It gave me both a wealth of experience and some incredible industry contacts. If I had to pick one specific moment it would be my first and sadly final directing experience in Durham with *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, which was staged in The Assembly Rooms Theatre in March 2014.

What is the best thing you've done after Durham?

It has to be *Les Misérables*, but performing to 7,000 people at Wembley Arena for my *X Factor* audition was singularly the best two minutes of my life.



Top: Simon and current Hatfield fresher Lily Ratnavel in a 2015 production of *West Side Story* on the Isle of Man. Photo credit to IOM Today.

Left: Simon appearing in *Les Misérables* at the Queen's Theatre, London. Photo credit to Johan Persson.



Paul Moss

WITH SHAKESPEARE ON WHEELS PROVING SUCCESSFUL IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND BEYOND, WE SPEAK TO THIS FORMER CASTLEMAN AND FOUNDER OF THE HANDLEBARDS.

With separate all-male and all-female cohorts, **The HandleBards** are two sets of four-strong troupes of cycling actors who carry with them on their bicycles all of the necessary set, props and costume to perform extremely energetic, charmingly chaotic and environmentally sustainable Shakespeare plays across the globe.

Specialising in outdoor theatre, their all-female troupe are currently touring productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*, with the latter recently performed in The Assembly Rooms Theatre. Whereas their all-male troupe have just finished touring *Richard III* and *Much Ado About Nothing* around the UK, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Myanmar.

Now preparing for their individual 2017 seasons, we speak to Paul Moss, a Durham graduate and one of the founding producers of The HandleBards. He has toured with the company as both a performer and producer for the last four years, and has also worked at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London on the opening season of their indoor candlelit playhouse.



The female troupe, who recently performed *Romeo and Juliet* in The Assembly Rooms Theatre.



The male troupe, who recently completed their tour of *Richard III* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

When did you graduate and what did you study?
I studied Chemistry at Castle and graduated in 2012.

Who are the Handlebards and how did you get started?

The HandleBards are a touring company that, in the summer months, travel around the UK on bicycles in order to perform Shakespeare plays in outdoor venues. It started a year after I graduated, when myself and a couple of friends (one of whom was at Durham) decided that it would be a fun thing to do one summer. Four years later and we now have two troupes (one all-male and one all-female) who tour theatres, schools and outdoor venues across the world.

How do you prepare for your long tours?

There's a lot more to the tours than just putting on the plays! We begin booking venues up to a year in advance, and then have to source funding, cast the shows, recruit the creative team and get all of our publicity in order. With tours that visit up to 100 venues, it's a lot of work, so I spend the majority of the winter months on the phone and answering emails. It all becomes a lot more fun when we get into the rehearsal room and start putting the shows together!

Have you got a favourite touring spot?

I love cycling around Scotland—it's definitely the prettiest place in the UK. And when we're off the bikes, my favourite place to tour is definitely Zimbabwe.

What was your Durham highlight during your time here?

Putting on shows pretty much every week in The Assembly Rooms Theatre, taking Castle Theatre Company on tour, and writing site-specific plays for the World Heritage Site. As you can probably tell, I definitely did more drama than degree during my time at Durham...

If William Shakespeare was alive today, what would you ask him?

I would ask him how he takes his tea, and if he has long for a chat.

What is the best thing you've done after Durham?

Starting a business in order to get paid to do something I enjoy, and travelling the world while I do it!



The HandleBards make history in being the first all-female theatre troupe to perform in Sudan.



Swallow



Arcadia

COMING SOON

ASSEMBLY ROOMS LINE-UP

EPIPHANY TERM 2016/17

WEEK ONE: Richard III by Aidan's College Theatre

WEEK TWO: Kafka's Dick by First Theatre Company

WEEK THREE: An Iliad by Pitch Productions

WEEK FOUR: Durham Drama Festival

WEEK FIVE: Carpe Jugulum by Ooook! Productions

WEEK SIX: Made In Dagenham by Feather Theatre Company

WEEK SEVEN: The Ritual Slaughter of Gorge Mastromas by Castle Theatre Company

WEEK EIGHT: *[to be announced]* by DULOG

WEEK NINE: The Picture of Dorian Gray by Fourth Wall Theatre

**DURHAM 2017
DRAMA
FESTIVAL**
5 - 12 FEBRUARY

The Assembly Rooms Theatre

Toll
by Charlie Keable

Alford and the Acid Tip
by Kate Lipson

Screen 9
by Kate Barton

Black Box:

Rose
by Isabelle Culkin

The Not So Divine Comedy
by Freddie Drewer

**Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes:
The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey**
by Andrew Shires

Site-Specific:

**The Bocchae: a post-truth
tragicomedy in three parts**
by Alison Middleton

Daisy's Dead
by Alice Clarke

A Year of Minutes
by Hamish Clayton



Someone Who'll Watch Over Me



Party