

A Journey with the Gallows

by Sarah Sambrook

There is something remarkably special about sharing a singular moment in time with a complete stranger and then parting ways, with every chance you'll never see each other again.

This is what the Northumberland Theatre Company does. You turn up to a cold, dusty hall in a small, out of the way village. You transform a space normally used for Keep Fit and WI meetings, into a buzzing theatre. You share an evening of thrills and spills with total strangers, and then you pack up, and part ways from people who may not see any theatre until you next come to town. What an incredibly special thing to be a part of.

After my last performance at drama school, I stood alone in the space we had just played in. The energy and electricity in the air was tangible. I could feel it lifting the hairs on my arms. It was the same energy I felt in those village halls, every night we came down. I am so proud to have been involved in something that can create such a feeling.

From the absolute get go, the NTC family (I say family because I feel as though I have joined the ranks of a slightly dysfunctional but overwhelmingly supportive family) has given me more than I could possibly voice. From audition to closing night and beyond, it is an experience I will carry with me all my life.

Judi Dench, Ian McKellen, Helen Mirren all began their careers in REP, sadly a form of theatre that has almost disappeared. I have long thought that this is the best start to any actors' career. What the NTC offer to Trainees is as good as, if not better, than a stint in REP. I have never worked in a company where the ensemble is so integral before. Not only because of the nature of the play, but the get ins and outs and the long journeys in the van. There isn't much down time away from your fellow actors and so you must learn very quickly how to handle each other.

Other than working within an incredibly reassuring company, I have signed with an agent (having invited her to one of our shows), become a fully-fledged member of Equity, rediscovered a love of folk music (I will be taking up the fiddle again) and gained bucket loads of confidence in my own capabilities. If you had asked me 3 months ago to sing a solo on stage, I would probably have had an anxiety attack. All of this in 2 short months. The progress I have made is on par to the progress I made whilst training at drama school. It just proves what a supportive and safe place NTC is. To be able to walk into your first job and feel instantly at ease is a rare thing. Many of my friends haven't been so lucky. I feel as though I could do anything now. Nothing could overwhelm me.

I hadn't done much creative work in the 18 months leading up to rehearsals and so decided to grab this opportunity with both hands. It has paid off in spades. Gill and her core team have been a hoot to spend time with and learn from. As for the rest of the company, the nutters, I know it sounds cliché but I feel I have made some lifelong friends here. The opportunity to watch these fantastically talented people work and be a part of their process has been enlightening and a true pleasure. I like to think that you learn at least one thing from every job you do. Well, I have learnt too many to count. And to be brutally forward, Gill has such a sound reputation in the industry that I am sure

having worked under her direction with make me instantly more castable. My only regret... spending so much money on the village hall raffles and not winning a bloody thing.

I also dabble in a little writing myself. Something I began doing to stop myself going insane whilst working horrible dead end jobs. The chance to see writing go from words on a page to a functioning production has been invaluable. Writing changes as soon as you get it on its feet. And to play with different stories, each with their own unique voice has been cracking. From a lyrical piece to a farce, it has been like a masterclass in writing as well as ongoing training in acting.

It has been a treat to spend some time in my native Northumberland (both my parents are from the area). Having grown up in the Midlands I vividly remember the excitement I felt every time I got my first glimpse of the North Sea. To see this almost every day has been wonderful. If nothing else this tour has been a beautiful way to see England and Scotland. I hope, looking forward, I will have the chance to bring some of the pride that you North Easterners have in your heritage and your landscape back to the Midlands. If only I had grown up seeing such personal theatre in my town hall. Perhaps I would have a greater opinion of Scummy Nunny, my dishevelled home town.

A final note. My 80 year old Grandad came along to our closing night. He is a hard man, an ex-miner, and doesn't give much away. It was the first time he had been to the theatre. Ever. My Grandad helped me with my fees for drama school and so, understandably, I was very nervous for him to see me perform. He sat on the front row and laughed the whole way through. Someone once told me that you must give your all every time you perform. For the person for whom it is the first show they will see. And for the person for whom it is the last show they will see. Whether it is either of these or both for my Grandad, I couldn't be prouder to have introduced him to theatre surrounded by my NTC family.