



**SPOONFACE STEINBERG /
KRAPP'S LAST TAPE
Education Pack**



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INTRODUCTION

This spring, Hull Truck Theatre is creating a unique double-bill and uniting two celebrated writers to bring a worldwide first to its stage. Lee Hall's *Spoonface Steinberg* and Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* will be performed from Wednesday 11 – Saturday 28 April 2012.

The production marks the first time plays by Lee Hall (*Billy Elliott*) and Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*) will have been performed together as a double-bill. Previously, the Beckett Estate has only allowed the work of Harold Pinter to be performed in this way.

Spoonface Steinberg tells the tale of an autistic girl suffering from cancer. The loveable character, aptly named after she was born with spoon-shaped face, details her often blunt yet charming observations on life. As her personal and family life gradually falls apart, we learn how simple things such as numbers, colours and music can provide comfort in testing times. The play was originally broadcast on BBC Radio 4 to critical acclaim before being adapted for the stage.

The other half of the double bill is *Krapp's Last Tape* which looks at the life of a man on his 69th birthday. Every year he makes a tape to look back on his memories. The play centres on a selection of recordings as he looks back over some of the milestones in his life and the love he lost one summer's day.

The double-bill will be directed by Jonathan Humphreys, who believes the pairing of these plays is a powerful one: "There is a similarity and a resonance between the plays as they are both about two characters who are interested in documenting and communicating their experience. But at the same time they are completely different."

Andrew Smaje, Chief Executive at Hull Truck Theatre says: "These plays are beautiful depictions of great age and of great youth. Both Krapp and Spoonface are trying to find their place in their world – Krapp by replaying the events of his life, and Spoonface searching for her place in the world before her life is cut short. There are some wonderful contrasts and reflections between two very different plays."

This Education Pack is suitable for teachers who are working with young people aged 14 and over in both formal and informal settings. It offers a brief playwright biography, play synopsis, list of key themes, and character profiles for both *Spoonface Steinberg* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, as well as suggestions for practical exercises which aim to explore both plays further. Also included are interviews with some key members of the artistic team who are responsible for bringing this fantastic new Hull Truck production to life.

LEE HALL – BIOGRAPHY

Lee Hall was born in Newcastle in 1966. His father was a painter / decorator and his mother was a housewife. He grew up reading Brecht, Marx, Shakespeare and Chekhov and, on completing his comprehensive education, he went to study English at Cambridge. After graduating, Hall went on to work in theatre - doing Youth Theatre and fundraising - for a number of years before his piece *Spoonface Steinberg*, which was originally produced as a series of radio plays called 'God's Country' for BBC Radio 4 in January 1997, launched his playwriting career following a very enthusiastic public response.

Hall went on to adapt *Spoonface Steinberg* both for television and then for the stage in 1999 and the play ultimately transferred to the West End. He also wrote many other plays – both for radio and theatre – including 2008's *The Pitmen Painters* (which won the Evening Standard Award for Best Play and went on to be performed at the National Theatre and on Broadway) as well as writing the screenplays for several very successful films including *Billy Elliott* (2000) (which earned Hall an Academy Award nomination), *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), and, most recently, *War Horse* (2011).

Although Hall's work cannot easily be defined or pigeonholed, two recurring themes in his work are class and aspiration – in a 2009 interview with The Independent, he said:

"I come from a long tradition of writing in Britain – in the 20th century at least – from JB Priestly to the various people in the 7ties such as Alan Bennett and Arnold Wesker who wrote about class and, very often, aspiration... It became unfashionable a few years ago, but it strikes me as an obvious theme that has always been of interest to theatre-goers." (Source: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/lee-hall-cambridge-taught-me-i-was-short-1830512.html>)

Sources (all retrieved April 2012)

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/lee-hall-cambridge-taught-me-i-was-short-1830512.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Hall_\(playwright\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Hall_(playwright))

<http://literature.britishcouncil.org/lee-hall>

SPOONFACE STEINBERG – SYNOPSIS

Spoonface Steinberg is essentially one monologue but it is divided into sections by music interludes.

Section 1

As Maria Callas sings 'Casta Diva' from *Norma* by Bellini, Spoonface – a 7 year old autistic girl – talks to us (the reader / audience) about how she likes opera because it makes death more beautiful and meaningful, and she imagines how uplifting her own death would be if she was in an opera.

Section 2

As the music continues, Spoonface explains that it was her doctor who introduced her to opera music which she much prefers to Take That (which is what the other children like). She moves on to saying that she has never 'been right' since she was born and tells us how she got her name. She gives the sense, in her childlike way, that her parents have been through various marital troubles – including her dad having an affair - and that they blame each other for her not being right. She says, however, that neither of them are to blame and that God chose it for her. In this section she also mentions Mrs Spud – the family's very kind and lovely cleaning lady – for the first time.

Section 3

As Maria Callas sings a song from *Samson et Dalila*, Spoonface reveals her talent for numbers and dates, and recalls when her parents became aware of her gift and took her to see the doctor. She explains that it is due to her autism. She then tells the audience how her dad moved out and her mum started drinking more and more, culminating in what we can deduce from her child's telling was an overdose.

Section 4

As we hear Maria Callas singing 'Teneste la promessa' from *La Traviata* by Verdi, Spoonface tells us about how – when her hair started to fall out and she started to lose weight – the doctors were very worried and she had to go into the hospital to have lots of tests, with the eventual outcome being that they were told that she was going to die.

Section 5

As we hear Maria Callas singing 'Addio, del passato' from *La Traviata* by Verdi, Spoonface tells us about the aftermath of hearing the news that her illness was terminal. She describes how her mum called her dad to tell him, and how he then came over and they cleared the air – saying that they still loved each other, etc – and then came to look at Spoonface when they thought she was sleeping.

Section 6

As Maria Callas sings a song from *La Wally* by Catalani, Spoonface tells us about the next few weeks. We hear about how her dad visited fairly regularly, but also that her mum was a little wobbly and was still drinking. Then Spoonface describes an occasion on which her mum went out and her dad drank too much and ended up frightening her

by grabbing her really tightly and saying it was all his fault before having what we assume was some sort of breakdown on the floor. Finally, we hear, Spoonface's mum came back and comforted her, saying that her dad only grabbed her because of the vodka and that he would never do it again.

Section 7

The section starts with us hearing Maria Callas singing 'O mio babbino caro' from *Gianni Schicchi* by Puccini. Spoonface returns to the theme of opera before telling us about how her doctor said she was being brave and that she should be brave like his mother, who was in a concentration camp when she was little. Spoonface then goes on to tell us – using the information that she has picked up from her doctor's retelling of his mother's stories - about what it was like to be in a concentration camp, particularly from the point of view of the children who were there. As she speaks, Maria Callas singing 'Casta diva' and then 'Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix' underscores the words.

Section 8

We hear Maria Callas singing 'O mio babbino caro' and Spoonface tells us, in a lot of child-like detail, about the treatment (which she refers to as 'zapping') which she was given in the hospital in what we can assume was a last attempt to save her. She describes her deterioration in hospital and how, ultimately, there was nothing more they could do and she was brought home. We then hear that her mum became very upset and ultimately blamed God for what had happened.

Section 9

This section starts with the sound of Maria Callas singing a number from *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Mascagni. Spoonface then tells us about a book that her doctor gave her to read from which she learnt more about religion, praying, and how to make the most of life. She seems greatly comforted by the message of the book.

Section 10

We hear Maria Callas singing 'Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore' from *Tosca* by Puccini as then Spoonface describes the conversations which she had with Mrs Spud about where her cancer might have come from. We learn that Mrs Spud's husband died of cancer and it is clear that Spoonface feels sad for Mrs Spud and her family. She then describes an incident in which she has an accident and Mrs Spud cleared her up and so she wrote her a thank you card telling her she loves her which made Mrs Spud cry.

Section 11

Maria Callas can still be heard singing 'Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore' at the start of this section. Spoonface talks about death, and imagines how things will be after her own death. Although deeply sad this section is also uplifting and hopeful.

Section 12

This short final section starts with the sound of Maria Callas singing 'Ebben? Ne andrò lontana' from *La Wally* by Catalani and finishes with Spoonface's recital of The Kaddish (a Jewish prayer).

SPOONFACE STEINBERG – KEY THEMES

Spoonface Steinberg tackles several key themes including:

Childhood

Although *Spoonface* is, in many ways, an unusual child, the play is nonetheless a beautiful study of childhood particularly given that it is essentially a 7 year old speaking directly to the audience. Part of the play's great charm is that the character of *Spoonface* is written so well that we feel like we are really given an insight into the workings of a young mind.

Dying & Death

The play gives us a rich understanding of how a child perceives death – and, perhaps more poignantly, how a child comes to terms with the concept of their own death. We also, via the stories that *Spoonface* tells us, develop a clear awareness of how the people around her deal with the news that she is dying. Ultimately, the play invites us to consider our own deaths.

Faith & Hope

Despite the fact that the play deals with a devastating series of events, it is also an incredibly hopeful piece. We, the audience, are ultimately left feeling inspired by – and comforted by – *Spoonface*'s attitude to her predicament which is positively affected by her love of opera, and her developing awareness of faith and God.

How ordinary people deal with an extraordinary situation

Much of Lee Hall's writing tackles this particular theme i.e. ordinary people (which *Spoonface*'s family do seem to be) facing extraordinary circumstances and the ensuing drama that then unfolds. Again, this is part of *Spoonface Steinberg*'s charm and is one of the ways that it draws the audience in – it invites the thought “what if this happened to me?”

Autism

Spoonface is, of course, autistic and through her monologue we learn more about her condition. Autism is still a complex condition which is not easily understood (particularly since it varies so much from person to person) and the play provides a rare opportunity to learn more about it straight from the mouth of a child who suffers from it.

SPOONFACE STEINBERG – CHARACTER PROFILE

Spoonface Steinberg is a 7 year old child with autism. As the play progresses we learn that she also has terminal cancer. She is, as far as we know, an only child with parents who are – for much of the play – separated but both in her life. We don't get the sense that she has many friends of her own age but she is close to her doctor, Doctor Bernstein who helps her to develop her faith and her love of opera, and to the family cleaner Mrs Spud.

Spoonface is extremely intelligent and perceptive for her age and is able to speak to us, the audience, in a very articulate manner. We also learn that she – like many people with autism – has an extraordinary gift for numbers and dates. However, despite all of this, and all of her medical troubles, she is in many ways a very ordinary child who relates her story to the audience with a very likeable sense of innocence and wonder.

SAMUEL BECKETT – BIOGRAPHY

Samuel Barclay Beckett was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1906 and died, aged 83, in Paris, France in 1989. His father, William, was a quantity surveyor and his mother, Mary, was a nurse before getting married. Beckett's family was well off but he suffered with loneliness from a young age, and later fell victim to long periods of depression. Beckett attended Portora Royal School (where Oscar Wilde also went) and then studied French, Italian and English at Trinity College in Dublin until 1927.

After graduating, Beckett worked briefly as a teacher in Belfast before moving to Paris – where he spent much of his life – to be an English lecturer at École Normale Supérieure. It was here that he first met and worked with James Joyce, who became a great influence on his early writing career.

Beckett was a prolific writer – he began by writing academic essays, etc. and then later, after he gave up his career in academia, focused on poems, non-fiction, short stories, novels, screenplays and – of course – plays. Beckett wrote many of his works in French (doing most of his own translations into English too), because he felt it lent itself more fully to the 'sparse' style that he aimed for. Amongst the works that he wrote originally in French is 1952's *Waiting for Godot* (originally titled *En Attendant Godot*) which is arguably his most famous play and which is still performed regularly today.

Beckett wrote *Krapp's Last Tape* in 1958. It is, with *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*, considered to be one of the four major plays that Beckett wrote in the 15 years after World War II which helped to define the Theatre of the Absurd movement. 'Absurd' plays (which also include works by writers such as Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter) were, in some ways, a reaction to the end of the war and all dramatise what the writers perceived to be the meaningless, ridiculousness and confusion of human existence.

Later in his career, Beckett became increasingly experimental and minimalist. One of his most notorious plays is 1969's *Breath* which contains no clear characters or dialogue and which lasts less than a minute. 1969 was also the year that Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Beckett's abstract & somewhat revolutionary style – which might be described as a rejection of realism - has been, and continues to be, highly influential on many writers and theatre makers today.

Sources (all retrieved April 2012)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Beckett

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Samuel_Beckett

<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc7.htm>

<http://script.vtheatre.net/absurd.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breath_\(play\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breath_(play))

KRAPP'S LAST TAPE – SYNOPSIS

Like *Spoonface Steinberg*, *Krapp's Last Tape* is essentially one continuous monologue. The script contains detailed and specific stage directions which help the reader imagine the long periods without dialogue. A short synopsis of the play follows:

We join Krapp on his 69th birthday one evening sometime in the future. He is alone in his den sitting at a desk on which can be seen a tape recorder, a microphone and boxes containing reels of recorded tapes. For quite a few minutes Krapp appears to procrastinate – he checks his watch several times, he fiddles with the drawers of his desk, he paces around the room, he eats a banana and then nearly slips on the skin which he drops on the floor, etc. Finally he leaves the stage for a few moments – during which we hear the pop of a cork - and then returns with an old ledger, which we gather details the contents of each of the reels. He leaves through the ledger, reading little sections aloud which hint at poignant stories from his past (“Mother at rest at last...”, “Memorable equinox...”, “Farewell to love”, etc.) until he finds the tape he wants and puts it on...

We hear the recording as Krapp does – it is him as a younger, more confident man and we learn that the tape dates back to his 39th birthday and that he celebrated it alone. He laments the fact that he has eaten three bananas – which we learn are potentially fatal to a man with his condition (which we gather to be some sort of constipation). He ponders his own death for a short while, and then the silence that surrounds him. He then reveals that he has been listening to a much earlier tape and then reminisces about these times when he was in his twenties. We learn that he had a lover at the time, and he laughs – perhaps somewhat bitterly – at the aspirations and the resolutions (including drinking less) that he held back then. The Krapp whom we see onstage joins in with some of this laughter, but then stops the tape and exits. From offstage we hear several more pops of the cork, Krapp singing and then having a coughing fit before returning and continuing to listen to the tape.

We hear the voice of the 39 year old Krapp once more. He is talking about his mother dying after her long ‘viduity’ - the onstage Krapp pauses the tape at this point to look up this word in his dictionary – and the experience of visiting her whilst she was dying, which we gather involved a lot of sitting around waiting and people watching. We hear the 39 year old Krapp brooding and speaking in a rather self-pitying manner and the onstage Krapp impatiently fast forwards the tape several times until he reaches a section in which the 39 year old Krapp describes, in poetic and intimate detail, a liaison with a woman. After listening for a while, Krapp switches the tape off again.

Another prolonged period without words now follows. Krapp broods, fumbles, debates eating a banana but resists, and eventually goes offstage. We hear the sound of what we assume to be drinks being poured and consumed repeatedly before Krapp staggers back onto the stage. After another period of fiddling around with his keys, the machine, new reels, etc, he clears his throat and begins his new recording...

Krapp kicks off his 69th birthday recording by speaking disparagingly about his 39 year old self, whilst also reminiscing about the woman with whom he was having the liaison with. He switches off the machine again and broods, before continuing his recording which comes out as a series of seemingly unrelated fragments of memory. Although we do not hear any fully formed stories, his words are somehow still profoundly moving and give us a sense of the life that he has had. After hinting at another liaison he suddenly stops the tape and, after a long pause, throws it away. He puts the tape from his 39 year old recording back on, rewinds it, and listens to the section about the liaison and then lets it roll on...

We hear the end of the 39 year old Krapp's recording – he says:

“Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back.”

The tape continues to roll in silence, Krapp sits perfectly still looking straight ahead, and the curtain falls.

KRAPP'S LAST TAPE – KEY THEMES

Memory

Perhaps above anything else, *Krapp's Last Tape* is about memory. By making – and re-listening to - his annual recordings, Krapp is trying to keep his memories alive. But whilst this is positive in the sense that Krapp is endeavouring to keep a record of life for posterity, it is also sad because we feel that Krapp has spent his whole life looking back rather than focusing on the present or the future.

The play also illustrates beautifully the way that memories work. Krapp does not give us neat and complete memories but rather conjures fragmented images and phrases which, when viewed / heard together start to build up a picture of a life.

The Passing of Time

One of the most powerful themes in the play is the concept of the passing of time. There is something about Krapp's recollections – particularly the fact that none of the people that he mentions are in his life any more - that reminds us life is short, that it can easily pass us by, and that we should grab the experiences that are offered to us with both hands because nothing is forever.

Love

Through the fragmented memories that Krapp shares, and the little details that he remembers, we begin to understand that he has loved but that he has never (as far as we know) really experienced lasting happiness with any one woman. We can tell that this is something that profoundly affects him because he re-listens to the recording that has the most details about one of his affairs, and on several occasions he stops the tape and broods after a moment which reminds him of what once was.

KRAPP'S LAST TAPE – CHARACTER PROFILE

Krapp is a 69 year old man who is celebrating his birthday alone. We get the sense that he has no friends or family to speak of (we know that his parents have passed away, and that he has had several failed love affairs), and that he has achieved very little of note in his life. However, he does make a tape recording of himself talking about his life on his birthday each year, and keeps a ledger which details the contents of each of his recordings. From this we can deduct that he has a great desire to express himself, to remember himself (i.e. to keep his memories alive), and potentially to leave some sort of legacy behind when he dies.

Krapp is not enjoying the best of health – he drinks too much and we also know that he suffers from constipation (his evocative name also hints at this fact!) and despite knowing that bananas are therefore very bad for him he continues to eat them.

Krapp comes across as a little bit world-weary and a little bit lonely, and although his actions are often comic, he is ultimately a tragic figure – we get the sense that his life has drifted past him without him ever really taking it by the reins.

INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN HUMPHREYS, DIRECTOR

What attracted you to the two plays?

I first saw *Krapp's Last Tape* when I was on holiday when I was fifteen and I remember being blown away by it – it was unlike anything I'd seen before. Since then it's been something I really, really wanted to direct.



Jonathan Humphreys in rehearsal

Spoonface Steinberg is a play that I have been aware of since it first hit the radio in the 90s – I remember everyone talking about it. When I returned to it I was amazed by how moving and affecting it remains – and how potent it is as a piece of theatre.

The idea of placing the two together was really exciting – they are two very different pieces by two very different writers, both responding to the question of how and why we carry on living.

Why did you decide to put the two plays together as a double bill and what do you think ties them together?

Both pieces are ultimately optimistic pieces of work – although *Spoonface Steinberg* is more obviously so – and I feel like at the moment we are living with a lot of uncertainty. Placing the 2 plays - which are about the meaning of life – together felt relevant and ambitious for the theatre now.

What themes are you aiming to draw out of the two plays in your production?

With *Spoonface Steinberg* what interested me is the personal nature of faith and – slightly unfashionably – the championing of faith.

With *Krapp's Last Tape* I was very interested in how he deals with memory and how memory relates to our contemporary existence.

What would you like the audiences to take away from each of the plays?

By the end of the evening I hope that the audience will have asked themselves a few questions that they haven't asked themselves in a while, and to feel that other people also ask these questions. We get lost in the minutiae of life and forget that these things are our universal concern.

Re *Krapp's Last Tape* – Beckett is very explicit in terms of stage directions, etc. How are you approaching the task of making the play fresh & putting your own stamp on it?

It's a question of whether you can trust the writer. We begun – myself and Alan (*Williams, who plays Krapp*) – by rebelling against the stage directions and tried to make a new naturalistic version using motivation and we found it didn't work. We realised that the imagination of the writer was far greater than our own and that doing what he suggested might actually be very helpful! I think that because it's me directing and Alan performing then you can take it for granted that there will be something new in it. Alan presents something incredible which is story, image, sound – he's thought all that through.

Re *Spoonface Steinberg* – as a director, how do you help an adult actor play a 7 year old child, particularly a child with autism?

It is said that there are as many different types of autism as there are people with autism – there isn't one typical person with autism. However we are dealing with a writer who is phenomenally good and he's written a great autistic character. If you just trust delivering the words as he's written them then you will get a sense of how to communicate with them.

In terms of the question of age – the whole conceit of the play as it is presented to the audience involves a leap of imagination and therefore being strictly accurate is redundant. It's about a means

What advice would you give to a young person who would like to become a theatre director?

I would suggest that they find as many opportunities to direct as possible because it's only by directing that you discover what directing is! There are no rules and it's only by learning through doing that you discover your style. I would also suggest meeting – and talking to / learning from – as many theatre people as you can.

INTERVIEW WITH ALAN WILLIAMS – ‘Krapp’

Krapp is played by Alan Williams, who was a founder member of Hull Truck in 1972 and returns to the theatre for the first time in 30 years. He joined Hull Truck as an 18-year old actor and starred in many of the early shows including The Weekend after Next and Bridget’s House. Alan has written several shows including The Cockroach That Ate Cincinnati, a play about rock and roll, which was adapted for a film in 1996. Most recently, he has appeared in the BBC drama Luther and in the stage and film adaptations of Michael Morpurgo’s War Horse.



Alan Williams in rehearsal

What attracted you to the play?

I’d always wanted to do a Beckett play because I really enjoyed watching his work, and there’s something about performing in a play which means you really learn about how a writer works. For example, there was always this debate about the pauses in Pinter’s plays and it was only when I performed Pinter in front of an audience that I found out how they work – I had to do it to see what he was getting at. With this one I haven’t met the audience yet but I am intrigued to see Beckett works in front of them.

How would you describe Krapp, and how do you relate to him?

In lots of ways he’s like everybody – he’s compelled to try and express himself. He’s 69, he has no mates, there’s no one interested in him as far as we know, he has no achievements behind him but he has this desire for his life not to go unnoticed and so on his birthday every year he makes a tape of himself. That makes sense to me, even though I don’t do it myself. He keeps the tapes as a record – so that if he wakes up in the night he knows he really exists. I identify with that. I also like the fact that even though bananas are very bad for him because he has suffered with constipation for decades, he loves them and eats lots of them! I think anyone would identify with that idea of doing something even though you know it’s bad for you.

What are the pros and cons of doing a monologue and being on stage on your own?

I have done quite a lot of one man shows and the thing about them is that you don’t know how they will work until you have an audience. A one person show isn’t a one person show – the audience are your other cast members. The tricky thing is that they aren’t with you in rehearsals. The great thing about being on your own on stage is that you are closer to the audience – you are talking directly to them, the scary thing is that they haven’t rehearsed and they don’t know what to do!

Beckett is very explicit in terms of stage directions, etc in the play – is it challenging working with such prescribed movement?

Hmmm. Well, apparently later in his life when Pinter was asked ‘what about the pauses?’ he would say ‘just forget about them’. But when they (*Pinter and Beckett*) were first writing they were trying to persuade the first presenters of their work to stop and think. In some ways, some of the stage directions in *Krapp’s Last Tape* are a little bit over-detailed but both writers were writing at a time when there was an assumption that dialogue would just keep rolling on – for example Shakespeare wrote words that were designed to be spoken continuously – and they just wanted to challenge that.

Obviously you are performing as part of a double bill – how has *Spoonface Steinberg* influenced your rehearsal process?

I saw a run of it for the first time yesterday and I didn’t know the piece previously. When I saw it I thought – “that will have quite an effect on how people see *Krapp’s Last Tape*” (*which comes second in the double bill*) because *Spoonface* talks about hope and *Krapp’s Last Tape* is a bit more post-hope. It will be interesting to see how seeing the plays together will affect the audience.

What advice would you give to a young person who would like to become an actor?

I was in a Youth Theatre when I was younger and there were quite a few good actors in the group. The ones that ended up in acting were the ones that really wanted to do it – the people that couldn’t cope with the uncertainty of acting became doctors, etc. Acting takes persistence – the ability to just keep trying to do it.

A second piece of advice I would offer would be to always keep looking for a second opinion. I used to teach at a university and there were students there who had done really well at drama at college but were lost when working with new people. The key is to keep looking for new people to work with until you find kindred spirits – luckily I found that in my Youth Theatre. I don’t think I’d be where I am today without them.

INTERVIEW WITH PIPPA DUFFY – ‘Spoonface’

Rising star Pippa Duffy makes her Hull Truck debut in the title role. Best-known for her role as Faith in the BBC comedy Mouth to Mouth, she has recently been on our screens in the Channel 4 series Pete vs Life.

What attracted you to the play?

The challenge of doing a one woman show is probably the first thing that attracted me as I have never attempted anything like it before and wanted to prove to myself that I could. Aside from this, but equally tempting; the play itself is very beautifully written and is unlike any material I've performed in my career.

How would you describe Spoonface and how are you approaching the task of bringing her to life, particularly given her age and the fact that she has autism?

I see Spoonface as a totally pure soul. She sees things that other people don't look for and much of the banality of life passes her by. It's been interesting trying to capture this as we are so laden with cynicism and preconceptions, so the director and I have worked hard on stripping that away.

During the rehearsal process we have approached her autism from different angles, at times playing it very much with the characteristics of many people with autism and at other times letting the language do the work and not layering anything else on top. In the end we decided that in order to draw the audience in we had to ignore some typical traits of autistic people, such as no eye contact and monotonal vocal delivery, as these were a bit much given that it was just her on stage for an hour.

We have let the age come about via the text itself as it's so stylised, and the director was very keen that an adult actress not be seen to be 'playing' young. Hopefully it is clear who she is, but is still naturalistic.

How would you like the audiences to respond to the character and to the play? What would you like them to take away from the production?

When I try and describe the play talking about its subject matter people say "wow that sounds depressing". In actual fact I think the piece is very beautiful and hopeful, not depressing, so that is how I would love the audience to react.

Obviously you are performing as part of a double bill – what do you think of *Krapp's Last Tape* and to what extent has it influenced your own creative process?

I don't know very much Beckett but what I have seen has often left me a little bemused (terrible to admit I know!) so I wasn't sure what to expect from *Krapp's Last Tape*. The first time I watched it I was struck by the beauty of the language and the clarity of the story, completely not what I was expecting. Alan is a wonderfully watchable actor and I think the show is a great and enjoyable piece of theatre. The two pieces are totally different and all the creative elements of direction, design, sound, lighting and costume reflect this.

To be honest it hasn't affected my creative process as our rehearsals have been separate (which gave me a chance to learn lines!) but it is lovely being in this with another actor, otherwise it might be a bit lonely!

What advice would you give to a young person who would like to become an actor?

Depressing as this sounds my advice would be to think very carefully if this is what you really want to do. Acting is a wonderful profession when you are working, but most actors spent much of their career unemployed, so you really have to feel incredibly passionate about it to stick at it.

Having said that, jobs like this do make it all worth while.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES - SPOONFACE STEINBERG

N.B. All the below exercises can also be adapted for any other play that you might be studying.

Writing exercise – creating character profiles

Resources required: copies of the script, writing materials

In this pack you will see a brief character profile for Spoonface Steinberg, who is the only character in the play who actually appears on stage. Using clues from the text, write a character profile for one or more of the below characters:

1. Spoonface Steinberg's mum
2. Spoonface Steinberg's dad
3. Doctor Bernstein
4. Mrs Spud

Classroom / drama exercise - hotseating

Resources required: nothing specific, but the group will need to be familiar with the play

Hotseating is a technique by which an actor 'becomes' a character in the play and the other members of the group ask the actor questions, which he or she will answer in character, in order to develop a richer understanding of the character and of the play.

The questions might relate to information which the actor is likely to know – for example when hotseating Spoonface, someone might ask "how old are you?" to which the actor will know the answer is "7". However, a key aim of hotseating is to create a richer knowledge of the character and the character's history then is explicitly present in the text. So a more leading question might be "how did you celebrate your 7th birthday?" which would require the actor to use both their existing knowledge of the character and their imagination in order to respond.

It is possible to hotseat either as one big group, or in smaller groups or pairs.

The below characters would all be suitable candidates for hotseating:

1. Spoonface Steinberg
2. Spoonface Steinberg's mum
3. Spoonface Steinberg's dad
4. Doctor Bernstein
5. Mrs Spud

Drama / writing exercise – dramatising scenes which happen offstage

Resources required: the group will need to be familiar with the play and a few scripts would be useful for reference. If you are doing the writing version then writing materials will obviously be required.

Select a scene from the play which is referred to but not seen onstage (in the case of *Spoonface Steinberg*, of course, this would apply to all the scenes!) and either write it up as a script, or rehearse and then perform it in small groups. Just as with the hotseating exercise, the participants will need to use both information from the play and their own imaginations.

Below is a list of suggested scenes which are directly referred to in the play which would work for this exercise. You could also ask your participants to select their own scenes from the script.

1. Spoonface's parents realising that she has a gift for numbers
2. Spoonface's mum ringing her dad to tell him the news that Spoonface has terminal cancer
3. Spoonface's mum comforting her following her dad's 'breakdown'

Another option would be to work on scenes which are not referred to directly but which we can imagine might take place. Below is a list of suggestions and again – there are many more options if you would prefer to come up with your own.

1. The moment that Spoonface's parents find out that their daughter is autistic...
2. Spoonface talking to other children on her ward about their different music tastes...
3. Mrs Spud describing Spoonface's situation to her own children...
4. Doctor Bernstein's mother telling him about her time in the concentration camps...

PRACTICAL EXERCISES – KRAPP’S LAST TAPE

Writing / recording exercise – creating your own life record

Resources required: writing materials, recording equipment if needed

Create either a written piece or a recording which will serve as a record for the last year of your life – it might include personal details but it might also be about things that have happened in your school, your local community, or even in world news, over the last year. If you choose to create a recording it might be worth writing up some notes first.

Alternatively – as a class or group create one collective record which might focus on stories from the classroom or school environment, as well as current affairs, celebrity news, etc, and which the class/group could even return to – time capsule style – in a year’s time.

Writing exercise – another year in the life of Krapp

Resources required: writing materials, the text for reference

Select a year in Krapp’s life for which the recording isn’t played during the play. Using clues & characters from the text use your imagination to write the transcript for that year’s recording. Study the recordings which are in the script to give you information about the way Beckett uses language to create these – i.e. Krapp doesn’t necessarily use complete sentences and he often wanders from thought to thought rather than delivering very structured speech.

Drama exercise – Krapp tableaux

Resources required: writing materials, the text for reference

In small groups, use the information provided in the text to imagine what a defining moment might have been in Krapp’s life at ages 19, 29, 39, 49, 59 and 69. In your small groups, create a tableau (a frozen picture) to represent Krapp’s life at each of these ages.

If you wish to develop this exercise you could find ways to link the tableaux, or develop each tableau into mimes or full scenes.