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# ‘Out from Underneath Control’– The National Theatre of Scotland

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# ‘Out from Underneath Control’– The National Theatre of Scotland

**Paula Sledzinska in conversation with David Greig**

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David Greig is one of the most prolific and successful Scottish playwrights of the last two decades. He co-founded Suspect Culture theatre company and served as National Theatre of Scotland’s first Dramaturg. In 2016 he was appointed as Artistic Director of the Royal Lyceum Theatre. Few contemporary artists match the variety and extent of his contribution to the development cultural scene in Scotland. He is interviewed during last-minute rehearsals at the Citizens Theatre, on the cusp of the National Theatre of Scotland’s tenth anniversary season. He speaks on a range of subjects, notably the Scottish stage as well as the politics of language and identity.

*P: What is the role of national theatres today? How relevant, or indeed desirable, are they in the age of globalisation?*

D: If you asked about Scotland, I’d say it’s very, very important. Ironically, we’re not an independent nation, so there’s a sense in which it’s one of the institutional statements of our existence. So it’s incredibly important. And because we’re fortunate enough that it exists in this geographically, socially, ethnically, linguistically diverse way— it’s an incredibly important defensive statement of the diversity of the word ‘we’, when we say who we are. It’s a ‘we’ not limited to white middle-class men who speak in a particular way. This ‘we’ represents the most thorough section of society that actually lives in this chunk of ground. When it comes to the National Theatre of Scotland, I feel it was our great good fortune that we had not had a national theatre before, that we had not had the independence in the nineteen-hundreds and therefore had a national theatre then, because it would have been a building and it would have looked to create a single repertoire. It probably would have focused on language and so forth. So, for me, it was a sort of luck that Scotland didn’t get a national theatre as we have been able to question the values of older national theatres and create something in the twenty-first century. I think the National Theatre of Great Britain is managing in some ways to catch up with what a national theatre can be in the twenty-first century but some of

the earlier-established companies are really struggling. They're very binding and entrapping. What goes without saying is that the national theatres of small countries are different from national theatres of big countries. There is something about the relation of national theatres to small countries, and Scotland has been fortunate enough to pioneer or to distil a way of doing what's appropriate in the new sense of these relations. So if you asked me how important the national theatres are in other countries, I think they're very important particularly in small countries. I think we can underestimate how important it is to have an establishment if only so that people can say it's doing the wrong thing, if only to create a fight.

*P: What would you say are the main pressures and dilemmas faced by national theatres today?*
D: The two examples I know the best is Scotland and Britain and the National Theatre of Scotland is actually in a good place, I think. Funding in a climate where resources are tight is always going to be a big issue. But I think, in terms of challenges, it's actually about growing a whole Scottish theatre sector really.

*P: Scholars such as Rebecca Robinson express a concern over the government funding — she argues it dulls the NTS's "radical edge" – how do you feel about that?*
D: That's rubbish, and for two reasons. Firstly, in my experience, it just never happened. And it never happened throughout the years it's been there. The NTS has been incredibly radical and it's been directly funded by the government. There's been no interference. The only thing I remember was a phone call from Alex Salmond asking if they could show *Black Watch* at the Parliament and that's a good thing – it's a challenging piece of work. The second thing is, assuming that the government of Scotland is likely to remain in the hands of the SNP for the next while, the party have staked a huge amount on Scotland being a dynamic and cutting-edge, artistic, modern sphere. The SNP's rhetoric places a great emphasis on Scotland as being diverse so it's wholly in their interest for the NTS to be radical. That's what they want it to be. I'm very sceptical about the fetishization of arm's length. What it does is that it takes out accountability. All the main companies, all the national companies are directly funded by government. And I see none of them wanting to change that. They like it because it provides them with stability and there's something good about accountability because if they're shit someone is held responsible. On the other hand, if the Citizens were repeatedly shit, no one can do anything. Because all you can do is what we had to do with Creative Scotland, which was

to rattle the cages of the bureaucrats. And they're not tangible; you can't sack them. So for me, actually, there should be a relationship between the national theatre and the government. And it is well for that relationship to be open, transparent, audited and accountable. Having said that, of course there are dangers but, in practice, I see equally as many dangers with any other funding you may get. Any funding brings the dangers of the funded work being boring or "safe" or whatever. Part of the national theatre's job is to appeal to the mainstream – otherwise it's not a national theatre. So I think, at the moment, NTS is striking a very good balance. And I think the government is striking a good balance. But I would completely trust, absolutely trust, that a Labour or even a Scottish Conservative Holyrood government would do the same. Artistically, I don't have any fear.

*P: Of course, the diversity principle promoted by the National Theatre corresponds with the SNP's political manifesto…*
D: It totally does, but I think there's a consensus about diversity amongst politicians in Scotland. Weirdly, I think there's a consensus amongst politicians in Scotland that ethnic nationalism is a bad thing. That's why I'm not worried about governmental pressures.

*P: Does the NTS face any issues when navigating between artistic and political influences?*
D: Not when it comes to the government and not with politicians. Within the culture, if we're going to call that political, yes. During the Referendum, for example, the NTS did the right thing in that it engaged with it but they were quite cagey to take a side. I think that was correct. They have to be aware they operate as a national theatre in a country where people have strong opinions about live political issues. So if a play came along that was very clearly advocating independence, I'd imagine they'd have to think hard about whether it's the right thing for them to stage. But if that play was really fucking good, if it was unbelievably good, I trust that they probably would stage it. To be true, if it was really good, it wouldn't be *advocating* independence because that's propaganda. So what I mean is a really good play which electrified people and made them feel empowered. I did have an issue with the NTS repertoire at the time and I wondered whether we're engaging enough. I'd say the political questions aren't really about politicians but they're to do with cultural forces. Should the NTS be doing more work in Scots? Should it have done a production of *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaits*? Should it do work in Gaelic?

*P: Writing about your adaptation of The Bacchae, Maggie Inchley suggests that it offered the return of a "previously stigmatised and oppressed popular voice" – an observation which refers to both the demotic voice of Alan Cumming and the black American Chorus. How do you see the politics of language on the Scottish national stage?*

D: I think it's tremendously important that the National Theatre can reflect the world back at you in your own language — in your own language and voice. Alan Cumming playing Dionysus as himself is no different from an English actor playing Dionysus in his own voice. But until you've got a national theatre capable of staging these kind of plays and until you've got a national culture that's capable of saying "look, it's ludicrous *not* to speak in your own voice", that's not going to happen. But when it starts to happen it's really good and why not be translating *Hedda Gabler* into the spoken language of the theatre outside *Hedda Gabler*? That, I totally agree with. What's more tricky and more interesting is that I didn't translate the *Bacchae* into Scots: I translated it into English with a Scottish tinge to it as I was aware Alan would be speaking his own voice. And translating *Hedda Gabler* into Scots…? That's where the questions become interesting because you then get into real, deep cultural politics. I mean you could translate *Hedda Gabler* into the spoken language of Glasgow, or you could change the translation into a kind of high Scots Lallans and that would be great. But I get antsy if anyone suggests one "ought to" or "has to". But if you *want to* – delighted. To be honest, the language wars were mostly fought in the 1980s. And I think they've kind of been settled in the sense that you write however you want to write. But you've been liberated to write in your own voice. I think it's started to come back in again and I think I'm actually more interested. I'm maybe less dismissive than I was. The possibilities with the Scots language are interesting. I don't know if I've really answered the question, but I think the bottom line is that it's really important to get people to speak in their own voice. My question is: can we call "official Scots" our voice, or is it a separate thing? Is it a kind of rich resource that we can draw from?

*P: Peter Arnott talked about this idea of Scots as a "resource" at a conference entitled 'Scottish Languages on the Stage' in 2013 – your own voice may mean English as it's one of the languages currently used in Scotland…*

D: Exactly. The other thing is that I translated the *Bacchae* into heightened language, into verse, because it's written originally in a heightened language. It's my observation that the best Scottish playwriting partly solves the question of what language to write in by creating, with each author, their

own heightened language. Iain Heggie writes in a way that is not like what anybody really speaks. Not even Iain Heggie! But it's very recognisably his "own" language. Chris Hannan is similar. Liz Lochhead uses Scots but it's a very particular Liz Lochhead Scots— it's very easy to understand and very funny, alive, contemporary. And if you look at David Harrower, he writes in English but it's a heightened, poetic English. I think it's wonderful how Scottish writers respond to these interesting questions.

*P: In a conversation with Clare Wallace you suggest that, as a playwright and director in a small country such as Scotland, it is almost possible to become familiar with your audience as they return to see performances on a regular basis. There is an active community of theatre goers and it seems to be a positive thing. How inclusive is this experience? To what extent can theatre actually bring the society together and should it be making a conscious effort to engage those less familiar with the stage?*

D: I'd separate two things. There's the community of people that go to the theatre and make theatre, but you're asking a bigger question: you're saying "the whole community". I think theatre should make *every possible* effort to speak to its entire community. I think it's one of the central aims of any theatre institution. Not every theatre company— I think some theatre companies can decide they want to speak to one set of people, but the big institutions, it's what they *must* do. I think they don't do it enough; some of them try very hard and some don't try hard enough. So yes, I think that's there. Now, what can they achieve in terms of bringing people together? I'm not sure they should: you're trying to bring people together in a room, in a playhouse, but I don't think you're necessarily trying to get them to agree. I mean you probably want them all in that room to experience their own individual responses. I'm quite Greek about this. I think you bring the *polis* into the room as a democracy and they watch the dilemma played out, the tragedy. And they think about it. And they reflect on it and that's a democratic process. But the idea that they would all be brought by emotion onto the same side is where we start to stray into propaganda.

*P: Vicky Featherstone estimated that 53% of the Glasgow audience of the NTS's production of Peter Pan had never seen a proper play before – how did you manage to achieve that?*

D: *Peter Pan* is really popular... Sexy poster… Putting it on at the King's, I guess? I'm not sure. I wonder where the figures come from. Most people go to the panto or have gone to the panto at least once, so I'd be sceptical. I think

Vicky maybe means that they weren't regular theatre goers. Again, I think pricing is terribly important and we should do much more to bring prices down to make it affordable to sets of people for whom it's very marginally affordable. I think that a lot can be done in terms of participation and the creation of communities. So, for example, the Edinburgh Royal Lyceum has a subscription, which is great. But I'd love the Lyceum to find other ways as well so that you could become part of a community in the theatre like the Lyceum without having to buy seven tickets. It's about being involved in making productions, being involved because your amateur theatre company gets invited in to the building or something. So I think there's a lot more that the theatres could do to connect to people. But I think the baseline thing is that people will come to see what they want to see. Here's an example: my mum and dad don't go to see Scottish rap music groups like the Young Fathers. I think what the Young Fathers should be doing is to reach out. Many people have never seen rap before. Once you start thinking about it like that you go "oh no, no, no, no – I was meaning that poor people should have high culture. That's what we ought to be doing". But I have the idea that all people should have access to all kinds of culture — that we shouldn't be prioritising certain culture over others in the way that we inevitably do, of course. That's more challenging. If people don't want to come to the theatre, that's fine. I want to make shows and make everyone want to come and see them, and then I want to reduce the obstacles to them being able to come and see them. What I *don't* want to do is give them an impression that there's something wrong if you don't want to come and see my production of *x* or *y* or *z*. It's fine if they don't. It's ok, as long as they have access. Just in the same way that, let's imagine I didn't like jazz – my taxes should still pay for the Edinburgh Jazz Festival. I'm happy it exists. I don't necessarily need to be bullied into going. I think there are power issues behind some of that thinking that I would challenge.

*P: How serious are class tensions in Scotland today? The theme seems to be recurring in NTS productions and you hint at it in Prudencia, Glasgow Girls and even Peter Pan. Do you see it simply as an element in the mosaic of multiple discourses circulating and clashing within the contemporary Scottish "ecosystem" or is there more weight to it?*

D: No, I think there's more weight to it in Scotland for various reasons. Class functions in particular ways in Scotland, I mean, it functions in particular ways everywhere. But it is very present on the Scottish stage, always has been, because we've never really had a West End high culture like you can have in London — we don't have the population. It's hard to say without facts

or figures, but it's always felt to me that the makeup of Scottish theatre, its existence even, has always been more class-mixed. There isn't really enough of a population that could sustain a bourgeois theatre on its own. And I suppose any Scottish theatre makers over the years who wanted to work in a bourgeois theatre would just go to London and do it. So those remaining behind in sense were already making a political statement. And people like to make these political statements about identity and so forth. They're always going to be bringing class onto the stage with them, I think. At least they have. So you look at the famous 7:84 Citz season, you see how working class theatre was always part of it. But then you look at Giles Havergal Citz, and what you see is this fantastic thing where he did an incredibly baroque bourgeois type of theatre in a sense, with no talking down to anybody; they programmed the shows they wanted. But they sold the tickets for a quid and they attracted as much of Glasgow audience as any other theatre did. I do think class is at the heart of a *lot* and we should always be engaging with it. It's very easy to forget and Scottish people sometimes like to pretend that we're sort of democratically, "consensus-ly" untroubled by class. But in spite of views sometimes spreading in the public discourse, we're riddled with class issues and it's a very serious part of our culture that we need to be looking at. But, fortunately, I think we constantly are.

*P: A lot is being said about your plays touching upon borders, migrations and travel between locations which may be unnamed but share the condition of being affected by the global economic and political change. Some of your works, however, clearly refer to familiar Scottish settings— how significant is that choice when writing for the NTS?*

D: I think it's a journey that I was probably going to do anyway. So the more and more I'm writing, certainly over the last five years, I've sort of come to almost a conscious decision to test my work by always setting it somewhere quite specific. And, actually, I'm always setting it in Fife. I know that it sounds sort of silly. So, for example, when I was thinking about *Events* and how to do this play about Breivik and the events of 27th July in Norway, I directly asked myself a question: "how can I write this play and set it in Fife?" And by doing that, that's how I came up with the story. I was doing another one recently, it's looking at love and the past and, again, I just had this moment where I was feeling lost for ideas and I said ok, "now how can I set this in Fife?" It challenges my thinking and it forces me to make microcosm macrocosm. If you want to do a play about politics and corruption, the first thing that comes to your mind is, you know, London, businessman, Russian oligarch

or something. But if you go "how can I do this play and set it in Fife?" a number of things happen. You have to be more interested because you don't go with the first idea, so you have to look at the second idea. And then you start wondering if it's about the way that corruption works? A feature of human dealings where you have a councillor managing a planning issue? And that becomes microcosm that reflects macrocosm. Or maybe the Russian oligarch's ship is parked in Kirkcaldy harbour. It's suddenly interesting and it's different. So for the last while I've been doing that. And maybe I'll change again and do something different. But previous to that, I would tend to be quite seduced by hotel spaces, and airport spaces and train station spaces. So maybe I'll do another thing in five years' time but right now I'm interested in the specific. This doesn't really have much to do with the National Theatre of Scotland — I mean ok, it happily coincides with its existence and maybe there's a relationship, but it's not one I'd consider.

*P: How important is the sense of familiarity with the place and its tradition when writing for a "national" audience?*

D: Actually *Monster in the Hall*, which is set in Fife, was commissioned by the Citizens Theatre, not by NTS, (it was then picked up by the NTS), and its first audience were teenagers in a school hall in a place called Methil in Fife. That audience to me was incredibly important. And once it passed through that audience I was quite happy with wherever else it went. Subsequently, the play was done in lots of countries and I went to see a production in Bremen, Germany. I don't really speak German but it gave me an enormous thrill when I could hear German, German, German, and recognise "the road to Kircaldy". The art transforms places. It's a very, very small thing, but that little corner has an existence in fiction now and that existence in fiction is somehow present in the world. As for the audience in Edinburgh or the audience in Glasgow who saw the play… I don't know what they get from that sense of local familiarity. I think you do get something. I think you feel that you exist but it's an easy feeling to conjure and it can be rubbish as well if you make people pander to that and the play is shit. It may mention lots of places and it's really annoying. But if it's good, it could be a really lovely thing. It's not why I do it, but I think there's an interesting swirl of energy as a result of that.

*P: What about The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart? Do you attach much significance to place in that play?*

D: It's more the significance of culture because it's the Border Ballads and the

peculiar place that they occupy in Scottish culture. The setting came about because that's where we went when we were workshoping it and I wanted it to be specific, so I made it specific. That's an interesting one actually because the show is very well-travelled, it's gone all over the world, but it's not been done by anybody else. I think a student theatre company in America did it but it was not picked up by other theatres. And I think that's because it's very difficult not to do it in English because it rhymes and it's very difficult not to be Scottish and do it because it's obviously got Scottish voices and accents and singers and music. So the specificity isn't so much the Borders as such. Someone might surprise me, but I think you pretty much have to be a Scottish company to do *Prudencia Hart* — don't see how else you could do it otherwise. Whereas with the other plays, I think they can be translated.

*P: Joyce McMillan described The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart as a "shuddering gallop through the landscape of ancient and post-modern Scotland…*
D: I really enjoy that show. At school I was a Scottish literature nerd. I used to bunk off school to go to the Scottish Poetry Library, get books and then sit in cafes, smoke and read poetry. So I've always enjoyed this relationship between the romanticised past of Scottish literature and folk music and the beauty of that, and then this irony — that I really do love — that it's very possible in Scotland to love folk music but not like folk. Because as soon as you're in a place where actual folk are exhibiting their actual culture you go, "oh, this is terrible, vulgar and uncouth", and people run away. Gypsies are a good example. How many folk songs do people sing in sessions going "oooh, the Gypsies, I ran away with the Gypsies" and then the next second they'd turn and say: "I'd lock your car, there's tinkies that moved in…"? So, you know, there's a disjunction between the romanticised past and the reality and I love playing with that. And I also love teasing both sides of the Scottish cultural debate and the play was able to do that. We tease Prudencia a little bit about her romanticised approach to the Ballads, but we also tease the fashionable academics.

*P: Would you say 'folklore' needs reverence and preservation or is it dynamic enough to look after itself? Should we protect the older forms of "beauty" or go with Colin's fascination with football chants and "working class performativity"?*
D: I actually am more of a Prudencia but I like to see both sides. So I think we absolutely should have reverence for and protect, and celebrate, and fund, and promote traditional folk forms whilst realising that if you're culturally

validating the older folk forms you can't dismiss hip hop artists from the East-End of Glasgow who are rapping in Scots, in their own vernacular. That is also a folk form and you have to recognise that folk is a wider thing and that it's very important to revere it in the forms you find it. And I think you also have to recognise that there's always that dance between folk and the official sanction… there should always be a fight. But I would hate it if it was uncelebrated and unfunded — that would be terrible. At the same time you should always be aware that it needs to be wriggling out from underneath control.

*P: Do you see* The Strange Undoing *as a praise or reflection of contemporary cultural trends? Or maybe it is a warning against them?*
*D: I think it's a celebration. I think it says: "we'll be fine. Folk will survive, but also look around you. Look at the karaoke night, it's ok, it's alright. See the magic of the karaoke". Yeah, I think it's a celebration and a provocation to thought rather than a warning.*

*P: The play's text ends with smoke coming from Prudencia's mouth, her eyes turning red and blood dripping from her fingers— the performance, however, seems to end on a more positive note. Is this purely a technical choice?*
D: I guess it's a production choice. You're assuming I think that's bad but I'm very fond of the devil, particularly in that play, and I think it's a sort of like saying she's got a bit of the devil in her. So it's not necessarily a bad thing. On the page, I had to conjure a strong image but on the stage, Wils Wilson was able to conjure a different image. It ends positively to me.

*P: Many of your plays share a powerful engagement with music: Peter Pan involves haunting performances of traditional Highland and Lowland songs,* The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Har*t resonates with the tradition of a ceilidh play and Glasgow Girls is an actual musical – what value do you attach to music in these works?*
D: I would go so far as to say that nowadays I wouldn't do a play that wouldn't have music. I just want music to be in everything and it's for a mixture of reasons. Music is such a powerful force on the stage. I think it demands that you're not naturalistic, really. I mean you can have scenes with music within a naturalistic play but the way that I do it, it tends to force you to talk directly to the audience. It's as if you said to me "I've noticed you use lighting in your plays" and I'd say: "well, how could I not?" It's a bit like that. Of course I use music. It's one of the most powerful tools in theatre.

*P: Do you see it more as a means of communication or more of an atmosphere-enhancing device?*

D: I see it as a means of… containing and magnifying emotion. And creating space, using a different part of the brain, bumping the rails so that not everything is linear, word-based. Music introduces movement: you often need to dance if you're going to have music. One of the things that *Prudencia* began to have a bit, and I quite like that, is to get the audience to move. I'd quite like to do plays where the audience danced as well as watched. We haven't achieved that yet but it's something I've got on my mind. One thing I'm very interested in at the moment, as a kind of coalescence of all the things I've been thinking about over the last five years, is theatre as a sort of semi-shamanic process of transformation where the play functions as a show and brings the audience together, and then takes them on a journey down into another world. And in that otherworld, issues are worked out via metaphor and story and those issues are kind of important wounds in the body politic, if you like, and they're explored in this otherworld and then eventually brought back out again into the real world with an awareness that the otherworld is there, and you've experienced it, hopefully with some kind of healing having taking place. Now, when you look at any shamanic process, it uses theatrical techniques to create in the audience disturbance. It ploughs the ground so that it's ready to take the seeds so you have darkness, and then fire, and then you have weird noises, and then there's a rhythm, and then there's music, and then there's a story. For me it's the same. The light is like the fire, the story is the otherworld in visions of it, the music is trying to bring you in and transport you, I suppose.

*P: You reveal in an interview with George Rodosthenous that you associate your plays with the music you were listening to when writing them. What about the association of music to the topics and characters within the plays?*

D: When I'm writing, a character might say they like a song or they might sing – that tends to come from the same place that they speak. So it's kind of character choice. But it's subconscious character choice. I'm quite careful and want to be aware of the influence brought by the production of the play. Some songs are important in *Prudencia Hart* if they get mentioned but there are other songs that are played but not mentioned in the text. It may just say: "a song goes here". Or I may have left a space knowing that they will put a song there. And it's the same with a lot of plays. In *Peter Pan,* I didn't write in "they sing this song or that song" but I knew these songs were going to be there so I think there's a sense in which there's music as a character choice and

there's music as a production choice and they're not always the same thing. I'm going to do a play called *The Idea of Music*; I've not completely worked it out yet, but it will be about a man who's composed a piece of music which makes the audience profoundly feel the emotions that they feel about Scotland. They think it's about Scotland. If they're depressed about Scotland, they feel very sad when they hear this music; if they're proud of Scotland then that's how it feels, and so the political parties start to compete because they want it for adverts for their broadcasts and the composer thinks it's about God, he hates it how people are interpreting music. I don't really know how this play will work or not work but the thing I like is the idea that you'll obviously never hear the music. So that might be an example of a play about music without any music in it, which is a long way of saying: you may not hear character music, I'm just telling you that that's what the character says he's going to play. Whether the director decides he's going to play that or not is entirely up to the director.

*P: What about the choice of the specific ballads in* The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart? *How meaningful is this selection for the whole piece?*

D: That was quite specific. 'Tam Lin' is about going down into the underworld so we copied quite a bit of that. 'Black Waterside' was deliberate again. It's an undoing song. 'Twa Corbies' is about death, I've always been quite fond of that. They were all personal choices but so was Kylie as well. They all have a reason for being there that's connected to the text. But again, *Prudencia* wasn't plotted out like that— the story I knew but I was writing it in rehearsals. I would be writing sort of a scene ahead of where they were. So I didn't know that the Corbies would appear until they appeared. And when they appeared I thought: "ah yeah…., the Corbies, yeah, yeah, that's really funny". So, in a way, the connections within the play came as we went along. And the best example is the "not so much the Devil's ceilidh as the Devil's Kylie" – you think: "ahh he must have spotted that and that's how the whole play came about". Definitely not. I didn't know that that was going to happen until I was typing the second last line. It's there, obviously it's there somewhere, but it comes in the moment, it's not planned out.

*P: Finally, before you return to rehearsals, could you shed some light on any future projects you may be working on in collaboration with the National Theatre of Scotland?*

D: There will be a lot, I'm sure. I'm talking to them about something which will be probably entitled *The Darkest Hour* but I, sort of jokingly, call it *Death; The Musical*. I think it's probably going to be a portmanteau show of characters and stories and scenes all relating to the idea of death but particularly to the

idea of the end of the world. There's a scene between a couple who have both lost people to suicide and their experience of maybe finding something in each other. Then there's a couple on the beach and it's not clear if the world is going to end or one of them is going to die because the way they're talking makes it sound like a very similar thing. And then there's a story about a hitman. I'm going to work with Gordon McIntyre with whom I did *Midsummer* and he will be doing music. It will be a song-psycho-portmanteau show, the "darkest hour" being four in the morning, just before dawn.

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