



Unfolding Theatre The Making of *PUTTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER* (2016)

This LMYE Laboratory sees a trio of interlocutors – Annie Rigby and Alex Elliott of Unfolding Theatre and their collaborator, musician Ross Millard of The Futureheads – grant insight into how they made their powerful and ambitious 2016 performance *Putting the Band Back Together*.

The performance departs from a simple question, but one that has a weight in the biography of many: ‘Why did the band drift apart?’ Rigby details how this question, plucked from her own past, led her to embark onto a fascinating, deep and wide-reaching project, which conjugates communities across theatre- and music-making but which above all creates a larger community within and beyond the time and space in which the performance takes place.

In this documentary, made up of clips from the show and memories of moments and encounters, Elliott, Rigby and Millard generously talk through the project’s initial sketches, crystallisation and realisation: from a desire to investigate this widespread nostalgia, to the choice of focusing on the story of mutual friend, theatre-maker Mark Lloyd and his wish to reform his old band having received a terminal cancer diagnosis, to the experience of getting into a room and jamming together. Our guests crucially focus on the piece’s afterlife: each performance forms a ‘house band’ in each location it visits on tour two hours before the show begins, and as Maddy Costa writes in her ‘zine collecting impressions from the house band: ‘*Putting the Band Back Together* is shaped by, energised by the invitation to take part’.

Putting the Band Back Together is a theatre show about music: making it, listening to it, playing it; about what it brings to our lives individually and socially, to how it allows us to travel into the past and into the future, find kinship and form friendships, perhaps even about how it makes life worth living.

[00:00:23 to 00:01:55] Trailer for *Putting the Band Back Together* (2016)

[00:01:57] STARTING POINTS

Annie Rigby: Hello, my name is Annie Rigby. I’m artistic director of Unfolding Theatre and I was director of *Putting the Band Back Together*.

Alex Elliott: Hello, my name is Alex Elliott, I’m an associate artist at Unfolding Theatre and was one of the performers and devisors in the piece.

Ross Millard: I’m Ross Millard. I’m a songwriter and musician based in the North East, mainly in a band called the Futureheads, and I was the bandleader and one of the devisors for *Putting the Band Back Together*.

AR: First of all, we’re going to talk about the starting point of the show. And in some ways the starting point of the show is that I am a frustrated ex-musician. I grew up being in a band as a teenager, I really thought I was going to be a musician. I was carving a niche as an accordionist in what aspired to be a heavy metal outfit, but that didn’t really quite work and it never happened. I moved away at university, the band drifted apart, and I always felt very sad about it. I kind of stopped playing around then and never really picked it back up again, and it always felt painful to me. I remember being in a pub years later when I was then working as a theatre director and getting chatting to Matt Burman, who’s now at Cambridge Junction – but I mean, this was years before that. I didn’t know Matt at all but we both got talking about the experience of having played previously – and I think he’d actually been a professional musician in the early part of his career – and just that the pain that we felt and how poignant it still was for him and how difficult it was. I remember walking away from that conversation thinking: ‘I want to make a show about this. I don’t quite know what it might be, but it just feels like there’s something really rich in here.’ Anyway, fast forward a few years down the line



and a really good friend of ours, a theatre-maker called Mark Lloyd, was diagnosed with terminal cancer and his wife Kylie said to him – you know, after he'd had that diagnosis and had a little bit of time to absorb it: 'What is it you want to do in the time that you've got left?' And one of the first things that Mark said was: 'I want to put my old bands back together.' And he did! So he got together the gaggle of people he'd been in bands with when he'd been in his early 20s and a bit before that as well. And they played this brilliant gig at Arts Centre Washington in Sunderland – well, in Washington, part of the wider conurbation of Sunderland. [*Laughter.*] And it was a fantastic night, it was a fantastic gig. And in that moment, something really clicked for me about why I wanted to make this show, which was what that experience of Mark's said to me is: these things that we pushed to the side of our lives, like playing music, like friendship, like doing those creative hobbies that we might have nurtured as a child or as a teenager, they get pushed to the side as being less important parts of our life. But when faced with the reality that all of us are in – that life is finite – what was very clear to Mark is actually that is one of the most important things. I felt that that's a really important provocation, and something really beautiful to share. I think the way Mark lived the last part of his life was a very beautiful provocation, to say what really matters, what are the things we make time for, and actually maybe those things that you think aren't as important are the things that need a bit more space. So that was where it began.

[00:05:57] CREATIVE PROCESS

What I would start off by saying is, as a theatre director and in terms of the work that Unfolding Theatre makes, I'm not a maker who has a clear vision of the shape a show might be at that initial point. I had a very clear sense of what I wanted to say with it, I had a very clear sense of the kind of emotional landscape of it, but I had no idea what form it would take. I was very inspired obviously, as I've said, by Mark's story but I wasn't sure that the show would include his story or whether it would just be inspired by that experience. But what I always am quite clear about is who might be interesting to explore this with, and while I was starting to think of this, a research and development opportunity was published by Cultural Spring, who are a Creative People in Places organisation based in Sunderland and South Tyneside. They put a call out to develop a new piece of theatre in the community. So something that would bring together some artists but also would be something that people could get involved with locally. It just felt like a really good fit because I knew I was going to want to work with people who, like me, had given up playing music and get their insight on it, and it also – brilliantly because we were successful in our application – gave me the results to bring together a team of people. I knew I would want theatre-makers as part of that team, performers – but I also knew I would need and want a brilliant musician as part of that team. So Cultural Spring, because they're based in Sunderland and South Tyneside, said to me: 'It would be great from our point of view if you approached a local musician to join the team and have you ever worked with Ross Millard from the Futureheads?' And I said: 'No, I haven't. I've seen him play but I've never worked with him.' That was a brilliant suggestion, and that was how the team started piecing together and bringing together some people who I'd worked with a lot, like Alex, who's always been an associate artist of Unfolding Theatre, and Ross, who we were working with for the first time. So I'm now going to hand over to Ross to say a little bit about joining the gaggle.

RM: Yes, so back in 2015, I think this was when the project first began, I was a musician who'd spent most of my adult life in one band, really, and I certainly didn't have any experience of collaborating on a theatre project before. So when an email dropped into my inbox out of the blue from Annie, saying: 'Do you want to meet up for coffee? I've got something I'd like to run by you', I didn't really know what to think – because I didn't know what the project would entail and I didn't really know what an MD or a songwriter for something like this would really end up contributing overall. But after Annie had run through the premise as it was at that point in time – which is similar to what she's just gone through there – it's certainly something that resonated with me. I mean, I was part of a large scene of young kids when my band first started, and obviously along the way some people drop out, for whatever reason, and stop playing, and I've always been interested in the reasons why that is. So we got together in a church hall in Roker in Sunderland for our first R&D session, and I just remember being



massively energised by it because it's a sort of creative collaboration that I'd never, never participated in before, you know. It was a very different experience to getting in a room with a few other musicians and trying to create something from scratch. It was a lot more conversational, we got to know each other by speaking about our own experiences of playing instruments or bands that we liked and sharing anecdotes, stories, playing some music for each other, talking about our tastes and stuff like that. Obviously I think Chloe Daykin, the writer on the project, was also a new face as far as Unfolding Theatre were concerned. That was a really nice melting pot, like Annie says, of familiarity but also some slightly more unfamiliar energy in the room as well. And I think that was a really great starting point for us.

AR: Absolutely, and one of the things I've always talked about in terms of this creative process is that we were all stepping into risk together. We'll come on to talk about the people who joined the house band along the way and people who stepped up on stage with us, but it wasn't a situation where we as a group of professionals were doing what we always do and inviting people to take a risk and do something new. We were all out of our comfort zone. You know, Ross, like he says, had never been in a theatre show before, Alex, as part of the process, ended up having to really spend a lot of time learning kick drums, I often appeared in the house band playing my accordion. We were all taking that risk together and I think that gave the process and the performance an energy that was always really special – and unpredictable, but really, really special. We had, as Ross said, those first few days of research and development. Ross and Mark Lloyd, who I mentioned earlier on, Chloe Daykin, the writer who joined us on the process, myself. Then a few days in, because it clashed with something else you were working on, Alex then stepped in the second week of R&D to join the team and [he] felt like some things were already emerging, which he's going to talk a little bit about what he saw at that moment.

AE: Absolutely. It was very exciting, I have to say, to step into that room. I think I'd been in Leeds or somewhere, doing something very, very different. And I turned up and it was clear that the people in the room had gone through something quite significant. Inasmuch as – Ross mentioned Chloe Daykin, Chloe and Mark seemed to create this incredible bond which was immediate and obvious. They would sit together and perhaps talk a little bit, then Mark would write a few things down and then Chloe would go away and write a few things down, and then this piece of incredible writing would emerge – and this was just in the first few days of it. I do remember – I think it was about the end of the second or third day – I was lying under a piano with mallets, hitting the bass strings of the piano itself, doing the craziest things, thinking: 'This is going to be very different, this is going to be really quite challenging.' I know there were people there from Cultural Spring who were sitting and watching this unfold. I don't know what they were thinking, but they could genuinely see that there was excitement and there was a real creativity in the room. It was great, great.

AR: As we mentioned before, what became a really important part of that creative process – after having those first couple of weeks of intensive time together as a creative team – is we started having regular workshops with what became known as the 'house band'. Cultural Spring put this call out saying – I think it was monthly at some times, at other times it was fortnightly workshops called 'Putting the Band Back Together' – that basically the invitation was: 'Do you sing in the shower? Do you have a dusty guitar that hasn't been picked up for years? Come along, a chance to have a chat and have a play and be part of the making of a new show.' And we ran those workshops in all kinds of places. So we ran them in Pop Recs, which is a record shop but also a bit of an event space in Sunderland, we ran it in church halls, in community centres, in all kinds of places around Sunderland – and just started meeting and building relationships with all kinds of people. There was quite a lot of retired blokes that came along with their guitars, there was quite a lot of ukulele players, but there were also kids as well, people who were just at the beginning of learning to play. And we just got to know people – you know, I always felt it was the loosest expression of running a drama workshop. Because I was really conscious that a lot of people came into that room just because they wanted to have a bit of a jam, they wanted to play a bit of music together. And if I started saying: 'Oh, here's a tennis ball, throw it around the room and say your middle name, followed by—', you know, it wasn't going to fly. So the creative process of drawing out some of the content that might inform the lyrics or



the speeches or the theatrical sections that Chloe Daykin was scripting – it happened very gently, it was that kind of conversations around music kind of invitations that Ross was making – and Ross is going to talk a little bit about some of that that music process with the house band.

RM: Yeah, so like I alluded to earlier, this was an experience that was at the time massively taking me outside of my comfort zone because certainly I'd never been in a position of being a teacher or a workshop leader or anything like that before. And so I was thankful, as Annie said, that the atmosphere of these sessions was loose, really friendly and geared toward having some very nice conversations around our music tastes, the tunes that we knew how to play on our instruments, the things that we'd like to learn how to play, where our interests lie, all that like the sort of stuff you would talk about. The early sessions revolved around trying to build up little rhythms between sub-sections of the contingent that would turn up on any given night, trying to find a way of understanding how this might feed into a proper piece, if you like – you know, how might we as, at that time, a loose gaggle of interested musicians, be able to feed into this larger story. The thing that struck me more than anything else is this willingness to try things from the group, you know, people very rarely turned up with definite ideas of how they wanted it to go. I think people were, for the most part, really up for experimenting and just seeing what works for us as a group. We were fortunate that we had more than just guitarists, you know? That was a great starting point, because we had a little section of singers and some brass, some percussion stuff, and every week was different. That was the first challenge that struck me that became the major hurdle, the climb, really, as far as I was concerned, is how are we going to keep this solid, knowing that it's going to be potentially different people turning up every time. And I think that in a way through those workshops and having that question hanging over us, I think that almost fed into the actual overriding premise of the whole show being that, where the show goes on tour, we'll be getting people coming along who we don't have personal relationships with, who we've never met before, and what's the entry point for those people who might be interested in participating, regardless of what instrument, what ability, what reference points, what context. So we had to, over time, figure out ways of not only the atmosphere being welcoming to people, but also the structure by which people can actually contribute musically as well, you know? And that took that took a lot of working out in Sunderland. I'm extremely thankful that we had such a long period of workshops on a regular basis in Sunderland to trial all that and for us to figure out how that was going to work. I think really what it boiled down to, in the end, was being able to devise songs or small pieces of music that could be flexible enough in their arrangements for people to be able to tap into that within ten, 15, 20 minutes sometimes, because there were quite a lot of things to get through in a workshop eventually, as the show started to go on the road, you know.

AR: I think for me what was so special about the process was that I thought Ross did such a beautiful job at welcoming whoever came. It was a show where the premise had to be no one could be turned away. It couldn't be: 'You can only come if you've got Grade 5', that was completely at odds with everything that the show was trying to be about – so that welcome, regardless of what level you are at, what instrument you played, you know. We had time while we were sharing drum kits between people – yeah, I really appreciated the generosity and the time and the thinking that Ross did to make the mechanics work for all of those people to take part.

[00:20:00] MARK

So the next thing we're going to talk about is Mark, who was the centre in the end of the story that we chose to tell. As I said, at the beginning of the creative process I was inspired by his story but I wasn't sure whether he would want it to be told. You know, sensitive to the fact that he was in the last part of his life and very aware of that, and that there would be some real limits and pressures on what he could or couldn't do in that time. But as Alex said, he and Chloe really clicked and Mark really trusted Chloe Daykin as a writer. You know, she was so sensitive to what he had to say about the world and how he was able to articulate that. And very quickly it became clear that the spine of the show was going to be the telling of Mark's story. I'm going to talk a little bit about that experience of making work that at its heart is autobiographical and then becomes biographical. We had the extraordinary experience of working with Mark really for a year, from the very first moment of embarking on making



that show until he died in May 2016, which was just before we opened the show in July. And what I'm going to share is a little bit of work in progress that we shared at Live Theatre when Mark was performing content that would later live on in the show. The fact that we even performed this at Live was an accident. It was because somebody else dropped out at the last minute and Live got in touch and said: 'Could you come and share a little bit of this?', and so I suddenly said, 'Hey, Mark, would you be up for this?' – which he was. I'm going to play a speech that is from fairly early on in the beginning of the show that sets out the structure that we found for telling his story and the part of his life that he wanted to share through the show.

[00:22:08 to 00:26:21] R&D at Live Theatre featuring Mark Lloyd

AR: I could watch so much more of that! Yeah, really, really gorgeous to see Alex and Mark riffing off each other in that sharing there. We talked a bit about how Mark and Chloe work together to write this set of monologues, so we came up with this idea, this structure that would see this idea of using the tracks of an album to mark out a life story. And we did look at, you know, does the show tell 'track one marks childhood, track two duh-duh-duh'? But it became quite clear that the important part of this show was the moment of diagnosis through to the moment of stepping out on stage – with potentially this hidden bonus track that might reflect on some of that. So that really gave us the backbone of those episodes that we were going to share as part of the show. Chloe and Mark worked together and we scheduled in days where we knew we needed certain bits of the narrative, the sending the email out to his bandmates who he hadn't spoken to for 20 years to get them back together, the experience of practising and realising he was a bit rusty. We knew some of the bits that we needed but also there was a process that was about life and about accident and capturing his perspective and his experience in that last part of his life. So he played a gig for his wife Kylie's 40th birthday in the March of that year, only a few months before he died. And he was – it was all running a bit late, I think the band ended up playing a bit later in the evening than they'd originally planned. And Chloe came to the gig partly to get that experience of watching him play, but Mark – yeah he was coming up the stairs and then Chloe was leaving because she had to go and get a bus, so she had to get home early. And they had this incredible moment of conversation on the stairs that then became a really important speech in the show, which was about that moment of stepping out onto stage. So yeah, I have endless, endless gratitude for Chloe's brilliance in finding those moments and telling, finding the words for those stories, and Mark's brilliance at articulating them so beautifully. But then, of course, we knew from quite early on in the process that Mark wasn't going to be able to perform in the show, even though he was going to be at the centre of it in a lot of ways. Alex and Mark had worked together for years and years and years prior to working together at Unfolding Theatre through being at Northern Stage Ensemble together, and Alex, you knew that you were going to step into Mark's shoes, so to speak, to take on that text and to speak as Mark. And Alex is going to just talk a little bit about that experience of taking on that content.

AE: Yeah, absolutely. As I mentioned earlier, it was clear to me that, you know, Mark and Chloe had forged this incredible relationship which was incredibly productive as well. They just seemed to be able to create these significant pieces of writing fairly quickly and, just looking back at the video, not much of that writing changed. There were quite a few speeches that were created in those first few weeks or in those first few months of development that remained pretty much as they were, I think because they just understood that it had to be done, and I'd say of Mark he was incredibly focused in so many ways in those final months. He was very clear – very clear about many, many things. So when it came to understanding that I in effect would be taking on those words, it didn't even seem a decision that had to be made, it was clear that I was not going to be a pale imitation of Mark in any way or somehow characterise those words – that the words in themselves were the character, they reflected absolutely what Mark and Chloe had been discussing, what Mark was thinking about the things that really mattered to Mark. I felt then that my job was just simply to channel those in as unencumbered a way as possible. Obviously it'd be coloured by the natural things and some natural differences, but it really was clear that it wasn't about acting or even performing it, it was just about being true to those words. And I'd say, you know – from lots of members of the house band who came with us along that journey, who often participated several times in the show – they would



always talk about those words and they would always say: 'It was so moving.' You know, they'd seen the show in rehearsals, they've been with us to several performances, but they were still touched by those words, and I think it's a testament to that unique relationship. I had not seen such a close, such an intimate, beautiful, unique relationship, I'd say, between a writer and a performer.

AR: I also want to add that I think Alex – everyone should know Alex is a performer who is fond of an ad lib and *[laughter]* I think it's the most restrained I've ever, on any project that I've worked with him on, that kind of responsibility he felt to make sure he was speaking those words, and not adding his own twist on them, was definitely a discipline that that he brought to that project.

[00:32:49] PUTTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER IN PERFORMANCE

AR: We first presented the show in June/July 2016 at Summer Streets Festival, which is the festival that Ross runs in Sunderland, open air in a park, a community, music and arts festival. It was performed with at least 20 people in the house band crammed onto a tiny stage in a marquee. And also because of the nature of Summer Streets and that idea of connecting with local community groups, there was also a local dance school – I can't remember the name of the dance school now!

RM: I think that the woman who runs it is called Gemma, and I think that they just, they just like Southwick dance school basically.

AR: This amazing dance school had 50 kids from like three years old up to 16, all in their leotards, who came and danced with the final song of the show, which is called 'Happiness'. So it was a really extraordinary experience – I don't think we had even seen the dance routine that they'd made up before they piled into the space between the stage and the audience to dance it. But having done that original performance with the house band that we'd worked with over a year and a half, we then had to reconfigure the show a little bit for touring, and think how can it work so that somebody can turn up and sign up for an hour's rehearsal before the show and then be in the house band, how can that work? So there was a bit of a process of going back to the musical content and identifying the moment where it was really useful to have the house band join us on stage and also the pieces of music that were practically achievable – the amount that was achievable in that time, and the ways that they could contribute to that so that it could be open. I remember Ross describing it: 'It's an audacious idea!' – this idea that you can tour somewhere and meet people an hour before the show and they can come and be in a rehearsal and then join the house band. But that's what we wanted it to do, you know? So Ross is going to say a little bit about managing that, and then we're going to talk a little bit about some of the people we met along the way.

RM: To my mind, the only slightly comparable structure to that invitation is very avant-garde experimental artists like Damo Suzuki and psychedelic prog bands and stuff where there's a bit more of a loose level of contribution involved. You know, so the fact that we had some very definite songs, some pieces of music that had this structure and the very specific chord progressions and arrangements that we had to still be able to be flexible about enough that people could tap into that. As we progressed with the show and as we got more shows under our belt, between the creative team we developed a really nice relationship and way of working with participants. So Alex would either go off and teach someone some percussion parts or get them acquainted with the drums, or work on some harmony parts with the saxophone and perhaps a cornet player that might have turned up or the clarinet player or something like that. Maria was off in the keyboard area, with vocal harmonies and keys, and similarly Annie with the accordion and, again, sometimes the drums. We all learned between us to be as flexible as we could possibly be in terms of how we would be able to use that hour to teach people some parts. But also it was really important that people could bring their own creativity to the process as well. We didn't want it to be structured to the point where if you turned up with a bass guitar and there was very sort of set bass guitar parts for you to play. It was more about working with each individual to see where they were at in terms of their technical ability and their style, and whether they felt like they could then almost busk a section in terms of their own ability, or whether they wanted something very specific. We learned quite quickly that that there is a type of person that would come along who would be very keen on having notation, and so we started



to develop that. We developed some 'learn the song'-type tutorial videos that we put online so that people could get a little glimpse of what they were getting themselves into in advance; we learned that that was quite a good way of gently easing people into that notion. But really it was about all of us trying to create a band mentality in a band atmosphere in that hour that we had as a rehearsal period before the show itself. And also putting people's nerves at ease as well, because a lot of people turning up not quite sure what they were getting into, knowing they wanted to be part of it but not really understanding quite what they might have to do – and if some nerves set in, then it was really down to us to make sure that people were comfortable enough when the time was going to come, quarter way through the show, that they would still be keen enough to stand up, walk from the audience out on the stage. I mean I mean remember our run at Edinburgh festival being a real baptism of fire, in a sense, because obviously we had a show every day and the rehearsal room booked just over the road from Summerhall every single day. That was a real kind of – that was really valuable because in that time we had double bass, cornet, bells, flute, basically you name it, someone turned up with a different instrument pretty much on a daily basis. And that really got us familiar with adapting the songs to fit most instruments and most levels of ability, if you like, really. Because at the end of the day, it was most important that we just felt like a band and the people felt like they were having that experience of what it feels like to be in a band on a stage, really.

AR: And we're going to share with you a few of our memories of some of the house band members we met along the way. We ended up performing the show between 50 and 60 times, and over that period of time we had about 450 people joining the house band at different times. Some people joined multiple performances, some we met once, never saw them again. But we thought we'd pick a few to shine a light on what the house band meant or some of the different themes that we saw in terms of people's experience of it. So the first person we're going to talk about is a man called Big Jeff who came along when we performed at Trinity Arts [sic] in Bristol. Now I had never heard of Big Jeff before because I am, as previously mentioned, not a touring musician, but Ross's reaction to realising that Big Jeff was booked in made me realise that this was somebody who was part of the Bristol music scene. I mean, Ross, maybe you could explain better than I a little bit about Big Jeff?

RM: Yeah so, anyone that's ever been in a band that's been able to tour the UK and has played Bristol – getting attendance from Big Jeff is like a genuine badge of honour. You know, he's like a guy that goes to a show pretty much every night of the week, he's always down the front, he's always going wild. He's a cult hero: I mean, he was the ambassador for Independent Venue Week last year, he's known around the country now as this guy who's super-fanatical about music, and I think if you see Big Jeff at your show, you know you're doing something right. So when he signed up to come and play drums, that to me was an encouraging sign that this show that we put together was straddling that dividing line between the theatre world and the indie rock circuit in a really healthy, nice way.

AR: I think also for me, I've always been quite dissatisfied by the experience of theatre touring, particularly at the smaller scale. Very often you'll be somewhere for one night or a couple of nights, and it can sometimes feel like you put the show on, you do it, it goes well or it doesn't go well, and you pack it in the van and you're off. And for us, we really – you know, the way we are in the North East is we're very connected with our communities and we're very interested in making space where people can come together, and I've always said I want to find ways that we can be on tour that feel like the way we are at home. So that thing of making a space where we connect to people like Big Jeff who are part of the fabric of audiences in Bristol, and get to know him and realise how important he is and celebrate that in the show, [that] felt really lovely. We also spent quite a lot of time at Battersea Arts Centre, both in the development of the show and then we brought the touring show back there. One of the people that we had in the show was Sam, who is the younger brother of Conrad Murray, who runs the Beatbox Academy at Battersea Art Centre, and that was a really lovely connection. They were just at the beginning of making *Frankenstein: How to Make a Monster*, and again it was that accidental thing of: we happened to be at BAC, Conrad really encouraged Sam to – he didn't really know anything about the project but encouraged Sam to give it a try, he came and sang with us, had lots of fun. And then the one of the producing team at BAC was saying to us: 'Oh,



what are you doing on Saturday morning? Could you come in and say “Hey!” to the Beatbox Academy?’ And Alex, you and Ross went and spent some time with them in the very early stages of when they were starting to imagine making *Frankenstein*. And I don’t know if you could share a memory of that?

AE: We were asked to come along and deliver a workshop. I wasn’t really sure what we were going to do, but it seemed like the most sensible thing was just to get to know the group and see what they were up to. And they said: ‘Oh, we’ve been working on this version of *Frankenstein*, we’ve just spent a couple of hours on it, here we go!’ And they produced some incredible, I mean truly, mind-blowing stuff. Just microphones in the room. And I thought, well, this is going to be an incredible show. So already we were thinking about how this might work and the set, and they recreated basically the first scene that you see in that show as a vocal exercise, basically. So they were at sea, you could hear the creaking, and they completely blew us away. Then some of them came to see the show and there’s been this kind of straddling relationship. We were up in Edinburgh doing another show and they were doing *Frankenstein*, and I was just saying to everybody, including my family: ‘You must see this show, you must see this show.’ And so they would comment on ours and they kept – so it’s been a continuing relationship, and I think that they could see that it was absolutely about sharing experience and just celebrating being together in a room. Certainly I looked across at Sam at one point during that show when he was singing along with Maria, and I could just see how happy he was to be there. It’s also true that some of Mark’s friends from LAMDA, where he trained, came along to see the show and they were they were truly touched by what they saw, and felt a deep connection, I think, with what was there in front of their eyes and what we were celebrating.

AR: What was incredibly special is when we were at BAC, Chris also came, who was one of the people who was in Mark’s band that played in that gig. There’s a scene in *Putting the Band Back Together* which is basically Mark’s memory of trying to send that email to Chris, having not been in touch with him for decades, saying: ‘I’ve had this idea’, you know, not knowing where to start, to say: ‘Look, I’ve got cancer’, or to say, ‘Look, do you want to come and just play this gig?’, or: ‘How are you?’, or: ‘Where are you?’ Finding it impossible to [know] how do you write that email? Chris came along and we were really conscious that for him he’d not seen the show and he was going on the journey of hearing that part of the story from Mark’s side. So yes, some incredibly special memories.

And then Darren, the Reverend! We’re going to talk about another member of the house band who came, I think, for the first time possibly in Harrogate, I think, was the first time we met him when we were on tour at Harrogate Theatre, but basically rocked up every time we performed in West Yorkshire anywhere and just had a great time with it, just really got involved with the whole spirit of it. We then later in the touring run toured to Chapel FM in Seacroft, and he came along and played there. And then a couple of years later, we were back touring at Chapel FM with a show that we’d made years ago called *Best in the World*, and we realised that Darren, while he’d been at Chapel FM the first time of *Putting the Band Back Together*, he’d spotted a poster, which was all about training up as being a community radio host. And then he just got really involved in Chapel FM and was running one of their community weekly radio shows, a couple years down the line. From that experience of being in that space of provocation to ‘let’s try something, just do it, see where it leads’. He later came to Summer Streets. I remember spotting him in the crowd of a later year of Ross’s festival, Summer Streets, and that joyousness of thinking: ‘Wow, he’s jumped in the car and he’s driven for a couple of hours to come here!’ But the ease of then just making those connections, seeing the house band – I mean, I’ve had a few gig experiences like that, Ross, particularly in Sunderland.

RM: Yeah, you know, you just talking about Darren in that way, Annie, it just reminds me that that we’ve made quite a lot of deep-rooted friendships with people who’ve been in the house band along the way. You know, I’ve got a lot of them on Twitter and we’re constantly talking about music or sort of staying in each other’s lives. Like you said, there were a lot of people who would join the band more than once, so if we were in a neighbouring town, some people would drive a few hours sometimes to come and be part of the show again. We’d always have a drink together afterwards, and it definitely did feel like a band experience, you know? There’s a closeness to a lot of people



who've been involved because there is a sort of intimacy to collaborating in that fast-paced manner, you've got to be really open and prepared to just go for it. And I think, especially in someone like Darren's case, I think he's really benefited from having an experience like that up to the point where I know he's actually playing in his own band now and he's done some touring and, like he says, he's broadcasting on the radio and things like that. So it's really nice to have had a very small part to play in his musical renaissance in this case, for sure!

AR: So we're going to share a little clip of 'Happiness', which is the emotional feelgood stomp-along finale song – it's not quite the end of the show, but right up towards the end of the show – to give you a bit of a flavour of the house band. This is a bit filmed from the back of the space, it was at Northern Stage where we had a very, very full gaggle of people. And we're just going to share some of the wild delight of the experience of the house band because – as we talked about, we thought so much about the experience of how we look after people in the rehearsal process to get them into the position where they could play, and what I completely forgot about until the experience of touring the show was the impact of just performing. The impact of being on stage in a professional show and being in a band, and it was properly joyous. So here we go, I'm going to take us over!

[00:50:32 to 00:54:38] 'Happiness' from *Putting the Band Back Together* (2016)

AR: [*Laughter.*] A lot of very happy and wild and great memories with that!

[00:54:47] WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

AR: I'm going to talk a little bit about what happened next. And loads has happened next: as Ross said, there's a lot of friendships that have continued on. There's a young woman called Charlotte, who was only 11 or 12 when we started making that show, her dad drove her to so many rehearsals and performances, and when we got together a year or so after the show at Pop Recs, I remember asking if we were to make another project together what should we make it about? And Gareth, her dad, saying it should be about unexpected friendship, because that for him was what was at the heart of the experience. Since then, we've embarked on making that show, we've had a bit of a period of pause obviously because of lockdown and so forth, but we've recorded a podcast recently with Gareth about – what was really interesting about the experience of *Putting the Band Back Together* was that it was performed just after the Referendum vote. The Sunderland house band brought together people who were UKIP campaigners and Leave voters alongside people who were staunch Remainers, and none of that really mattered in the context of, you know, the joy of the house band and the fun of playing together. Of course there's a lot of complexity that sits under that, and that's something that we're now opening up on and exploring, having got the foundation of those relationships – and I had a brilliant conversation with Gareth just a few weeks ago about all of that. But for a long time after the show toured I got lots of emails, you know, every now and then I would get an email from somebody saying: 'Hi, you probably don't remember me' – although I always did – 'you probably don't remember me but I played cello in the house band when you were at Battersea Arts Centre, and actually you've prompted me to go and write my own music and I sang it at a buskers' night that I go to every week and I never ever perform.' Or: 'Do you know what, I played drums when you toured down to Reading and it's just been my 60th and I put my band back together and we played and here's a video.' It's been really joyful to see that for a lot of people it was a little spark, a little kick to go actually: 'These things matter, what feels like ridiculousness or perhaps indulgence, you know of like indulging your hobbies, actually this is the fabric of life and this is what really matters.' And Maddy Costa wrote a beautiful piece called 'Stories from the House Bands' that I can share a little pic of –

[00:57:36] Screen-shares document 'Stories from the House Bands' by Maddy Costa

So you can find this on Unfolding Theatre's website in the *Putting the Band Back Together* project page. She shared from the beginning of this fantastic email that we got from a house band member called Paul. So: 'I'm a bitter and twisted ex-musician who's been through the grinder. You know, I thought you might be the person I'm looking for, but no worries if not.' And she interviewed a load of people who talked about their experiences and she checked in with them six months or so down the



line to see the impact that it had had. And it was really beautiful sharing and hearing some of their stories and the confidence that some of them had and the activity it had sparked. We always took a house band selfie: lots of happy faces along the way. So yeah, it's been a beautiful project and it's had a big impact on us, and it's been really lovely to share some of that with you. I'm going to finish off by playing one more bit from the show, which is the hidden bonus track. Because Mark did end up – he hadn't written it in that moment at Live Theatre, but he had got together with Chloe and they'd written that speech by the end. So this is a bit of video from when we performed at Battersea Arts Centre, and I'll share the hidden bonus track with you to play us out, so thank you very much for having us.

[00:59:07 to 01:04:14] 'The Hidden Bonus Track' from *Putting the Band Back Together* at Battersea Arts Centre (2016)

Transcription by Nick Awde

Clips Summary

[00:00:15 to 00:01:55] Trailer for *Putting the Band Back Together* (2016)

[00:22:08 to 00:26:21] R&D at Live Theatre featuring Mark Lloyd

[00:50:32 to 00:54:38] 'Happiness' from *Putting the Band Back Together* (2016)

[00:59:07 to 01:04:14] 'The Hidden Bonus Track' from *Putting the Band Back Together* (2016)

Works Cited

Costa, Maddy (2016) *Stories from the House Bands*,

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bbf1e66af4683682939f193/t/5e4416304e121a43fdd8c8ff/1581520443330/UT_StoriesFromTheHouseBands.pdf.

Video available at <https://www.auralia.space/laboratory4-unfoldingtheatre/>.

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