

... some trace of her

Inspired by *The Idiot* by **Fyodor Dostoevsky**
Adapted by **Katie Mitchell** and the **Company**

From the translation by **David Magarshack**
The production also uses the poems of
Emily Dickinson

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Photo (Hattie Morahan) Stephen Cummiskey

Further production details:
nationaltheatre.org.uk

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The National's production

...some trace of her had its premiere at the National's Cottesloe Theatre on 30 July 2008

The Company

JAMIE BALLARD
PANDORA COLIN
SAM CRANE
GAWN GRAINGER
HELENA LYMBERY
HATTIE MORAHAN
BRADLEY TAYLOR
BEN WHISHAW

Music played live by

CALINA DE LA MARE (MD/violin)
ALISON DODS (violin)
RACHEL ROBSON (viola)
CHRIS ALLAN (cello)

Director.....**KATIE MITCHELL**
Designer.....**VICKI MORTIMER**
Director of Photography**LEO WARNER**
(for Fifty-Nine Productions Ltd)
Lighting Designer.....**PAULE CONSTABLE**
Music.....**PAUL CLARK**
Sound Designer**GARETH FRY**
Artistic Associate**PAUL READY**
Company Voice Work**KATE GODFREY**

Production Manager **TOM RICHARDSON**
Staff Director **AMELIA SEARS**
Stage Manager **PIPPA MEYER** (to 2 AUGUST)
CLARE SIMMONDS (from 11 AUGUST)
Deputy Stage Manager **MARY O'HANLON**
Assistant Stage Managers **IAN FARMERY** and **DAN READ**
Costume Supervisor **LYNETTE MAURO**
Prop Supervisor **CHRISTOPHER LAKE**
Video Design Associate **LYSANDER ASHTON**
Associate Sound Designer **CAROLYN DOWNING**
Assistant to the Designer **ALEX EALES**
Video Production Engineer **PAUL KENAH**
Assistant Production Manager **JAMES MANLEY**
Design Associate **BEN AUSTIN**
Production Photographer **STEPHEN CUMMISKEY**



Photo (Hattie Morahan and Ben Whishaw) Stephen Cummiskey

Biography – Fyodor Dostoevsky

Born in 1821 Fyodor Dostoevsky was the second of seven children. His father was a retired military surgeon and an extremely violent alcoholic. Dostoevsky grew up in a rough neighbourhood in Moscow, and it is quite possible that these early years fuelled the interest and compassion towards the poor and oppressed, which later became apparent in his work.

Dostoevsky suffered from epilepsy from the age of nine. There was very little treatment for the condition at the time, and many epileptics were sent to lunatic asylums. Fyodor suffered from seizures throughout his life, and these are – most likely – the basis for Prince Myshkin's experiences of epilepsy in *The Idiot*.

Dostoevsky's mother died of tuberculosis in 1837. He and his brother were sent to the Military Engineering Academy in St Petersburg – a subject in which he had little interest, however, he was able to study Russian and French literature there. Two years later his father died under suspicious circumstances and, though it was never proved, it is believed that his serfs murdered him by drowning him in vodka.

In 1841 Dostoevsky received a commission from the army and, the following year, was made a lieutenant. In 1844, with the help of a small income from his estate, Dostoevsky resigned from his commission to concentrate on writing.

In 1846, his first novel *Poor Folk* was acclaimed and he was hailed as the new Gogol. It was described as "the first attempt at a social novel we've had". His next novel, *The Double*, was less enthusiastically received.

The same year, Dostoevsky joined a group of utopian socialists. His involvement meant little more than healthy debate, but the police were in pursuit of him and, on 23 April 1849, Dostoevsky and his brother were arrested. He was initially condemned to death, but his sentence was then changed to four years' hard labour in Siberia, where he was kept in a stockade, wearing fetters. It was during these years that he became a monarchist and a devout follower of the Russian Orthodox Church. He was forced to spend his days with some of the darkest characters in Russia, characters who clearly informed much of his writing in later life.

He was released in 1854 and in 1857 married Maria Isaev, a 29-year-old widow. In 1859 he resigned from the army and returned to St Petersburg to write.

In 1861 Dostoevsky served as editor of the monthly *Time* – later suppressed because of an article on the Polish uprising. *The House of the Dead*, a fictional account of prison life, and *The Insulted and the Injured* were also published.

In 1862 Dostoevsky travelled abroad for the first time, visiting France and England. In 1864, devastated by the death of his wife and brother, and crippled by debt, he became increasingly obsessed with gambling and suffered frequent epileptic fits.

In 1866, *Crime and Punishment* was serialised in *Russkii vestnik* and appeared in book form the following year. The same year he wrote *The Gambler* to satisfy an agreement with his publisher who threatened to claim the copyright to all of his works if he did not deliver another book.

In 1867 Dostoevsky married Anna Grigoryevna Snitkina, his 22-year-old secretary, and, to avoid his creditors, left Russia with her to live in Germany, Italy and Switzerland, mostly in poverty. Over the course of 1868-69, he wrote *The Idiot*.

With its success, Dostoevsky returned to Russia and bought a house in the provincial town of Staraya Russa. In 1879-80, Dostoevsky wrote *The Brothers Karamazov* and was recognised as one of Russia's great writers.

On 9 February 1881, he died of lung disease in St Petersburg, in Alexander Nevsky monastery. His funeral was attended by 40,000 mourners. His tombstone reads: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John 12:24).

Synopsis of *The Idiot*

Prince Myshkin meets Rogozhin on a train to St Petersburg. Rogozhin tells Myshkin of the recent death of his millionaire father, and his infatuation with Nastasya Filipovna, a beautiful woman with a bad reputation.

Myshkin, an orphan from an early age, who left Russia four years ago for epilepsy treatment in Switzerland, is returning to St. Petersburg after the money for his treatment has run out. He tells Rogozhin of his hopes of meeting his only remaining relative, a Mrs Yepanchin, who lives with her family in St Petersburg. The train arrives and the two men part friends.

Myshkin visits the Yepanchin's house and meets General Yepanchin, and his clerk Ganya. During their meeting the Prince sees a portrait of Nastasya Filipovna and is transfixed by the beauty and suffering in her face.

Myshkin learns that Ganya intends to marry Nastasya, a plan which has been facilitated by General Yepanchin and Totsky. Totsky, a rich aristocrat who took on the guardianship of Nastasya when she lost her parents aged seven, began grooming her when she was 12, taking her as his mistress when she was 16. Totsky recently promised Nastasya a dowry of 75,000 roubles in order to remove her from his obligation.

Myshkin also meets Mrs. Yepanchin and her three daughters. He is particularly taken with the Yepanchins' youngest daughter, Aglaya.

Myshkin takes a room in Ganya's flat. There he meets Nastasya, who has come to visit Ganya. A rowdy crowd of drunks arrive, led by Rogozhin, who promises to bring 100,000 roubles for Nastasya to her birthday party that evening. She is to announce there, once and for all, whether she will marry Ganya.

Myshkin attends Nastasya's birthday party hoping to dissuade her from marrying Ganya, who he knows is only marrying her for the money. Rogozhin arrives with 100,000 roubles for Nastasya. Myshkin offers to marry her, however Nastasya rejects Ganya, Totsky and Myshkin. She throws Rogozhin's 100,000 roubles on the fire to torture Ganya and runs away with Rogozhin.

Rogozhin and Nastasya flee to Moscow, and Myshkin follows.

Ganya falls ill, resigns from his job, and moves in with

his sister and her husband. Nastasya runs between Rogozhin and Myshkin. Eventually she promises to marry Rogozhin, but runs away again almost on the day of their wedding.

Myshkin inherits a small fortune from a distant relation. During his time in Moscow he writes a letter to Aglaya, which she keeps.

Totsky becomes engaged to a high society French woman and plans to move to France.

Aglaya meets Radomsky, a rich aristocrat, who begins to woo her. At the beginning of June, Aglaya's family move for the summer to Pavlovsk, a country retreat popular with St Petersburg nobility.

Six months later, Myshkin returns from Moscow. He visits Rogozhin's house where they discuss religion, and exchange crosses. Rogozhin takes Myshkin to meet his senile mother, even though he now considers Myshkin a rival for Nastasya's affection. Myshkin goes looking for Nastasya at her house despite promising Rogozhin he will not see her. Nastasya is not at home; Rogozhin follows Myshkin back to his hotel and attempts to kill him. That very same moment, Myshkin suffers an epileptic fit. Rogozhin runs away and Myshkin is spared.

Myshkin leaves for Pavlovsk to recover. He sees Aglaya and meets her suitor Radomsky. A group of nihilists come to Pavlovsk seeking payment from Myshkin; one of them claims to be the illegitimate son of Myshkin's benefactor who paid for his treatment in Switzerland. The claim is disproved but, during this encounter, Myshkin and the Yepanchins meet Ippolit, a boy of 17 who suffers from tuberculosis and has only weeks to live. Ippolit falls for Aglaya.

Myshkin continues to spend time with Aglaya and her family. Soon everyone around them begins to see that Myshkin is in love with her. One day, while Myshkin and the Yepanchins are out walking, Nastasya intrudes upon the gathering and tries to insinuate that Radomsky, Aglaya's suitor, has been her lover, in order to facilitate Myshkin's marriage to Aglaya.

Myshkin has a birthday party, at which Ippolit reads out his 'necessary explanation' (suicide note) and then attempts to shoot himself. His attempt fails.

Myshkin discovers that Nastasya has been writing love letters to Aglaya. Aglaya arranges to meet

Myshkin and give him the letters. Myshkin meets Nastasya and Rogozhin in the park at night, and Nastasya says she will marry Rogozhin, when Myshkin's marriage to Aglaya is confirmed.

Aglaya's family begin to treat Myshkin as her fiancé. They arrange a huge party to introduce him to society. Myshkin has an epileptic fit and knocks over a priceless Chinese vase.

Aglaya forgives him and arranges a meeting between herself, Myshkin and Nastasya. During the meeting the two women force Myshkin to choose between his love for Aglaya and his compassion for Nastasya. Myshkin hesitates at the sight of Nastasya in anguish. Aglaya leaves, ending all hope of an engagement between her and Myshkin.

Nastasya and Myshkin become engaged and prepare for the wedding, but on the day, Nastasya flees with Rogozhin.

The next day Myshkin follows Nastasya and Rogozhin to St Petersburg. Rogozhin leads Myshkin to his house where he has stabbed Nastasya that night. The two men lie with her dead body until morning, when they are discovered.

Rogozhin is sentenced to 15 years' hard labour in Siberia. Myshkin loses his mind and is returned to the clinic in Switzerland, and Aglaya runs off with a Polish count who eventually abandons her.



Photo (Hattie Morahan (on screen)) Stephen Cummiskey

The creative process

Pre-production

Workshop

Before rehearsals for ...*some trace of her* began, Katie Mitchell and Leo Warner, the video designer, worked with a group of actors on ideas for the piece in a two-week workshop. In particular they wanted to find a style for the images that would be produced live and projected onto the projection screen.

They started by looking at the work of photographers from the 19th century, such as Gustav Klimt, August Sander and Julia Margaret Cameron. Leo, Katie and the actors selected a series of photographs from books of reproductions, and then tried to reconstruct each one as a video still. The actors put on costumes from the period and positioned themselves exactly like the people in the photographs. Leo then used small lights on stands to replicate the angle and quality of the lights used by these 19th-century photographers. The video images were then processed by a media server so that they came up in black and white or sepia on the projection screen.

At the end of the two weeks it became clear that the work of two female photographers in particular provided the style they were looking for: Lady Hawarden and Julia Margaret Cameron. The actors also carried out research into 19th-century photographic processes. This was later used during the rehearsal period to build the idea of one of the characters in the novel, Nastasya Filipovna, as a photographer.

Katie was also interested in the work of an American 20th-century female photographer, Francesca Woodman (1958–1981). Katie thought that her idiosyncratic aesthetic might be useful when it came to conceiving images of the women in the novel. In the workshop the actors reconstructed some of Woodman's photographs as video stills. These still images proved very useful for capturing some of the more painful aspects of the women's experience of unhappiness in love. In the end, the group decided to draw on the photography of Woodman, Hawarden and Cameron.

It was clear that these three female photographers would provide a visual guideline for how each shot would look on the screen in the final performance,



Photo (Hattie Morahan) Stephen Cummiskey

both in terms of colour and tone.

For a selection of **Francesca Woodman's photographs**, visit:
<http://www.heenan.net/woodman/>

for **Lady Hawarden's**, visit:
www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/photography/photographerframe.php?photographerid=ph030

and for **Julia Margaret Cameron's**, visit:
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/indexplus/result.html>

Narrative choices

When director Katie Mitchell started work on the novel before rehearsals began, it became clear to her that it would be impossible to adapt the whole of *The Idiot* as it would take years of rehearsals and several days to perform. So before rehearsals began, she made three decisions about how she would adapt the novel.

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- To focus on the central love triangle between Myshkin, Rogozhin and Nastasya.
- To select eight characters from the novel to tell the story with.
- To reduce the novel (over 300 pages) to a 40-page document. (This document contained the sections of the novel that the company were going to work on for the performance. It was not shaped into a play script but simply included the sections of text that Katie wanted to focus on. The shaping of that text was to occur much later on in the rehearsal process.)

Character preparation

Katie decided to build the adaptation around the following characters:

Prince Myshkin: Orphaned from an early age, he has suffered from epilepsy all his life and has spent the past four years in Switzerland being treated for his condition.

Rogozhin: Fled from his family five weeks before, after spending a vast amount of his father's money on an extravagant gift for Nastasya Filipovna. His father died a month ago, and he has inherited his fortune.

Mrs. Rogozhin: Mother of Rogozhin. She has suffered from senile dementia for two years and stopped speaking altogether upon the death of her husband.

Nastasya Filipovna: Orphaned from an early age. Totsky became her benefactor until he took her as his mistress when she was 16.

Totsky: An incredibly wealthy land owner and high society man who is seeking to marry and, therefore, needs to rid himself of his obligation to Nastasya Filipovna.

Aglaya: The well educated and wealthy daughter of Mrs Yepanchin, Prince Myshkin's only remaining relative.

Ganya: A clerk and secretary to Aglaya's father. He has been nominated by Totsky as Nastasya Filipovna's preferred spouse.

Ippolit: Lives with his widowed mother and younger brothers and sisters. He is in the final stages of tuberculosis.

Part of my early work and research for the production was to write up the biographies of these eight characters. This meant re-reading the novel and piecing together all the facts about the lives of the characters before the action began. I mixed facts from the novel – such as dates of birth – with simple invention. For example, the novel tells us that Nastasya Filipovna had a sister who died of whooping cough and it was I who decided on her date of birth and the year that she died.

Here is Nastasya's biography:

1844 27 November. Nastasya's born to Philip Alexandrovich Barashkov, a retired army general from a good family.

1845 Her sister born.

1851 Her father manages to overcome his debts and goes on a visit to the local town. His home catches fire and his wife dies. When the father finds out he goes mad and dies from brain fever. Totsky, a landowner from an adjoining estate, undertakes to bring up and educate Nastasya and her sister. The two sisters move in with Totsky's estate agent, and his family, who are German. Totsky moves abroad.

1852 Nastasya's sister dies of whooping-cough.

1856 Totsky returns to Russia, and looks in on his estate. He notices the twelve year old Nastasya and realises that she will grow into an attractive young woman. He takes on her education and development. A Swiss governess is employed and moves in with Nastasya.

1860 Summer. The Swiss governess leaves and Nastasya is taken to live on a remote estate near a village called Eden. She is given a maid and a housekeeper. The house is filled with musical instruments, a library, pictures, prints, paintings, brushes and a greyhound. Two weeks after the move to Eden Totsky himself arrives, starts having sex with her and stays for about three months.

1861 – 4 Totsky spends two or three months with Nastasya every Summer.

1864 Winter. A rumour reaches Nastasya that Totsky is to be married to a rich and beautiful society woman. Nastasya leaves her house and goes to St Petersburg to see Totsky, tells him that she has

The creative process

always hated him, and has felt contempt for him ever since he first slept with her. She has come to prevent his marriage and wants public humiliation for Totsky. Two weeks later Totsky decides to install Nastasya in St Petersburg, and set her up in high society. She has only female house staff.

1864-9 Over the next five years Totsky tries to tempt her with suitors. Nastasya leads a modest life and eventually meets General Yepanchin, Federshenko, Ptitsyn and finally Ganya.

1869 General Yepanchin and Totsky visit Nastasya to try to persuade her to concede to a marriage for Totsky, by giving her the right to decide on whether or not it should go ahead. Totsky apologises for his terrible actions. They suggest Ganya as a potential husband for her. Totsky tells her of the 75,000 roubles he will leave her in his will. Nastasya considers the proposal and accepts the money.

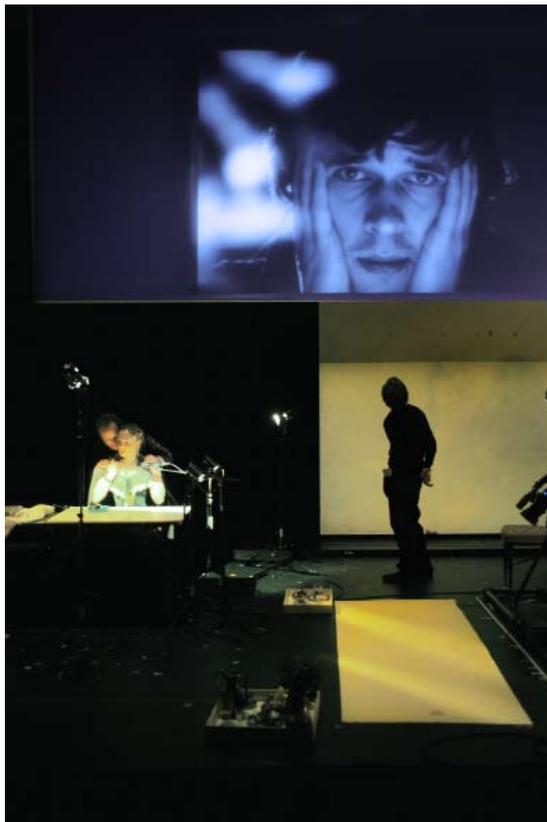


Photo (Gawn Grainger, Hattie Morahan, Ben Wishaw (on screen)) Stephen Cummskey

Ganya and Nastasya meet. Nastasya says she will continue to consider the marriage, but must have the right to change her mind right up until the wedding day, as will he.

Nastasya hears of Ganya's hostility to the marriage, knows that he is only marrying her for money, and will eventually exact revenge if a wedding goes ahead.

November, 2 days ago: Nastasya tells General Yepanchin and Totsky that she will give her answer on her 25th birthday.

Today she has given her portrait to Ganya.

I prepared a biography like this for each of the eight characters and these were handed out to the actors on the first day of rehearsals.

Rehearsals

The actors' work on this production was a combination of normal rehearsal activities – ie: work on their characters' biographies – with learning new skills, like creating sound effects and using video cameras. It was essential to train the actors in these new technical skills so that they could use video and sound confidently in the performance.

To begin with Katie set up some simple training sessions. Leo (Warner) explained the function of the different settings on the camera, how the tripods worked, and the way in which lights could be used to focus objects or people in shots. Gareth Fry and Carolyn Downing, the sound designers, then explained the way in which films use sound effects. He showed us several clips from films like *The Godfather* and pointed out how literal and abstract sounds were used to underscore the action. He also explained the way in which sound studios used Foley artists to add additional sound to films, after they have been shot on location.

Foley

Foley describes the art of laying down sound to film images. It is a highly skilled practise and there are only twelve professional Foley artists in the UK today.

Foley artists work in a sound studio full of objects and surfaces that they use to make sound effects.

For example, the Foley artists use large trays of earth, sand and gravel, as well slabs of concrete on the floor, to make the sound of footsteps by walking

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on these surfaces. There is a large film screen at the end of the sound studio on which there is a time code. Films are played on the screen without sound and eventually, layer by layer, the different sound effects are introduced. In a scene of a woman running along a beach, the Foley artists would need to lay down at least four sound tracks – the sound of the woman's footsteps on the pebbles, the movement of her clothes as she runs, the noise of her keys in her pocket and the bump of her handbag banging against her hip.

After Gareth and Carolyn's workshop we invited a Foley artist, Jack Stew, to show the actors how he worked in more detail. Jack brought a large suitcase full of curious objects, such as crisp packets, feathers, different types of dog-chew and odd shoes. All the objects were used to make different sounds. His visit gave the actors ideas on how to produce some of the more complex sounds in the piece. For example the sound of insects flying, or maggots wriggling in the earth, is best made by rubbing dog-chews together. The highlight of his visit came when he achieved the sound of a woman walking down a street late at night using simply a high-heeled shoe on his right foot.

Throughout the rehearsal process the actors, Carolyn and Gareth continued to work on both the literal and abstract sound effects. For example, down-turned tea-cups were pushed onto a gravel tray underneath a pillow to create the sound of Nastasya's horse arriving at the church, and a wet hand rubbed around the rim of the fish bowl was used to make a more high pitched abstract sound.

All the sounds in the performance were created live by the actors and then directed into microphones. These were processed and amplified in the soundboard and the output through speakers suspended near the projection screen.

Once the actors had finished training in sound and video, we approached the idea structure underpinning the novel.

Ideas

Katie and the actors isolated four main ideas underpinning the action in the novel:

- Death and Illness
- Love

- Faith and Morality
- Materialism

Katie then asked the actors to think of moments from their own lives that related to these ideas and to re-enact them. For example, one actor chose to explore the theme of Faith and Morality by re-enacting a moment in their life when they had behaved badly in the run-up to a family wedding. Another actor explored the theme of love by re-enacting a time when they were rejected by a lover. Everyone discussed the relationship between these moments from the actors' real lives and the events in the novel. This was a way of bringing the ideas to life in a concrete and practical way for the actors.

Character

To begin with, each actor worked on the character they were playing in the novel by carrying out research into the 19th century in order to fill in any gaps in the biographies that I had prepared for them. For example, Ben Whishaw researched treatments for epilepsy at the time and clinics in Switzerland. He discovered that cold water cures were regularly used and there was a preventative drug that could be taken using a pipette. This research gave him a clearer picture of what his character, Myshkin, had been through during the two years he spent at a clinic in Switzerland.

Katie then discussed who the actors would be playing when they weren't being projected on the projection screen as their 19th-century character. 'Who am I when I am operating the camera or doing sound effects?' asked one of the actors. Katie explained that each actor needed to create a second character, living in 2008, who had trained in the video and sound skills they were using in the performance. She suggested that they should base their biographies on present-day performance or visual artists who would be confident and skilled in working in either sound or video.

Each actor went away and invented a biography for their second character. For example, Hattie Morahan invented a character called Maria based on the biography of the modern-day performance artist, La Ribot; Gawn Grainger drew on the biography of Jack Stew – the Foley artist who had visited rehearsals – to build a character called Jack Meechan; and Helena Lymbery based her second character on the visual artist, Tacita Dean.

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It was important for the actor's second character to have an affinity with Dostoevsky's novel (or the character that they were playing within it). For example, the actor Sam Crane plays Ippolit in the novel and his second invented character is Isaac Samuel Bartlett. Ippolit is a young man with tuberculosis who worries about the point of living on with a terminal condition. Isaac is a sound video artist whose mother died of cancer when he was 15, and whose father is a priest. Much of Isaac's sound and video work therefore focused on Faith and Death, themes that resonate strongly with the ideas underpinning *The Idiot*.

The actors then shared their biographies with each other – here is an example of how two of the actors presented them to the group:

Name: Sadie May Morton

Born: 1966 in Vauxhall

1969: Moves to the countryside in Kent.

1971: Roger the cat dies.

1972: Makes a 3ft dragon from egg boxes.

1974: Her grandmother shows her a box of old photos of her and family dating back to 1900s.

1975: Grandmother gives her, her first box brownie camera.

1977-81: Does lots of walking in London with her dad. Goes to the National Portrait gallery, likes Titian and Vermeer.

1978: Grandmother shows her photography by Brandt and Rogers capturing class divides and England during the Blitz.

1979: Grandmother develops dementia and moves into family home. She spends lots of time with her. Her grandfather dies aged 59. He was an epileptic.

1982: Moves to London, starts A-levels.

1983: Grandmother dies. Sadie starts reading Beckett and Sartre.

1984: Trip to Russia with school, visits Leningrad and Moscow.

1985-6: Travels round Europe with friends, Paris, Lisbon etc. Becomes more interested in film. Her main influences are Tarkovsky, Ozu and Mizoguchi – particularly his film *Tokyo Story*.

1986-9: Does art and design at Chelsea College of art.

1991: Goes to Greece, does fine art. Has some group shows, at Corner house in Manchester.

1991-3: Goes to the Slade and studies painting.

Name: Eddie Shaw

Eddie was born in Dorset in 1981. He studied fine



Photo (Ben Wishaw, Bradley Taylor) Stephen Cummiskey

art at Central St Martin's. Since graduating in 2005 Eddie has been devising a solo piece of performance art called 'Acts of helplessness'. The show is built around a series of over 100 conversations conducted with people – sometimes family and loved ones, more often strangers – who have agreed to share their deepest and most intimate experiences of love with him. A version of the piece was presented at The Riverside Studios in 2007. Eddie has recently started a collaboration with Dorset-based performance art group Sheela-na-gig. Eddie now lives in East London and works in Ripping Yarns bookshop, Bethnal Green Road.

Each actor presented an example of the present-day character's performance or art-work from 2008, to the rest of the group. Actor Sam Crane created a sound installation that took over the entire rehearsal space, of the kind you might see at The Hayward Gallery or Tate Modern. He projected footage of the wind blowing across moors with scattered sheep on

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the video screen, and played the sound of wind very loudly out of all the speakers. He then positioned a small computer with headphones under the projection screen with a chair next to it. You could sit and look at the image of a crack in a wall on the computer, through which the windswept landscape could be seen on the projection screen. Through the headphones came the sound of someone reading a poem.

When the ensemble had a clear picture of the characters they were playing in the novel, as well as the 2008 characters they had invented, it was necessary to work out the circumstances of the performance.

Immediate circumstances

The first question we had to answer was, 'Why were these visual and performance artists from 2008 performing an adaptation of Dostoevsky's novel?' This led us to invent the following simple and concrete circumstances:

Time: The action takes place on 2 September 2008. The performance starts at 7.30pm and has to be inside the time envelope of an hour and a half.

Place: It is BBC Radio Studio Two at Maida Vale.

Circumstances: The performance is a one-off event and the sound output will be relayed live on BBC Radio Three. The video output will be relayed live at The White Cube Art Gallery. There is an invited audience at the Maida Vale Studio made up of colleagues, loved ones and promoters. The promoters are present with a view to the giving the project a future life. The purpose of the event is to reach a bigger audience than the artists would be able to singly, and to experiment with simultaneous outputs through different mediums (radio and video links with an art gallery). The group has no political, moral or religious agenda in making the piece besides their own personal interests.

Katie said that these circumstances would determine the way in which the piece was acted from now up until the final performance.

Once these starting points for character, ideas, narrative and circumstances were mapped out, we began the arduous task of devising exactly what the

audience were going to see on the screen, shot by shot.

Devising the images

Early on in rehearsals Katie gave a copy of the 40-page document, that she had put together before rehearsals had begun, to every actor to read. It was not clear, at that stage, whether the narrative would be told in a linear order (as it is in the novel) so she suggested that the actors should consider various ideas on how the events should run. The possibility of starting with the murder (from the end of the novel) was discussed, flashing back to earlier events. It was important to concentrate on telling the story with images and not words.

Every day Katie would arrive with a plan to look at a different section of the action from the 40-page document. The company would read through the scene or event and then the cast would be split into smaller teams to come up with a way of visually representing it. They would go off into different places in the room and discuss possible solutions together. Then they would start to use the video cameras, lights, props and costumes to generate a concrete solution that would be projected onto the projection screen. (Most of the rehearsal day involved working in full black-out with a large sound desk, lighting desk, media server and several operators for each piece of equipment.)

For example, Katie wanted to find a way of communicating Nastasya's curiosity about Aglaya in Part Three. In the novel Dostoevsky describes Nastasya writing letters to Aglaya, but the image of a hand writing on a piece of paper is not very interesting visually. The acting company was divided into two groups and each had to come up with an alternative solution. One group came up with the idea of Nastasya's reflection on a window as she looked at Aglaya sitting at home cutting paper. Another, with a shot of Nastasya pouring water down her neck as she imagined the letter she would write.

Once the actors had devised a solution the whole group discussed what they thought worked. The video designer and sound designers suggested developments or modifications to ideas. At the same time the composer, Paul Clark, tried out different pieces of music, and Katie explored using various bits of text as voice-over to the images created by the

actors.

When we all felt that an idea worked, a photocopy of a video still was taken and put up on the wall of the rehearsal room. The narrative was gradually pieced together based on these video stills. Katie and I would spend much time looking at them and putting them in different orders as we started to sharpen the way in which we were going to tell the story.

After each successful shot had been devised the stage management team marked up the positions of the camera tripod, lights, props, microphones and so on. They also recorded the positions and camera settings for each shot in a file which became known fondly as 'The Bible'.

Constructing a sequence

Due to the extensive detail of each shot, simply putting two shots together smoothly took many hours to organise and perfect. The company tackled small sequences of narrative and rehearsed them until the moves between each shot became fluid. Very often technical jobs had to be swapped around amongst the company so that the scenes could be performed in order. As a consequence, even the slightest change to the narrative impacted hugely on the journey the actors made throughout a section.

Further exploratory questions and tasks

1. Choose a novel or play that inspires you visually.
2. If the piece you choose is from a specific period, research how the characters may have lived and worked at the time, as this information will help in creating the shots. When you are doing your research look for pictures from the period, either paintings or photographs.
3. Decide what the ideas of the piece are and start to list any repeated images or metaphors.
4. Look at the work of different photographers from the period in question and examine the way they compose a picture. Where do they place the figure in relationship to any objects or furniture? Is the figure standing in the middle of the photograph or to the side? Where does the light come from and where does it hit the figure, objects or furniture in the photograph?
5. Choose three of your favorite moments from the piece and work out how you would shoot each moment. Think about each moment as if it were a moving photograph or a fragment of a film and use your research to suggest places where the characters might be (like a restaurant) and actions they may be doing (like drinking coffee at the end of the meal). Then consider how you would link each of these moments ie: when you would 'cut' from image to image. Does someone lift an arm in one image and does this movement give you the edit point when you could cut to the next image? Draw up a storyboard of how all your images run together in a sequence.
6. Think about the text that will be in each of the images in your storyboard. Should it be a voice over or spoken dialogue? Be sparing with your use of language and remember that a picture paints 1000 words.
7. Have a go at acting out those moments and take a picture of them.
8. Explore what kind of sound you could use to enhance those moments. If any one in the group plays an instrument experiment with how musical composition and the use of live Foley sound can work together.
9. Now video all the ingredients and as you play them back, think about whether your sequence of images, actions and sounds gives insight into the story. Think back to your list of ideas and repeated images and ask if you need to draw on these ingredients to enhance your work.



Photo (Hattie Morahan) Stephen Cummiskey

Interviews with the creative team

Staff Director Amelia Sears interviews Helena Lymbery (Actor):

When did you first know you wanted to become an actor?

In my late teens. At first I thought I wanted to be a stage manager, and never considered I could be an actor. Then I realised that I wanted to be involved in the making and creating of the work so thought about being a director, but eventually I tried acting in a school play called *The Dragon* in year 10. I played the emperor's son Henry. I had no idea how to do it but people said I was really good and encouraged me, and that's how I got into it.

Where did you train?

Lamda.

You worked with Katie Mitchell before on her production of *Attempts on her Life*. How did that experience prepare you for working on *...some trace of her*?

Practically it helped because it meant I had a familiarity with how to use cameras and lights. It means I have a degree of physical comfort and familiarity working with the technology, which gives confidence. Psychologically it helped because I had already made the journey as an actor. For *Attempts* I convinced myself that I was a video artist, because in order to make the work I had to believe that. I knew that it was possible to change the way one thinks of oneself as an actor and to believe that I'm a film maker. That's the biggest battle, believing that you are the person who has skills you haven't got – somehow that gives you the skills to play the part.

How has working on *...some trace of her* differed from *Attempts on her Life*?

The big difference is that *Attempts* is a play and the text is unalterable. And with this – although we have the source material of the novel – the version we tell of that novel felt up for grabs from the beginning. So, although Katie has held, led and driven the process, I feel it has been truly collaborative, and that the whole team have made the piece together.

Do you think people should work like that more often?

The simple answer is yes. In terms of being a practitioner that's what I'm interested in. In my experience this is a much more satisfying process: to be included in the decision making, and to be expected to contribute ideas, because you end up

surprising yourself. But I think it is more suited to some projects than others, and I also think you need an exceptionally strong leader to make it work.

Had you read any Dostoevsky before working on *...some trace of her*?

Yes, when I was 18 or 19 I read most of his novels including *The Idiot*.

When you read them, did you imagine they could be made into plays?

No, it never occurred to me, and even when I read *The Idiot* this year I wondered how we would do it. But I would say that what we have made isn't a 'play'.

What would you say it is?

I would say it's a piece of theatre that is exploring the use of film as another live element, or as the principle live element.

How has the creation of *Sadie May Morton* helped you during the making of *...some trace of her*?

In order to perform this piece I need to be someone who knows how to make films. It links to what I said earlier, ie: believing you can make the work. So Sadie is the means to that end. She is the vessel I can put all the filmmaking knowledge and experience into. I can use her to get myself through all the technical tasks I do when performing the piece. If it was me doing it, I would keep making mistakes, I'd trip up, but because it's Sadie, she just knows and she can see if something will go wrong and how to correct it.

What is the most satisfying part of the process?

At the moment I feel sad because we are now in the tech (technical rehearsals), so it's the beginning of the end of making the piece and getting it ready to show people. I am sad about that because it's been so challenging to learn new skills. But it is very satisfying being able to deliver the ideas and make it look the way we want it to look. It's something to do with the fact that it's not just your own individual list of tasks: setting lights, cameras, acting etc. but the collective effort of doing that, and the way the pieces of the puzzle make the picture, not just on stage, but through the whole creative team – sound, musicians, design etc – and to feel everyone's contribution together, because no one element could work alone.

Interviews with the creative team

Staff Director Amelia Sears interviews Ben Whishaw (actor):

When did you first know that you wanted to be an actor?

I think I was very young when I first mentioned it to my parents, maybe five or six? My mum's got a letter that I wrote to her – or a piece of school work or something that I did when I was maybe seven – and in that letter we had to talk about what we wanted to do when we grew up, and I said that I wanted to be an actor or an artist. I don't know how on earth I would have known, but I did.

Was there an actor whose performance inspired you, or was it just something that you knew you wanted to do?

I don't even know that I knew what acting was at that age (obviously). I certainly hadn't been to the theatre. I may have seen a pantomime or something but that would have been it. What I'd seen was films, but my involvement in acting was dressing up; that's what I thought acting was. I dressed up, played games in costume, and put on plays and performances with my friends. I thought that was what I wanted to do with my life.

You have worked with Katie Mitchell before on *The Seagull*. How does that experience compare to doing *...some trace of her*?

They are really different experiences. One of the things that I really admire about Katie is that she has so many different ways of working so, one month she'll be doing a piece of new writing at the Royal Court, and then the next she'll be doing some strange devised multi-media piece. This feels like a far freer way of working, probably because we're less tied to a text. When, for example, we were working on the Chekhov, Katie applied a very thorough Stanislavskian system. That hasn't been the case on this at all, because we've been asked to be more like performance artists, or just artists generally; we've had to think in different ways, very visually and also as though we were dramaturgs, thinking about narrative and story telling. Then there was all the technical work as well, so it was drawing on a whole range of skills that working on a Chekhov play, for example, didn't.

Was that an enjoyable part of the process using those skills? Did it combine your five-year old desire to be an actor/artist?

It did combine those things, yes. It was frustrating



Photo (Ben Whishaw) Stephen Cummiskey

for me because I came onto this job directly from something else, so I wasn't as prepared as I would like to have been. I hadn't re-familiarised myself enough with the source material to feel like I could always contribute as much as I would have liked, in terms of how we adapted the narrative, and what the central themes of the story were. I felt a little beat behind, but I took it in my stride. It was really exciting to be asked to work in a different way, and to be trusted by Katie enough that whatever ideas we came up with would find their way into the show. It was a genuine collaboration. I loved her trust.

Had you read *The Idiot* before?

Yes, I read it when I was about 19 – I went through a stage of reading a lot of Dostoevsky – and then I read it again about two years ago. I read it just after we'd done *The Seagull* and then again while we were making *...some trace of her*. I realised that I didn't really understand it the first or the second time – I got bits of it and certain scenes struck me – but it's only been through pulling it apart in the process

Interviews with the creative team

of rehearsal that I feel I've really understood what Dostoevsky was writing about. That's been really interesting.

And what have you learnt?

Well, I think for me I understood much more clearly what Dostoevsky was doing with this interplay between the four characters at the heart of book, what he was doing within those relationships. What he does so amazingly is plant this idiot character Myshkin – who is a sick man but who has a sort of incredible child-like purity and goodness – and he sets him next to a character like Nastasya Philipovna who is the victim of abuse, and makes them fall in love. Then he puts this other character Rogozhin – a sort of psychopath – into the mix and explores different kinds of love through these relationships. I suppose that came through very clearly for me, and I realised that what he's ultimately saying is very bleak because Myshkin's form of total compassionate love will always fail in the flawed world that we exist in – he's saying that even that type of love isn't enough.

While making ...some trace of her, you all created characters who were performance artists, as you said. Your's was Eddie Shaw. How did the creation of that character help you to continue making the work and then perform the show?

I was a bit sceptical about that idea at the start of rehearsal, because I didn't understand how it would help us at all. I thought that the most important thing would be to work on the characters that we were actually playing in the film that we were making, as it were, ie: the characters that the audience would be watching on the screen. But having gone through the rehearsal – and now performing it – it has been really helpful: having a character who is not an actor allows you to embrace all of the other technical requirements that the show demands. It allows you to jump from being an actor to being a video operator, to being a sound artist; you can move very fluidly between all those roles because you feel like you have an identity as someone who makes that sort of work.

Do you think if you didn't have that, you would have more of a feeling of being 'naked' on stage?

Yes, I think perhaps we would feel less confident in carrying out some of those tasks because we're not au-fait with (me especially!) operating cameras and fiddling around with tripods. It gives you a belief.

What is the most satisfying part of performing in a piece like this?

Without doubt for me, it's working as part of a group, and in an ensemble where everyone is equal and there isn't ego involved. You're all working to achieve something that is bigger than you as individuals – that's the most thrilling thing. And when it's good and we hit it, it's really exhilarating because you feel all the pieces fall into place. I find that quite moving. I don't know what it's like to watch, but in the making of it, it's quite touching.

Interviews with the creative team

Amelia Sears interviews Leo Warner (Director of Photography):

When did you first notice video design and take an interest in it?

At Robert Lepage's *Far Side of the Moon*. I saw it at the Newcastle Haymarket Playhouse. He did it really well because he used really tiny elements like a goldfish bowl slowly draining of water and things like that. It was obvious to me that it was video but it wasn't like a screen with video on it. It's the first time I remember thinking of it as a design as opposed to a screen component.

How did you train as a video designer?

I didn't train at all. I did what everyone else did in Katie's team: I studied English, although I did go to art college and do a lens-based photo media course before I went to uni. That was a lot of photography and a bit of film-making. When I left university I set up this company called Fifty Nine Design and we mainly did graphic design, but also content design for interactive things like websites and DVDs – like old-school multi-media cd roms.

So were you making little videos?

Yes, we were creating image content for things like that, some animation, some live action and video stuff. We were working dramaturgically on a project with a writer called Judith Adams on a show

called *Sweet Fanny Adams in Eden*. The show was developed to go over a seven acre outdoor garden and there were lots of different locations where things were happening simultaneously. We created a 3D model of the garden in order to work out what was happening where – how long it took for the actors to get from A to B etc. She composed the piece in this sort of hypertext way and then scripted in various filmic elements of the show, so we ended up producing the content by default. We gave it to the theatre company and they said, that's great, how do we make it work? So we devised this little system off the shelf, with bits of computer equipment, to make it run in a way that you can queue it like in the theatre – what's called finger tip queuing. The show happened to be really successful so lots of people in Scotland saw it. We ended up being the only video designers in Scotland, by default. It's entirely learning on the job and, depending on which job we were given at any given time, we developed different skills, putting different systems together and design software, looking at how best to integrate video with theatre – so yes, no training!

Your title on ...*some trace of her* is director of photography. What does that mean?

I chose that title, which is a 'film-world' title as opposed to a theatre one, because there was some confusion over what my role had been in previous productions. Broadly speaking, a director



Photo (Sam Crane, Pandora Colin) Stephen Cummiskey

Interviews with the creative team

of photography takes responsibility for pretty much everything you see on camera – composition, lighting, what medium you’re shooting on, what cameras you’re using and what lenses – so in this context, it really meant, to a large degree, designing the show shot by shot: I set up the individual shots, light them, and then also take on the secondary role – which I’d normally do as a video designer – of making it work on stage technologically and physically. I take care of the projection screen, the projectors themselves, look at how we treat the image and how the edit functions.

What kind of preparation do you have to do before starting a project like ...*some trace of her*?

We did two weeks of development workshops which we hadn’t done on *Waves*. I ended up coming into *Waves* late when rehearsals had already started. With this one, we used the workshops very much to plan the look and the aesthetic of what we were going to be shooting, and we looked at quite a lot of photographers, from contemporary right back to late 19th-century. We looked at replicating their photographs, or the aesthetic feeling, in video form and camera. So, in a way, we were setting up a still image and then animating it. I don’t think the decisions we came to had changed that radically once rehearsals started. We also spent quite a lot of time looking at the text of *The Idiot* itself. I didn’t do a vast amount of preparation because I tend to find that it doesn’t really help with these shows. The best work happens when we’re literally just doing it and Katie will request something – an image, an emotion, a shot, a feeling, a dramatic moment – and then we create it. It’s very easy to tell if that’s going to work or not in the context, whereas if you try and plan that by abstraction in advance, by story boarding or a shooting script or whatever, it has never helped in the past. Consequently, we didn’t do too much of that.

Do you think having that aesthetic decided on before you started rehearsals helped the actors to make the shots?

I think having something that we’re aiming for visually – whether it’s a degree of quality or a particular aesthetic feeling – helps as it’s something to aim for and it gives us a collective goal. We set the bar really high on this. Looking back on *Waves* now, although some of the shots are really lovely, there’s no overarching stylistic concept visually.

So had you decided on an aesthetic model, or photographers that you were going to base things on, for *Waves*?

No, *Waves* just happened in the rehearsal room. The very final shot in *Waves*, my favourite one, is very

much like a dark oil painting, not unlike Caravaggio. That sounds incredibly arrogant, but we were going for that composition and lighting – faces out of the darkness and things. There wasn’t really anything else. We just decided to make something that looked good in its own context. It changes stylistically from section to section as well. Now I realise – as we go back and re-rehearse it for the revival at the end of August – that the first section is very different to the final chapter.

Now that you’ve done *The Idiot*, and you’ve set the bar that high, where do you think it can go from here?

We set the bar high because it was almost as though we chose a genre. Somewhere it became film noir because it was dark, we didn’t have lots of backdrops and there are some components of early Russian film. Generally speaking ...*some trace of her* has gone in one particular direction, so it would be really interesting to do projects in other styles, and to develop a completely distinct one. That happened as a result of the starting points that we worked from, but I think you could apply that to anything. It’s not like we’ve done the best we can possibly do and now we have to change the ball game. I think we need to explore very similar ideas but with different impetus.

What advice would you give to someone who wanted to be a video designer?

It’s an odd job because it’s still one that people don’t really understand because different video designers work in extremely different ways. Some are very technical, some are creative and very few sit in between. I think probably the main practical thing you can do is to be absolutely on top of your technology. It’s an easy mistake to assume that you can make really nice pictures work on stage if you don’t know how the system functions. Also, if you’re on top of the things that are happening and you’re aware of the new technology, this opens up new possibilities and gives you new ideas. With ...*some trace of her* – and all of our shows at the National – we’ve always been on the absolute edge of what’s possible technologically. We’re using completely new bits of equipment and software. Practically speaking that’s probably the only piece of advice I could give at all.

Interviews with the creative team

Amelia Sears interviews Gareth Fry (Sound Designer):

When did you first become interested in sound design?

I've been interested in it for a long time, but it took me a while to realise. I've always had bad eyesight, and good, but slightly weird, hearing. Most people have this ability to tune out the rest of the world with what's called the cocktail effect – when you're talking to people in a bar, and you tune out the background noise and just focus on the conversation you're having. I tend to hear more background sounds than most, so I'm generally less tuned into the person I'm talking to and more to the rest of the world – not in a rude way, I just pick up more of what's going on around me. I think because of that, it's been a natural progression towards sound design.

Did you train?

I trained originally as a recording engineer. I've always had a love of music, and an interest in sound. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I always had an interest in stories and literature, and also psychology and perception – ie: how we perceive the world – particularly. Then I trained as a recording engineer doing music but didn't find it very interesting. I discovered theatre completely by chance, and suddenly every aspect of what I was interested in married: sound, perception, literature, were all there in this one place. So I decided to change career track. I was originally going to study Psychology and Artificial Intelligence at Edinburgh University. I had a place, but I discovered theatre at the Edinburgh Festival one year, so moved to London and went to the Central School of Speech and Drama. They do a theatre design degree, so I studied set, lighting, sound, costume and puppetry design and slowly specialised more and more in sound.

What was your first job as a sound designer?

It depends on what you mean by sound designer. There were early shows where I was credited as a sound designer, but I was really a facilitator – the director gave me a list, I went away and found it, made it into a show tape and made it sound nice. That's one version of sound design.

What's your version

For me it's become more of a collaboration. Working with Katie is very much a collaborative thing. She'll often give me guides as to where she feels something needs to go up or be louder, of faster or

more jagged, but she'll rarely specify what kind of sound. We'll go through where the events are, what they are and where things need to dramaturgically notch up, but she's very unspecific. The more interesting collaborations I have with directors are when they don't really know what they want, but they know where, when and how.

When did you first work with Katie?

The first one was in 1999, in the Cottesloe, on the *Oresteia*, and sound technology was quite primitive then compared to what it is now. That's where we first developed the tonal language and the abstract sounds, underscoring and shifting with various events and that sort of thing. We couldn't really do very much more than that at the time, but we spent a long while developing the sounds that are now in use today. It's been a progression ever since then. ...*some trace of her* is the 17th show I've done with Katie!

How do you find new sounds?

It's usually stimulated by the text, or by a moment, or something that's happening in rehearsals. I realise I need something to give a sense of frustrated love – after that it's a case of me wracking my brains and trying to come up with what I think that sound would be. Whether it would be a rhythm, a pitch or some combination of elements to give that sense.

Do you identify sounds in obscure places?

Do you sample things and are you looking everywhere for sounds?

Absolutely, I tend to use sound in a very musical sense. I regard sound effects as a part of the orchestra of sound design, and I consider sounds of music to be part of that orchestra. Sound design is trying to use all those different instruments to create that sense of frustrated love, or whatever it is that I'm trying to do. This can be done with a recorded sound effect – that I've either gone out and recorded or found off the shelf – a tonal sound that might be a symbol being pitched down three octaves to make the origin of it unidentifiable, something musical, or a combination of these. It's very difficult to work out how to create that sense of frustrated love.

So on ...*some trace of her*, we've used Foley and multi-media, obviously. How does doing a production that uses those elements differ from a normal play in terms of sound?

It's quite interesting because for a normal show, all that is hidden from the audience. For example, on

...some trace of her, we've got an early shot of a ticking watch on the clinic table and, in the show, that's done with some nail clippers. That's the sort of thing I would do for a show anyway, but nobody would ever know that is how the show is being made. In this show, we're declaring things and in a way, because of that, you can get away with more. It's almost a challenge for me to find the strangest objects to make the most mundane sounds. It's also nice not having to disguise things as much because the audience can see us making the sound, and they accept that it isn't perfect because that's the language we're talking. It's an interesting dynamic between hearing the sound, the audience accepting it, and seeing this totally incongruous object making it.

So is using Foley quite a satisfying part of the process for you?

There are aspects of Foley that are really boring. I would hate to be a Foley artist because 90% of the time you're trying to match somebody's footsteps and that's not very interesting. The other 10% we get to do more interesting work than that.

What advice would you give to someone who wanted to work as a sound designer?

There isn't one way to being a sound designer apart from how you approach listening. Something we do a lot in workshops is to say that sound design is all about how you hear the world. You to find a way of stepping back from your normal perception of reality, and find out about how we really hear the world, and how our perceptions are altered by what our ears pick up. When you're sat down somewhere, your hearing system filters out the air conditioning and traffic rumble in the background. As a sound designer you will need to be aware of that. We have these sound stereotypes in the world which are completely at odds with the reality. If you filter out the recording of bird song, it sounds like an avery because of our perception system. It's about listening to the world, being quite analytical about it and looking at how we respond emotionally to it. There are a lots of designers who are interested in setting a location and a time, but I'm all about the storytelling and the emotions. It's basically working out how to tell stories and influence an audience with sound and music.



Photo (Ben Wishaw) Stephen Cummiskey