

Dialogues from Babel

TEXT
Philip Howard

DIRECTION
Mary Robson

EDINBURGH
Traverse Theatre, 4 March 2022, 7.30pm

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
Northern Stage, 7 March 2022, 7.00pm





Dialogues from Babel is based on listening and learning from people's lived experience. It brings the experiences of voice-hearers from the North-East of England, described in their own words, into dialogue with the experiences of writers from all over the world.

Thank you to all the hearers, speakers and writers that talked to us.

– Mary Robson, Director





Dialogues from Babel

***Dialogues from Babel* is a stage play about how we live with the voices in our heads.**

Drawn from interviews with voice-hearers and novelists, it weaves together conversations that unfold to illuminate the experience of hearing a voice that no one else can hear.

Seven actors have worked alongside director Mary Robson, dramaturg Philip Howard and Fife-based sound designer R J McConnell to create a unique theatrical experience.

The 90-minute rehearsed reading will be followed by a 30-minute panel discussion.

Dialogues from Babel is the result of a long-term collaboration between Edinburgh International Book Festival and Hearing the Voice – an interdisciplinary study of voice-hearing based at Durham University and funded by the Wellcome Trust.

Cast and crew



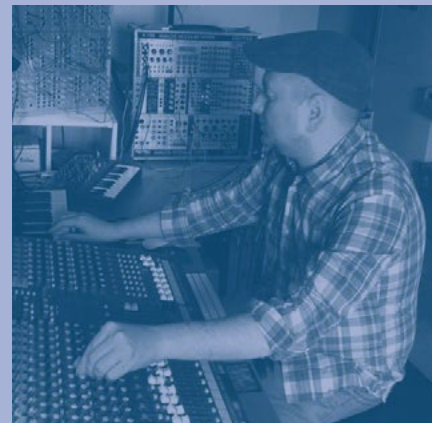
Mary Robson (*Direction*)

Mary is Creative Facilitator in Durham University's Institute for Medical Humanities and for *Hearing the Voice*. This may seem a far call from her original training as a theatre designer, and from her decades of experience in arts in health work but she still works with people to make things.



Philip Howard (*Text*)

Philip is a director and dramaturg. He is a director of new theatre company Pearlfisher and a former artistic director of the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh. For Nick Hern Books, he is the editor of *Scotland Plays*, *Scottish Shorts* and *Theatre in Scotland - A Field of Dreams*. Current adaptation commissions include *Richard* (Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part Three* and *Richard III*) for Stellar Quines and *Elysium Street* for New Sparta Films.



R J McConnell (*Sound Design*)

RJ is a Fife-based composer and sound designer who has worked extensively in Scottish theatre, writing music and creating soundscapes for productions for Dundee Rep, The Tron, Pitlochry Festival Theatre and others as well as composing the score for the award-winning *Enchanted Forest* for ten years, in collaboration with Jon Beales. Recently, RJ has been working in film, bringing his unique sound to shorts and documentaries.



Elliot Baxter (*Wes*)

...trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He has starred in OFFIE award winning *Napoli 44*, *The Words of Others* and Sam Mendes' motion picture *1917*. His TV credits include BAFTA winning CBBC's *Harriet's Army*, *Silent Witness* and *Star Wars: Andor*.



Paul Chaal (*Vikram, Dhruv, Graham*)

...works as an actor, model and presenter. Since graduating in Acting and Performance he had appeared in many productions in film, TV, stage, radio, and Scottish Opera. Credits include BBC *Doctors*, *Life's a Breeze*, feature film *Tin Holiday*, and *Hedz* CBBC.



Andrea Crewe (*Joy, Mebrat, Rosemarie*)

...trained at City Acting Studio, Manchester. Theatre work includes *Beauty and the Beast* at the Dukes Theatre Lancaster, M6 Theatre and a wide variety of touring theatre projects. Her screen credits include *Synchronicity*, *Waterloo Road*, *Line of Duty* and *Blue Murder* and Andrea will appear on *Coronation Street* in a story that will air over 4 episodes in March.



Caroline Deyga (*Radio Voice, Margery Kempe, Clair*)

...trained at Napier & Queen Margaret Universities and the graduate scheme at Dundee Rep. She has just appeared in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (National Theatre of Scotland). Caroline was nominated for an Olivier Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role with the cast of *Our Ladies of Perpetual Succour* (NTS/London National/Sonia Friedman).



Houda Echoafni (*Qamar, Nasrin*)

...Theatre roles include King John and Museum In *Baghdad* for the RSC, and Shahrazad in Tim Supple's *1001 nights* at The Royal Lyceum Theatre. TV work includes roles in *Green Wing* (Channel 4) and *Hotel Babylon* (ITV). Films include *Death of Klinghoffer* (Film 4) and *Piercing Brightness* (Soda Films).



Lewis Howden (*Mac, Owen, John*)

...Lewis trained at the RSAMD (now RCS) and has worked extensively in theatre, film, television and radio. Theatre work includes *Red Dust Road, A Slow Air, Borderline. Dunsinane, Calum's Road* (National Theatre of Scotland). TV includes seven series of *Shetland* (as Sgt Billy McCabe), *Long Night at Blackstone, West Skerra Light*. Film includes *For Those in Peril, Aberdeen, The Blue Boy, Slide*.



Ali Watt (*Aiden*)

...trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. He recently appeared as Inspector Hay in the National Theatre of Scotland's new film production of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in UK cinemas, and as Winterburn in Irvine Welsh's *Crime* for Britbox.



I think the sounds
are coming from me

From my heart

My heart's a radio

The interviews that inform *Dialogues from Babel* come from the **Voices in Psychosis study** and **Writers' Inner Voices**.

Voices in Psychosis

Up to 1 in 10 people hear voices that others don't. These experiences can be highly stigmatised, rarely talked about, and often hidden from public view.

Hearing the Voice has been working with clinicians from the Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear (CNTW) and the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys (TEWV) NHS Foundation Trusts for over a decade, trying to get a better understanding of what voices are like, why they happen, and what helps people live well with them.

As part of this collaboration, forty voice-hearers using mental health services in the North-East of England were recruited to take part in the Voices in Psychosis study, which ran for three years and explored how their experiences of hearing voices changed over time.

Dialogues from Babel brings the participants' descriptions of their experiences to the stage, in their own words, so that they can be publicly heard. Philip worked closely with three of the participants who generously gave their permission for their experiences to be shared in this way.

Writers' Inner Voices

Many writers report vivid experiences of 'hearing' the voices of the characters they create and having characters who talk back to them, rebel, and 'do their own thing'. It's an experience described by a wide range of authors from Enid Blyton, Alice Walker, Quentin Tarantino and Charles Dickens through to Samuel Beckett, Henry James, Hilary Mantel and many more.

Writers' Inner Voices was a collaborative research project between Edinburgh International Book Festival and Durham University's Hearing the Voice which set out to examine the ways in which writers and storytellers experience the presence, agency and voices of their characters. Writers who took part in this study were interviewed by Mary and Philip and their conversations have been woven into *Dialogues from Babel*.

You can find out more about *Writers' Inner Voices* – what we discovered, explanations for what might be going on, and creative writing exercises based on the research – at the project website.

writersinnervoices.com

About Hearing the Voice

Hearing the Voice (Durham University) is an interdisciplinary research project on voice-hearing that has been funded by the Wellcome Trust since 2012. It brings academics from anthropology, cognitive neuroscience, history, linguistics, philosophy, English studies, medical humanities, theology and psychology together with clinicians, artists, activists and experts by experience in order to improve the way people understand, clinically treat, and live with experiences of hearing voices.

hearingthevoice.org



"Book festivals offer much more than a celebration of literature: they are a forum for public dialogue and grassroots democratic discussion. In *Dialogues from Babel* we get an imaginative response to the meeting of academic research and public discourse. Through collaboration and creativity comes a new kind of insight into consciousness, cognition and the human condition."

– Nick Barley, Director, Edinburgh International Book Festival

Edinburgh International Book Festival is the largest public celebration of the written word in the world. Every August they bring around 1000 writers and thinkers across the planet together to rub shoulders with you, the audience.

edbookfest.co.uk

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Katherine Lewis, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Huddersfield. Featured academic in the 'In Our Time' segment of the script. bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07cyfkg

Radio extract from 'In Our Time: Margery Kempe and English Mysticism' BBC Radio 4 June, 2016.

Looking for
information
and support?



Understanding Voices
understandingvoices.com

A 100+ page website providing evidence-based information and personal perspectives on different ways of understanding voices and supporting people who are struggling to cope.

Topics range from what voices are like and why they happen through to the pros and cons of medication, talking therapies and peer support. The website also contains techniques for managing distressing voices, information for families and friends, and sections on voices and trauma, creativity and spirituality.

Hearing Voices Network (HVN)
hearing-voices.org

Offers information, support and understanding to people who hear voices and those who support them. HVN can help you find a peer support group in your area if you live in England, Wales or Scotland. Groups may meet in person or online.

Voice Collective
voicecollective.co.uk

A London-based organisation providing information and support for children and young people who hear, see or sense things that others don't. They also offer support for parents, carers and other family members.

Intervoice
interviewonline.org

Website for the international Hearing Voices Movement, the largest international advocacy movement for people who hear voices and their allies.