

**National
Theatre
Learning**

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white top with a black neckline. She is looking intently at a vintage-style microphone with a red band. Her hand is raised near the microphone. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

The Hush
Background pack

The Hush background notes

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Welcome to the National Theatre's background pack for *The Hush*.

Through imaginative and innovative in-school, on-site and online activities, NT Learning opens up the National's repertoire, artistry, skills, and the building itself, enabling participants of all ages to discover new skills and experience the excitement of theatre-making.

Our background packs reveal how the National Theatre brings the plays in its repertoire to the stage. They describe the interpretations, processes, design choices and technical methods that have been applied to a particular play – demonstrating how a play *could* be staged, rather than how it *should*.

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Reg. No. 1247285
Registered Charity
No. 224223

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Further production details:
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The National Theatre production of *The Hush*



Cast

TOBIAS MENZIES
SUSANNAH WISE

Foley Artists

BARNABY SMYTH
RUTH SULLIVAN

Director **MATTHEW HERBERT**

Designer **SARAH HOPPER**

Lighting Designer **PAUL KNOTT**

Sound Designer **MATTHEW HERBERT**

Associate Sound Designer **MIKE WINSHIP**

Company Voice Work **RICHARD RYDER**

Production Manager **PAUL HANDLEY**

Staff Director **KATE SAGOVSKY**

Stage Manager **NEIL MICKEL**

Deputy Stage Manager **MADDY GRANT**

Costume Supervisor **LUCY WALSHAW**

Props Supervisor **ELEANOR SMITH**

Project Draughting **EMMA MORRIS**

Casting **WENDY SPON**

Production Photographer **SIMON KANE**

Susannah Wise in *The Hush*

PHOTO: SIMON KANE

WORLD PREMIERE

The Shed, 17 July – 3 August 2013



Rehearsal diary: Week One

Staff director Kate Sagovsky documented the four-week rehearsal period; the following extracts from her diary reveal how the production emerged.

“the power comes from believing the sonic image”

Matthew Herbert

The performance will be built around the creation of a number of sound worlds – or sonic images – using sounds created live-in-performance by Foley artists Ruth [Sullivan] and Barnaby [Smyth], as well as pre-recorded sound, operated and mixed live by Mike [Winship, Associate Sound Designer] and Matthew [Herbert]. This mixture of methods allows the creation of complex, delicate and sophisticated sonic images.

Most of Week One is spent unearthing the subtleties of these sound-worlds and pinning them down in layers to create the desired images. Much of the time the rehearsal room is hushed, with pairs of people talking quietly. It seems like little is happening until you start to watch closely. Barnaby is positioned to the side of the room, pressing his weight down through his arms onto a wooden chair, head tilted to the side. He moves to another chair and does the same. Then to a table. Then back to the original chair. From across the room there is nothing to be heard, until he calls to Ruth “this table’s got a nice creak on it” and she comes to listen. In performance the mic will pick up this barely-audible sound, giving it a life of its own. It is agreed that this is the creak they have been hunting for. The table is

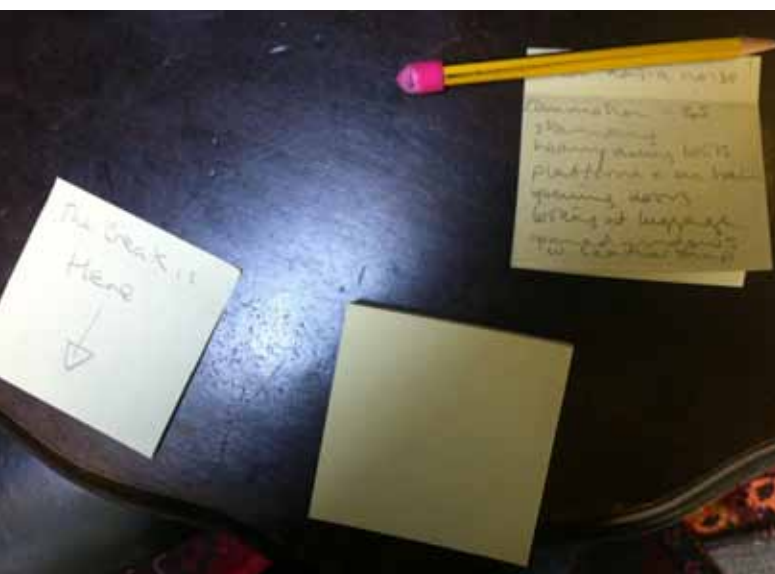
moved onto the balcony at the back of the room and becomes part of the prop-laden Foley area. Throughout the rest of the day the creak develops its own identity as a character as it is woven into Tobias’ sonic image, first being used to evoke shifts of weight on a creaking bed, and then the sound of walking back and forth across attic floorboards.

On the other side of the room, Tobias [Menzies, actor] sits close to Mike behind an array of sound equipment and they both stare intently into space as they ‘audition’ ambient traffic sounds on pre-recorded tracks. In many theatre productions where sound is an element – but not so foregrounded – any needed sounds such as background traffic would be found and a selection would be made by the director and sound designer. But in this production the sound is paramount – in fact the hunt for the correct sound to evoke a particular memory is the meat of the performance itself. So, ‘traffic sounds’ are no way near specific enough. They must be redolent of the right city; the correct part of town; the height and placement of the apartment; the time of day etc and, because the image is drawn from the actor’s (Tobias’) real memory, he must be a key part of the discovery and selection process. The extraordinary thing is that the more you listen the more you really can identify differences within recordings: the extent of what we can hear and identify with our ears without even realising is vast, and each track tells its own, incredibly specific, story. In the end it is decided that none of the tracks are quite right, so over the next couple of days Mike, Tobias and Matthew disappear from the rehearsal room at various intervals to reach out of the top-floor windows of the National Theatre Studio and record the traffic below.

“The whole show should feel on edge, like it could shatter at any moment. Everyone totally aware of themselves and everyone else... We should listen to the world more carefully”

Matthew Herbert

As I walk away from the rehearsal room on day one I am intensely aware of my footsteps on the floor and how they shift as I walk from wood to concrete and then down the stairs. Later in the week, I am sitting for a moment before afternoon rehearsals begin and I notice how the afternoon sounds have changed from those of the morning. The traffic noises from the street below have shifted in tempo and tone, and the air is more still, so they are floating up to the room in a different way. I realise how the process of ongoing listening is affecting me: I am listening to – receiving – the world in a different way, therefore perceiving it in an altered way too. It is



Left: The ‘creak’ is labelled
PHOTO: KATE SAGOVSKY

Rehearsals: Week One

this experience which everyone is working to understand and harness through the rehearsal process in order to provoke this same experience for the audience, too.



The Shed, a temporary performance space at the National Theatre
PHOTO: KWEKU BENNIN

“If you’re listening, sound becomes a great collaborator... it’s exciting to make a performance where [incidental and audience] sound is not the enemy”

Matthew Herbert

On Friday of Week One we spend a morning in The Shed, our performance space. Dotted around the auditorium, the Company sit still for three minutes and just listen to the sounds of the space, counting the number and types that we can hear. The difference in number and perception of sounds is great: some hear just five or six; Matthew – with ears that have been in training for years – hears 39. Those sitting closer to the back wall can hear the sounds of the South Bank more clearly; next to the lighting desk the buzz of the electronics is overwhelming; while nearer to the front of the auditorium it is my own sounds I hear – the creak of the flip-up chair I am sat on and the sound of swallowing in my throat. It is vital for us to notice and know the character of the sounds in The Shed, as these sounds will not be ignored in preference for our created worlds. They are present in the reality of the performance. The aim is for the audience to notice and enjoy these sounds (of their current environment and of themselves) as much as those we create for them.

On returning to the rehearsal room, Matthew and Susannah [Wise, actor] start to compile a list of all the possible sounds which might happen during a performance: mobile phone rings (the audience will not be asked to switch them off), audience exits, the dropping of a programme or drink, sneezing or a persistent cough, shouts or laughter from outside The Shed. For each eventuality a live response is sought which will bring communal focus to the sounds we usually try as an audience to ignore. The actors are to be actively seeking to respond to any sonic ‘coincidences’ or ‘collaborations’ – “panning for gold in public” – by responding quickly to the moments where the real sounds of the world are brought into high focus for everyone because of the nature of the created listening space of *The Hush*.

Rehearsals: Week Two

“The show is made in the details.
Every time you add detail everything
comes a little more into focus”

Matthew Herbert

Each sonic image in the performance is of a specific time and place: the aim is not to allow someone simply to hear that sound (with an implication of distance or objectivity in the action of hearing), but for the sound to transport them to that very particular world so that they experience it in a visceral way. It is decided in rehearsal that when the performers come into the performance space they do not say “can I hear X?” but rather that they say “can I go to X?”. The dialogue is so sparse that each phrase or line works as a huge clue for the audience as to how they should understand and respond to the performance-experience. Much of the rehearsal time each day is not, therefore, spent running lines or scenes. Instead time is spent carefully discussing, playing with, and selecting the few lines that will end up in the performance, so that each potential nuance is controlled and exploited to the full.

An extended period of discussion and exploration ensures that tiny differences – such as the difference between ‘hear’ and ‘go to’ – are deliberately aligned to communicate meaning in the desired way. This level of specificity applies to both spoken text and created

sound. To create sonic images which can truly transport the listener requires a multi-faceted, many-layered process of creation. There is never any sense of ‘that’ll do’: the

sound is telling the story and therefore has to be spot on – it is not simply a sketch, it is a finely-drawn portrait.

The train

By the end of Week Two, there is in place one particular sound-world centered around a train. To achieve the first draft of this sonic image there have been at least seven different stages, each bringing together different layers of detail:

1. First Susannah’s father came to the National Theatre to record his memory of being a child on the Kindertransport from Vienna.
2. The Foley artists then took the events from the story as described by Mr Wise and brought them to life through sound-actions (such as doors and windows opening and closing; boots stamping etc), experimenting with what objects to use in order precisely to re-create the remembered sounds.
3. Some of the sounds could not be created with the objects at hand so the props team began construction on a specific item – a small sliding unit to replicate the sound of a sliding train-carriage door. Normally a prop will be designed and created according to the joint priorities of aesthetic and functionality, so it was unusual to hear a discussion between the performer and the makers in which the sole remit for the prop is to do with the sound it makes.
4. The live Foley was then married to sound on pre-recorded tracks which give the details of the atmosphere – such as the sounds of the steam emanating from the halted train, and of the countryside in which it stops. The background sound was ‘auditioned’ carefully, as everyone worked together to select the tracks which tell the best possible story: the sound of hedgerow birds gave the false experience of a summer setting, and only when it was changed to crows nesting was the experience suddenly one of a bleaker, colder environment. The historical period has to be correct as well as the time of year, so the sound of the steam-train whistle was researched to make sure it was that of a 1930s train, and an Austrian one too. Each time a detail was questioned and shifted to make it as accurate to the memory as possible, the experience of the sonic image came into focus a little more. However, this couldn’t take place instantly, because there was often a need for people to search through sound libraries elsewhere to gather different options to try out.
5. Many of the soundscapes have little need of human speech but in this memory there was a significant recollection of shouting voices. When the world of the memory was created without them, it felt like there was a missing component, so shouting in German was recorded in the rehearsal room and then distorted to mimic the muffled voices of people outside the created interior train environment.
6. The soundscape of pre-recorded tracks and live Foley were then structured together. This was to put in place the detailed timings which are essential for the live and pre-recorded sound to work together as a ‘duet’ to tell the story – the timing of the recorded train door slam, for example, has to come at precisely the point at which the live footsteps stop at the door.
7. This sequence was then edited back together with the original recording of Mr Wise narrating his memory. As the sounds we’d created were now telling the story which Mr Wise originally narrated, the recording was largely edited out: there was no need to hear the story told through sound and words simultaneously.



Above: the train door prop arrives in rehearsal
PHOTO: KATE SAGOVSKY

Rehearsals: Week Two

“We need to think about mining the darkness: the darkness is a time for the audience to catch up – we can stop worrying about what’s going on and be in our head a bit more – and that’s where the fun stuff will go on”

Matthew Herbert

Two white fluorescent floor-lights, a hanging red neon and a number of angle-poise lamps to light the Foley area have all arrived in the rehearsal room. Suddenly, the sound is transformed as the interplay of sound and light is brought into the equation. Placing sound into blackout, or half-light, allows us to listen in an entirely different way as our focus moves from the visual purely to the aural. Sometimes in rehearsal when the performers are wholly focussed on listening they instinctively shut their eyes to block out other stimuli. Placing the audience into darkness leads them to this same level of focus. The blackouts are not, therefore, simply transitions from one scene to the next. Instead they serve their own function: an echo or residue of what has just been remains in the blackness, deepening or shifting the audience experience through the dark. Matthew speaks of playing with ‘shifting the whole show one minute to the right’ – meaning that where one would expect the scene to continue to its end point and then for the light to be taken out, instead we are plunged into darkness earlier than expected but the reality of the current moment, communicated through the sound, continues and deepens in the absence of light.



Above: the red neon and the Foley area
PHOTO: KATE SAGOVSKY

Rehearsals: Week Three

“That’s what I love about sound:
it takes everyone with it. It’s a
very generous medium. We hear
a summer’s field and we all have
different fields in our heads”

Matthew Herbert

It is a welcome part of the form of this show that the audience will all have different pictures in their head when listening to a particular sonic image. However, it is important that, whilst they have the freedom to imagine their own worlds in response to the sounds, they do not feel adrift in sonic worlds which they do not understand – the audience have to understand the images to a certain degree in order to be able to relax and enjoy the sounds. Paradoxically, a high degree of specificity in the creation of the image allows the audience to recognise things within it and then to have the freedom to create their own imagined response, and to relax into the sonic experience even when the sounds do transform into something more abstract. At this stage, therefore, refining the perspective of the created sounds has become a vital part of the process of guiding the audience through each soundscape. Now that the sonic images have all been developed, the question is asked repeatedly: from whose point of view are we imagining this created world?

Rather than mediating the audience experience through chronological narrative, shifts in perspective move the image forward: at one moment we are listening to a shower in the distance, suddenly we are in the shower; we are outside in a garden, a door slams and suddenly we are inside a house. These shifts occur through precise differentiation in many areas of the sound simultaneously: different tracks to create a transformed atmosphere, new Foley sounds, different placement of the mixed sound in the speakers to create an altered sense of distance, and so on. In these shifts you can start to accomplish an almost filmic sense of shifting perspective: finding moments where things suddenly become a ‘close-up’, or where we are given a certain point-of-view. Adding a child’s breath at the forefront of the sound-mix during the train sequence, for example, suddenly means that we experience the whole scene from the child’s point of view. What we ‘see’ in our mind’s eye will all be different, but nonetheless we will all be experiencing the memory with the child to some extent. The sonic image becomes a way of experiencing a situation from someone else’s perspective; of sharing in the way in which they experience the world through listening.

“The whole performance is a piece
of music made up of sounds”

Matthew Herbert

As we move into the final stages of rehearsal the structure of the piece as a whole becomes the main focus of the ongoing work. Each of the detailed sonic images is re-considered not just as a stand-alone moment or scene, but in terms of its chronological position – what comes before and what comes after.

Matthew asks: “if we were to view *The Hush* as an album or soundtrack what would the structure of the sounds be? Where would we need spikes? Where would the ‘crowd-pleaser’ sit? Where would there be an abrupt cut or juxtaposition and where would there be a smooth segue?” In applying these questions to the current structure it becomes apparent that in some places there is a need for more new or different sounds, and in others for less. So new sonic images enter into the performance as others are cut. When finding new images a connective logic is used, rather than a strictly narrative progression: the actors find connections with events or memories which link to the sonic image that is being expanded. Susannah’s memory of her Grandmother’s house, for example, leads to associated memories of experimenting with Ouija boards and reckless drives through the countryside as a teenager. These do not occur in a strictly narrative progression, but placed side-by-side they have a dream-like connection as shared memories from youth. The musicality of the performance starts to grow, not only as structural shifts allow the sound to follow a designed progression, but as the timings of each shift become more specific. Through the week Matthew works to lock down timings so that the performance is fluid but precise: whether a transition is cued through changes in pre-recorded sound, lighting, actor movement or Foley sound, it is clear that timing is essential to the musicality of the performance as a whole, just as it would be in a more traditional music composition.

“The great thing about sound is that
it can go around corners – you can
hear what you can’t see”

Matthew Herbert

As we prepare to move into The Shed for the technical rehearsal, one of the most exciting things is the possibility to explore, for the first time, the ways in which the building and the environment in which it sits can be brought into the world of *The Hush*. By miking different parts of the building, inside and out, and bringing the sounds of the theatre into the lobby and vice-versa, our attention is brought to the world – both theatrical and real – in which the performance is existing. Listening allows us access to parts of ongoing life which we cannot currently see, and therefore allows a different perspective on the everyday world which we so often take for granted. We are asked to listen for the musicality of the everyday sounds that we so often ignore – the sounds which are happening around us right now; or are occurring just around the corner and which we can hear if we only listen hard enough.

Interview with Matthew Herbert

Members of *The Hush* company were interviewed during rehearsals by staff director, Kate Sagovsky. Matthew Herbert, the director and co-creator described his approach.

Tell me about the genesis of the project. Where did the idea come from?

It was one of those amazing opportunities that came up: the National Theatre Studio asked 'would you like to try something for a few days?', and I said I would love to. And really the genesis of the idea was knowing that I wanted to do something with Foley and something to do with sound – about taking direct and explicit control of sound and it not being just the enemy, or flotsam on an otherwise stable show. I think that we block out a lot of sound and if we started paying attention to it, it would drive us nuts. So, for example, in the Albert Hall, the air conditioning unit is really loud right by the boxes, so at times it is louder than the orchestra. It hasn't been designed like that, it was just that no-one thought of it. But now that we can record things so readily and have the opportunity to re-listen and listen a lot, I think these things are going to become more important. And of course, the other thing is that I don't know of any other plays about sound. It feels like that in and of itself is a good starting point.

Have you worked with Foley artists before, or is it a completely new thing for you?

I have worked with them inadvertently on films, but I would just do the music and they would do the Foley for a third-party director, so we wouldn't have any contact. But I have worked with Barnaby before on a show at the Royal Festival Hall, where he did some live Foley for me for a film about mould. He was using overcooked pasta to do the sound of mould growing on the screen, whilst 300 people made paper aeroplanes and tried to get them on stage.

What do you feel that you are able to do or explore in a theatre context that you haven't been able to do under a musical umbrella?

The most exciting thing is about really messing around right on the border between fiction and reality. Which is, if I am making an album or doing a project about a pig's life, or a bomb exploding in Libya, I feel that I have a responsibility to the original sound because there are no words, there's nothing else to show people. There's nothing for them to look at. I am not in control of what they look at whilst they listen. So, what's really exciting about this is that actually you can sort of wander a bit more freely backwards and forwards across that line between totally imaginary and really meaningful. And it has been a real pleasure doing this, and seeing how much the actors have given themselves and their stories over to the process. I think we are reaping bigger dividends from crossing that line because this piece is based on real experiences.

You're clearly bringing your experience of music-making into the process of making *The Hush* – for example looking at structuring this theatre piece in the same way you would an album or a gig. Do you think doing this return to theatre will affect your future musical work? Or do you not know yet?

I am too busy trying to get to the first performance to think exactly what might happen after that! I don't really know. They feel like such different forms, but I do think of this show as one big piece of music. So the musical background has really helped with that. I don't think fiction is that useful in music. Historically, at least, for me to stand up and sing a made-up story about an experience I have never had, doesn't feel like what music is supposed to do. Though that's a not a reason not to do it...

Have there been any specific moments in the process where you've been really excited by something? Any 'Eureka' moments?

Yeah, there are all sorts of moments along the way. There was a great moment quite early on when the Foley artists were making sounds of smoking and they did a sort of burning of a cigarette without actually setting it alight – so there's this amazing



Matthew Herbert in rehearsal
PHOTO: SIMON KANE

Interview with Matthew Herbert



thing sort of smoking but without any smoke. It sounded realistic, which was a great bit of magic to see happen before our eyes. Other things like playing with volume are helpful too: suddenly listening to something very loud then turning it off makes you listen differently in all sorts of ways both to the sound that's really loud and then the silence immediately afterwards. Adding the red neon light is also a really big factor, it changes how you listen. Seeing when the red light comes on makes you realise that this bit is pre-recorded, and you will listen much more intently now. It's an interesting addition.

The audience experience, or what they are going to get from it, often seems to me to be at the forefront of how you talk about work. Is it true that you think of them? Or do you put your work out there, without worrying about what results come back?

The main thing really is that I don't really believe in the idea of an audience: it feels suspiciously capitalistic in terms of a lump of people that have paid their money and are consuming this thing. I don't think it's like that so, for example, I will know somebody in the audience. Do I make the show for them, or do I make the show for the person sitting next to them that knows nothing? Do I make it for my six-year-old son who might come and see it? Do I make it for his grandmother who may be over from China to see it? I don't think an audience is a blob like that, and I don't think you can generalise them just as you can't generalise any kind of reaction. All you can do is try and make it work for yourself and your collaborators – the other people in the space at the time when it's being made – and see how it makes us all feel collectively; and try to create a respectful space for somebody else to join in. I see any live event as a collaboration between the performer and the listener, so for me this is a kind of extension of that.

Do you have a favourite sound – on this show or generally?

The problem is that no-one will have an answer to that question for you because generally we don't think of it like that yet. But my favourite sound is the sound of Neil's (the Stage Manager's) mouse clicking. Whatever noise Neil's making is my favourite, because it means I am alive.

Interview with Barnaby Smyth and Ruth Sullivan

Could you talk about how and why you got into Foley?

Ruth Sullivan (RS): I have a background in dance, and when I was applying for dance jobs a long time ago, I sent off a CV in response to an advert in *The Stage* that said 'Dancers wanted for film work.' I was called up and they said 'well it isn't exactly dance, but what we do is Foley.' And they explained a little bit about it, which went completely over my head. But they said it was quite useful to have dance training, supposedly for the sense of rhythm and coordination. These two women trained me and I joined a small agency that was running at the time.

How did they train you? What does that mean?

RS: I went to one of their houses and they showed me some footage with a time code – because you work to a clock – and they showed me how to walk in time with somebody and to gauge how people move. Even if you just have a head-and-shoulder shot, there are little tricks like pouring tea and looking at the screen at the same time – just little bits and pieces. And then I would accompany them to film sessions at Twickenham or Shepperton and eventually I did my first Foley, which was terrifying, on an episode of *Soldier, Soldier*.

Were you interested in sound before or did that come when you were learning the tricks? What was the hook?

RS: It is relatively well paid, and also it isn't full-time, generally speaking. Sometimes you work for weeks on end, sometimes you work two days in a month. At the time I was doing my own dancing so it made sense to have a job that I could pick up at times and continue doing my own creative stuff.

Barnaby, how did you get involved?

BS: Slightly different – my dance career isn't particularly extensive! I came to it through the technical side. I was a runner for various places: I tried to get into the music industry and realised the music industry was not the nicest of industries – and you're on slave wages as a runner – so I got into film. I got myself a job as a runner in a place called video-sonics in Camden, worked my way up and ended up doing various technical jobs – editing and assistant mixing – and from there I got into Foley. I was recording and editing Foley, and I was learning. As money dwindled a bit in TV, I ended up having to stand in – there wasn't enough money to hire the proper Foley artists like Ruth, so I would have to stand in! 'All right. I'll try and do some footsteps but it's going to be bad.' Slowly I learnt that way.

So by accident as well?

BS: Yeah. And when I was recording it was 'oh, just get it in sync!' But when you try and do it yourself, you realise it is hard and scary. In my first session when I went freelance, I felt like a fraud. I didn't appreciate how much you are exposed. Maybe not as much as an actor or an actress, but you are performing and if someone says 'no, that's not right, go again' you think, 'oh, what did I do?' Over the years I felt more assured. I sometimes still supervise a session and say to artists 'That was a really good take. Can we go again but just try it a little bit like this...?' I don't say it was wrong!



Interview with Barnaby Smyth and Ruth Sullivan



I've learnt there's a huge precision in what we hear. Most people can identify when something doesn't sound right, but knowing how to tweak it, presumably that's the skill?

BS: It's so subjective. You have to match the emotion of what you see on screen: it's not just putting a bottle down, for example. Are they annoyed? Are they happy? Have they just broken-up with their wife? Are they being chased by a lion? That's all background emotion and without that, you are just walking on the spot.

When you work for TV or film do you have a list beforehand of the kind of sounds that will need to be done? Or is it thinking things up on the spot?

BS: Sometimes you'll get prep time. If it's a bigger film, we might get a chance to prep it or see a bit of it.

And is there a kit you take?

BS: You wheel around a suitcase full of shoes and little props.

R&B: Lighters.

RS: Glasses.

BS: Knives – I've got a flick-knife.

RS: Chains.

BS: High heels. It's not all bondage stuff, though I have got a lot of leather in there. Things that sound like horse reigns.

RS: Yeah, bridles. I have a bit for a horse's bridle.

BS: Old handcuffs, belts, coconuts. I have old bobbins from 35ml-reels, which sound quite good for sheep.

What is different about working on this project?

RS: The main difference is that we are being asked to create a soundscape of particular scenes out of thin air, whereas usually we will watch a scene and immediately know we're going to need this, that and the other. Everybody can pitch in and have ideas of how to create more in a scene and give it more atmosphere, but you know what you are trying to do because it is there on the screen. You are reacting to the visual.

BS: I guess this is more like a piece of music really. We are adding different instruments for particular movements.

So I guess this is quite immediate?

BS: Well, there has been a certain amount of evolution through workshops, where there have been certain props around and we think 'oh that works.'

RS: But also, when layering the sounds, we would usually record one sound then move on and record the next sound and so on – you are building up the layers. Whereas, for this show we are doing it live. You need to pick out three or four sounds to perform, physically, that will layer up in a way that adds to the emotion of the scene without cluttering it – and also matches Mike's [Winship] recorded sound.

BS: We've been stripping stuff away to avoid this clutter. Less is more.

It's interesting because your Foley area is very cluttered and full of props, but the choreography of what you are doing is really elegant.

BS: What we do for TV and film can be really technical. For foreign versions of English programmes you make something called a 'm&e' which is 'music and effects'. Once you take out the English dialogue (the dialogue recorded on set), you are left with a hole because on set, you naturally hear and record footsteps as an actor walks through the set, or the movement of the actor's clothes. If the characters are talking at the same time and you take out the speech, there will be a hole. What we do is a technical process of adding clothes moves, adding footsteps, so that there is a background sub-layer of movement, music and effects – to which they can add a foreign voice.

RS: You can't just decide 'oh I'll do that effect because that would be lovely, but I'll leave the footsteps today' – you have to do everything. And we do way too much most of the time, but then it will be up to the sound mixer to decide what they need. you're like, 'That took me two days!'

Interview with Barnaby Smyth and Ruth Sullivan

Have you had any 'aha' moments during rehearsal?

BS: Moments like the swimming are really nice. It's the moments where Ruth and I come together and produce a sound that is bigger than us – it's the sum of the parts really.

RS: Yeah. The boat, for instance.

I suppose that takes us back round to music again.

BS: Yeah, we're an orchestra – a little Foley orchestra.

What's the biggest challenge for you with this project?

BS: Trying to sit on those creaky seats quietly!

RS: I don't know. Just working on a project like this is a challenge. It's out of our Foley comfort zone! I will often not sleep well on a Sunday if I am starting a film on a Monday – I still get that – but I do know that when I approach a project, I will be doing clothes moves, footsteps, sound effects. You break it down and you go for it: there's a framework. Whereas here, there is no framework. It doesn't exist in this kind of project.

BS: I just find it so enjoyable.

What's your favourite Foley sound?

RS: Water. I love doing water.

BS: I have a pair of high heels that I love walking down a stone corridor in.

RS: I really like doing paper.

What's the strangest thing you've ever been asked to Foley?

RS: It's rude.

BS: Yeah, it's generally rude.

RS: I worked on *Queer As Folk* and I think that's all I need to say...!

Interview with Ben Power

How did the collaboration with Matthew Herbert come about?

Matthew is an artist I've known about for a little while. I was introduced to him by the director Lyndsey Turner, who directed some of the new plays that we did in the Paintframe at the National Theatre two summers ago. Matthew did the music and sound for one of those plays. When Laura Collier, Head of the National Theatre Studio, asked Matthew if he wanted to develop something at the Studio, I thought it was a great idea, and it coincided with me looking for projects for The Shed, particularly for non-traditional, cross-art-form work that we could develop at the Studio and also would bring new artists into the National.

What was it in Matthew's work that interested you personally, not just as a programmer?

It's the same thing. The first time I met him he talked about the fact that we don't pay enough attention to sound. Sound is neglected. Sound recording is a very young discipline and we don't yet know what it means to be able to record the world. That was a hugely exciting idea to me and made me think about everything – theatre and the world – in a really new way. It was one of those conversations which shifted the paradigm slightly. The more I found out about Matthew, and his work turning found sound into music, and the performative nature of what he does, I started to get *really* excited. I learned that he studied drama and was interested in how you could bring some of those processes he uses to make music into theatre.

Could you describe the development process?

Matthew and I met in September 2012, which was just at the start of trying to put The Shed programme together. And then we workshoped in November, for two weeks. After that we did another two-week workshop. After that we felt like we had something and decided to programme it into The Shed. We came back for another two-week workshop in May, and then we started rehearsals.

Can you describe your role in the rehearsal room?

What I do in a rehearsal room is different in every

process. This collaboration with Matthew has felt open, free and not bounded in terms of specific roles and responsibilities. In the time between workshops and rehearsals I put together a script, lots of which came from conversations with him. He took bits away and rewrote it. The rehearsal process is extremely fluid and has a rhythm of its own. I think it's important that the rhythm by which Matthew makes work, is the rhythm that we are adopting, rather than falling into conventional rehearsal patterns. My role is to provide the structures that allow him to be as free as possible. When we need a text to rehearse, we have one – and it can be changed a lot and rapidly. And, pragmatically, because I am an associate at the National, and programming the whole of The Shed year, I am able to help him see what he's doing in the context of the organisation, particularly in terms of making the most of the resources we have. He's not worked at a theatre like this before and there is huge opportunity here.

Can you think of something that has really excited you in the rehearsal room?

It's amazing, because it happens really frequently in this project. There are moments when the hairs on the back of your neck just stand up. I had one yesterday, when I heard the lawnmower for the first time in the memory of the field behind Susannah's house. For reasons that are quite hard to explain, there's a repeated motif, I think it will probably be in the final show and has been in the workshops, of a bi-plane going overhead. I don't know why but it's completely transportive and emotional. There are specific moments when a sound is created, often by the Foley artists. For example, there is a very particular quality to Ruth when she does Foley smoking close-up to the microphone; it feels hyper-real. It takes me to an emotional place in a way that I've not had before. Sound doing that to me is a discovery for me about the power of sound.

What's the biggest challenge about the project?

I think, and this is not just true of this project but of other projects in The Shed this year, it is about letting everybody – actors, creatives, producers – and the projects be themselves and happen in the way they need to; not falling back on the things we think we need. Like: to have a script ready, or to have a design ready at a certain point beforehand. Or if you're an actor, to have a certain character structure and place in order to be able to rehearse. Everyone is working without the usual safety nets and that's often scary for us. So keeping everyone feeling confident about those things without the safety nets is one of the biggest jobs. But all of that is an opportunity as well as a challenge. It means we can make something really distinct.

Are there things you are learning from this project that will affect your ideas for the future?

I don't think I will ever think about sound in theatre in the same way again. What's really good in terms of Matthew and my collaboration is that I always reach for robust, linear, fairly simple dramatic structures. I want to make sense of things, I want coherence. He likes jagged edges, bangs and sudden, hard turns and that's good. I need more of that in my work. I am really enjoying trying to embrace it.

Ben Power in rehearsal
PHOTO:
SIMON KANE



Interview: Tobias Menzies and Susannah Wise

How are you finding this experience. What are the differences between this and a more usual theatre project?

Tobias Menzies (TM): One of the major differences is that we haven't started with a script, so it's been a devising process, largely. Obviously we have started with a theme rather than a story – the theme of sound and looking to create a piece of theatre through which an audience can learn about sound; learn to listen maybe in a different way. So our job as actors has been to create some narrative on which to hang a piece of theatre through which we can go into interesting and illuminating sound experiences. It's unlike any process I have had before.

Has a lot of that come from your own experiences?

Susannah Wise (SW): Yes. The starting point for that was Tobias' and my memories from childhood and growing up, and experiences that we've had even more recently. Performatively, it has become that our job is about being the ears of the audience so it's almost like we're showing the audience how to listen to the sound. The way we listen is the way they'll listen in performance.

TM: They learn to listen through us, so in a way if we're interested in what we're hearing, then they will be interested in what they're hearing.

SW: We are a kind of a conduit.

Have you had to learn a lot about sound in the process?

SW: I think as actors, or anybody who works in the arts, we are quite sound literate.

TM: I have found myself listening to incidental, everyday sounds in a very different way – we are not

dealing with music, we are dealing with sound that we take for granted and maybe we don't really notice so much; hearing that in a different way and almost hearing that as music.

SW: Once you switch that portal in your brain on it's quite difficult to switch it off. So there has been some more invasive experiences. Suddenly you are noticing all the different... Like if it was a piece of music, a symphony there'd be loads of different instruments. Suddenly you're noticing the whole score as it were to this soundtrack of life.

TM: I have certainly found myself walking down the street and thinking, oh yeah this is also a track of music with all the different instruments: people walking, car horn, a train in the distance. Thinking of those as music rather than just noise does change how you hear it.

I wonder whether in the rehearsal room too there have been things you remember as transformative moments?

SW: I think we have pulled up memories that perhaps aren't the ones that would necessarily have been the most dramatic – the high points, like doing a bungee jump off a cliff or something. It's not really about that, it's about the minutiae and it's like a cameo brooch, like a tiny painting. So it's all in the detail and the smaller and more delicate the moment, the more interesting, sonically, it becomes.

It seems there's been a process of stripping away, in the acting as well, being able to just listen on stage.

SW: It's an unusual thing because we are used to wearing masks, metaphorically, and presenting character – and actually it's quite raw. It's quite exposing because you're kind of being yourself but you're being a slightly adjusted version of yourself or maybe sometimes heightened, sometimes not.

TM: Early on we went through the scenes and decided the more personal it was to us, the more fruitful it would be. Rather than just straying around for something interesting, if we made it personal, then that would lead us to the specific. And the more specific, the more both detailed and universal it would be.



Tobias Menzies and
Susannah Wise in rehearsal
PHOTO: SIMON KANE

Interview: Tobias Menzies and Susannah Wise

Have there been particular challenges along the way in giving yourself over to the process and ultimately the audience in this way?

TM: The biggest challenge from the beginning was finding what the form was. We were reaching for something that there wasn't really a blueprint for. We started with a basic premise of two performers and two Foley artists. The rest was a blank slate. So then it was working out how do we create something that explores sound and can make a show.

SW: It was more a freeform thing than thinking in terms of classical structure – of beginning, middle and end – it was more a stream of consciousness of sound. Matthew has been brilliant with that – putting buffers on my desire to find an end point, so that it goes in a linear direction.

Do you have a favourite sound, and has it altered through the process? In the show, or outside it?

SW: A favourite sound that was in the show – not any more – is that of a Tibetan singing bowl. I love that. But also on a slightly more obvious and literal note, I love the sound of my son laughing. So that hasn't really changed. That will always be one of my favourite sounds.

TM: There's a sound in that train bit, as the train comes to a halt, there's a feedback sound. I don't know whether it's the mic or the recording. I don't think anyone will notice, it, but I really like it. That's my favourite in the show. My personal favourite – I guess, the usual ones, like wind in the trees. Wood pigeons. I certainly wonder whether that will change as I go out and listen to things differently.

It is amazing how those sounds are universal, isn't it? We say 'wind in the trees' like it is almost a cliché, but actually that's what this show does – it shows us that we all love or have a response to the same sounds.

SW: There are some natural, universal, organic sounds that everyone will respond to.

Tobias Menzies and Susannah Wise in *The Hush*
PHOTO: SIMON KANE



Creating Sonic Worlds

Using Foley

Foley is the art of making replacement sound effects. It is normally used in film and television. Foley artists match live sound effects with filmed footage by manipulating everyday objects or performing actions that sound like what is being seen on-screen. These include footsteps, the movement of clothing, doors slamming etc. **Replacement effects** are needed for a number of different reasons: on-set the sound recordists' priority is to capture clean, audible dialogue and it is difficult to record both this and background sounds simultaneously. Not only this, but often the film-set will not create the same sounds as there would be in the real-life environment it represents, so all these sounds need to be added to the film in post-production. By re-creating these ambient sounds the Foley soundtrack adds realism, depth and detail to the film that would otherwise be missing. Foley artists can also **add to existing sound effects** to enhance the soundtrack or emphasise particular events or elements of the action. If a film is dubbed into another language then the entire sound-world of the film must be re-created using Foley, because removing the dialogue also takes out the incidental sound. **The technique is named after Jack Foley**, who first invented it when silent movies were replaced with 'talkies', and suddenly the problematic need for realistic recorded sound became a priority. Many of the techniques which Foley artists use today have remained unchanged since that time.

Foley artists will **choose objects that best create the sound** they are looking for without any reference to the normal use or look of the object. Sometimes this means that they use the same object that made the original sound but in an unusual way. For example, to create a heightened sense of smoking in *The Hush*, Ruth uses her hand against her lip to create the right breath and mouth sounds. Barnaby and Ruth then each hold a cigarette close to the mike, rolling and crushing the tobacco between their fingers to give the sound of the cigarette burning down on the inhale. Often, however, it is entirely unrelated objects which are used because they give the most authentic sound: in *The Hush*, leather gloves flapped through the air give the wings of a bird, kitchen gloves give the snap of a swimming costume, and fingertips tapping gently on a metal tray give rain dripping on a roof.

The Foley artists work with great precision to match their created sounds to the action that is happening on-screen. This is both in the choice of objects which they use to create the sounds, and also in **the detail of their physical timing**. If they have to re-create the sound of footsteps, for example, they will consider a number of factors in order to get the detail of the sound exactly right. A small area of the same or similar surface will be used (gravel; grass; concrete etc) whilst

wearing shoes that match in particular ways (hard-soled; soft-soled; high-heeled etc). The Foley artist will then walk on the spot in the exact timing of the filmed steps so that the low-level mike placed by their feet can catch every part of the sound. This recording might then be mixed afterwards: in *The Hush*, for example, Barnaby wears a hard-soled shoe on concrete to create the sound of footsteps in a hospital, to which Mike adds a reverb effect to complete the sonic-context of the steps.

Ordinarily Foley work is carried out in post-production: the filmed footage is played back on a screen allowing the Foley artists to match sound effects to the action. In a normal process for film or television each sound would be recorded individually in short segments and then layered over the footage at a later stage. In *The Hush*, however, the Foley artists must create each of the needed sounds simultaneously. The traditional process of Foley is reversed as, instead of matching the sound to a given image from recorded footage, all the sound-artists are working from a shared imagined narrative to summon an image purely from the created sound.

Creating Sonic Worlds

Using Pre-recorded Sound

In *The Hush* sound is at the forefront of the performance as we watch the Foley artists create live sound effects onstage. However, there is an additional level of created sound that remains invisible: that which is controlled by the Associate Sound Designer Mike Winship who will operate the sound desk during the show. As part of the creative process Mike has worked carefully with Matthew to match pre-recorded sound effects with the live Foley in order to create the desired sonic worlds. Some of these sound effects were sourced from pre-existing sound libraries, and others had to be specially created for the show. Often both are used during the same scene to achieve the level of required specificity: eg, when Tobias listens to traffic some of the tracks are existing professional recordings from a library, including a historical one from 1972, while others are tracks recorded by the company on location in various parts of London using a portable digital stereo recorder.

Each track has different characteristics depending on the quality of the recording device that was used and the way in which it was recorded. In *The Hush* the quality of the recording is used as a creative choice: the voiceover of Mr Wise, for example, is crisp and clear, having been captured in a studio-setting, indicating he has chosen to narrate this story for Susannah. The recording of Susannah telling a story as a child, however, is deliberately left with its original quality – that of an archived cassette from the 70s.

Once the desired recording has been chosen, the sound-file is edited – this might be for creative, practical or technical reasons. It may be that the recorded sound needs to be cut so that it begins and ends at certain points, or so that only particular segments of the track are used, or unwanted sounds are taken out. Part of the editing process can also include adding particular effects, such as giving a sound a sense of a particular location through adding reverb and/or adjusting the EQ (the frequency components – bass/treble – of the sound).

The sounds are then programmed using playback software. This allows the operator to layer the sounds: multiple sound-files can run and be mixed simultaneously, each with different set points for start and finish. It also allows the operator to fade sounds in and out with precisely programmed timings.

As well as operating the pre-recorded sound from the desk, Mike will control the sounds picked up from the Foley artists through the many mics which surround their area, mixing and altering the sounds they are creating live. He can shift the sense of where the Foley sounds are coming from by playing with levels, reverb and EQ, as well as choosing which mic is picking up the sounds, and which speakers the sounds are played through. Use of another software also enables Mike to 'loop' Foley sounds by recording them live and then playing them back so that they repeat multiple times. The creation of the sound worlds within *The Hush* becomes, therefore, a sophisticated duet between the visible work of the Foley artists and the invisible actions of the Sound Designers.

Activities: Learning to Listen

The Company used some simple techniques to enable them to focus on sound.

- **Sit silently somewhere and set a timer for three minutes.** Count how many sounds you can hear during that length of time. If more than one person does the exercise simultaneously, compare the number and types of sounds you were able to hear once the three minutes is over.
- **Repeat the three-minute listening exercise** but this time focus not only on the number of sounds you are hearing but on the type of sound. How many can you identify?
- **Experiment with doing this exercise with your eyes open, and with your eyes closed.** Does being able to see affect the way in which you listen? Do you feel like you can hear more or less with your eyes closed?
- **As you listen, focus in on the sounds you are making** (eg, the sound of your breath, or the rustle of your clothing as you shift position). Then slowly focus your listening to the rest of the room and see what sounds are happening around you. Then move your focus once again, this time to the furthest reaches of your hearing to listen to sound from far away, perhaps from outside the room. In this way you can become aware of the many layers of sound happening around you all the time.
- **Try this exercise in a location which is very familiar to you** (eg, a room in your house, or outside on your street). Can you hear noises which you have never noticed before?
- **Try this exercise in a location which is not familiar to you** and see if the sounds you hear can give you a new perspective on the place you are in. Can you hear unexpected sonic details which draw attention to things you would not have seen if you were just concentrating on looking?
- **Visit a specific location** (eg, a swimming pool; a park; a train station). As you listen to the environment around you can you identify up to ten sounds which work as the main clues telling you what environment you are in? These might be sounds like the splashing of water in a swimming pool, or the birds in the trees at a park.