

Such Stuff podcast
Bonus: Composing for the Ensemble

[Music plays]

Imogen Greenberg: Hello, I'm Imogen Greenberg and welcome to this bonus episode of Such Stuff. We'll be back next week with a longer episode, but we just wanted to bring you a little something extra from the Globe Ensemble.

As well as being an unusual process for the actors, it threw the creatives completely out of their comfort zone. As the entire show was created as an ensemble, the creatives couldn't do any preparatory work before coming into the rehearsal room and were equal players in the room with the actors.

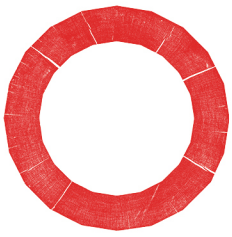
But how do you go about composing or designing a show as an ensemble?

Well, Composer and Globe Music Associate James Maloney took us behind the scenes, talking us through the process of composing for the ensemble and having to hold his nerve to the very last minute.

The music you'll hear is all from the Globe Ensemble's production of Hamlet. Here's James...

James Maloney: The first few weeks in particular of this process were unlike anything I've ever done and maybe unlike anything I'll do again.

In the sense that, it's normally starts to materialise a bit before the rehearsals start and that can happen in various forms. Normally it might be in conversations you have the director and the creative team and you kind of spark off the designs and maybe like the world of the play that you're setting it in, the



higher concept. But on this there was none of that, deliberately, there was kind of self-consciously a very blank slate, which was amazing and turned out to be really liberating and empowering.

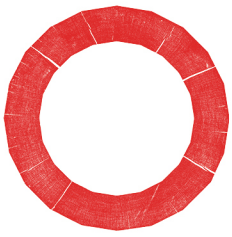
But also Fed and Elle were very keen that actually the creatives in the room didn't bring in their ideas too heavily in the first kind of month of rehearsals. I think it was a ten week rehearsal process, which was really kind of unusual and really sort of anxiety inducing for lots of different reasons. Partly you're just thinking 'right, there are two plays to do'. One of them in particular is extremely musical, it's full of songs. Everyone has to learn those songs, and just on a logistical point of view, the amount of material there is to make in an increasingly short amount of time. It was just so, really, really nerve wracking. But in a really good way, in a really exciting way. I was just thinking I didn't know how it was going to happen.

Also, I guess it was unusual in that your role in the ensemble was a very one to what you'd normally have as the Composer. So I was there in the circle, feeding lines to the actors, doing all that kind of thing.

The music materialised through a process of games in the room that uncovered the texts and uncovered the sort of production we were trying to make and Fed and Elle were really keen that instead of me coming in and imposing my ideas, they would come organically from the room. And that was really, as I say, slightly anxiety-inducing because you're not sure where they're going to come from, but gradually it came.

[Music plays

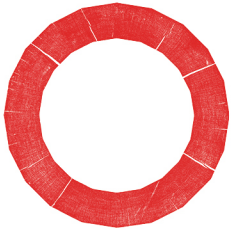
JM: And it was really interesting how it did come and real credit to Fed and to Elle and to Michelle, who wanted to work in this way, and who really were absolutely right that it would sort of come out of the room in quite an organic way.



So we did various games. For the first music session I did, instead of saying 'Here's some music, let's all learn it', we sort of got into groups and they each took on a character from Hamlet and I brought a load of instruments in and asked them to come up with a musical response to each of those characters. And that was a great way of a) sort of getting to know the texts, excavating the texts via music and also just sort of getting used to the idea of music as a thing so that when the time did come that music was going to be part of these productions, it didn't feel like a total anomaly. And then the rest came through lots of sort of one to one sessions with people like Shubs, playing Ophelia, looking at his songs, and with Tanika, who had a whole load of songs in As You Like It, and is a very brilliant singer. We really kind of workshopped ideas, we improvised the lines to music. I might play at a piano and they'd sort of sing over it and we'd gradually carve and sculpt these ideas, and I'd take them away and make them into something that was more musically coherent.

The dumb show in Hamlet, that came very late, very, very late in the process. And it was born out of, I think, no one really knew what we were going to do with it, which was the plan. And the choreographer Sian Williams brought in a track by The Beatles, and I can't remember what the name of the track was. It was one I'd never... I know The Beatles' music really well, and it was this track I'd never heard before, somehow. It was one of their, sort of, it's very psychedelic. And she played that and they kind of various sort of improvisations to this Beatles track. And it worked so well somehow. And it's something I'd never have thought of as a reference at all. And it really unlocked the possibility of what that sequence could be musically.

[Music plays]



JM: And I took it away and played with it. And sort of in the dumb show as it is now, although it's very different musically from that track, not least in the instrumentation which is basically a brass quartet and percussion, but that germ, that germ of the idea came from that collective approach to bringing music to the table. And it's a great example of something that works well, that's probably my favourite bit of music in the whole of the two plays, and that came from Sian.

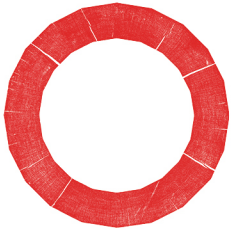
One of the things I did like about that bit is that it sort of grew with everyone else's input. I remember I was rehearsing it with the band for the first time and I was thinking 'this is a bit much'. It's very loud and it's very in your face and very sort of stylistically imposing and I remember thinking 'people are really going to think this is just far too much'. And actually when we brought it to the table and we got into the tech rehearsal which was actually the first time most people had heard it. Most people in the ensemble only heard it in tech week because that bit came together so late, and actually the general response was let's sort of turn it up even more.

[Music plays]

JM: You know, those loud bits, let's make them even louder. Those kind of cacophonous, very sort of contrapuntal, mad bits, let's make them even madder and that was great. That was a process of everyone coming together and me taking feedback and over the course of the first time that we workshopped those ideas in the rehearsal room, it had just taken on a life of its own and became a completely different bit of music.

[Music plays]

IG: If you missed the Globe Ensemble's production of Hamlet, you can catch up on the Globe Player later in the year.



You've been listening to Such Stuff with me, Imogen Greenberg.

Our theme music is from the album Mali in Oak, which was recorded in our very own Sam Wanamaker Playhouse.

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