



# Performance Studies

**A LEVEL**

**Performance Studies:  
John Godber – Chat**

Learner reference

July 2015

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This OCR resource should accompany the ‘John Godber’ Topic Exploration Pack, which you can download from the OCR website.



*This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.*



## John Godber, March 17th 2004, Cask Inn, Scarborough.

### His background

If you pretended to be a tree you were queer and I palpably wasn't  
This attitude informed what I wanted to do. Write plays.

I wanted to convince my mates that if you were sensitive and you liked reading plays there wasn't something wrong with you.

Some theatres are a temple to Art; Spring Street is just up from the morgue!

I was interested in demystifying and stressing the importance of Art.

Some people sympathize with 'Busted'. That is the journey that young people are on today.

### Teachers

I first wrote 'EPA' in 1983. But it was too close to me as I was in education. It wasn't until 1987 that I wrote 'Teachers'. I am Nixon.

I think that education probably isn't getting better. Drama is marginalized in the curriculum more than ever.

Why for 3 people? It is a financial consideration. Budgets were very limited. I was given £50 to do a production of Oklahoma at school. No money at all in Hull at Spring Street Theatre.

### Up 'n' under

The reason we did 'Up 'n' under'? If that theatre couldn't survive by doing a play about rugby league the theatre in Hull wanted shutting down and turning into a carpet warehouse. If the people in Hull didn't come and see a play about rugby league they wanted f\*\*\*\*\*!

'Up 'n' Under' was influenced by 'Rocky'. At the time I was influenced by Expressionism. I was Influenced by John McKendrick as I was doing a PhD at the time, but if I did a play by him no one would come to see it and I was in a situation at the time that I had to run a theatre.

Hull Truck was playing to 16% a house that was basically two people and a condom each night.

## Bouncers and the physical style

'Bouncers' was based on my experience of not being able to pick women up in clubs in Pontefract. So I wrote a play about it.

The style was influenced by what I was doing at the time. Playing rugby and power lifting. The physical side of my life impacted on my work. I wanted to convince those mates at the time that writing plays wasn't for 'tossers', you can't put that in your exam papers, but it was workman like. The challenge was to tell stories from a limited point of view.

The physical nature of the work is informed by an experience of wanting to communicate to a working class audience the value of physical work. In 'Bouncers' as an actor you are knackered you are exhausted and sweating, it's like a gig. I don't do 'sweating theatre' anymore I do 'sat down talking theatre' ('Fly Me to the Moon'). That's where that style came from.

## Teechers - Characters

'Salty' was a name that was taken from a teacher I taught with. 'Jackie Prime' is based on a real PE teacher that wasn't interested in me at all, no change there! I am 'Nixon' and 'Oggy Moxon'. 'Gail' had to be a blonde bombshell in order to play 'Gail'. 'Hobby' is based on a lad, now an actor, Adrian Hood who was very large, and shy, against the tiny 'Gail', Adrian was taught by me at school. 'Hobby' needed to be big in order to play 'Mrs Parry', who is a very big operatic kind of character. 'Hobby' is also has a dry sense of humour.

There is an 'Oggy Moxon' in any establishment or school. 'He was shaving when he was seven' type of lad. 'John Dean', Deany', teaches at the school. 'Mr Hatton' was the school caretaker 'Mrs Parry' was Hazel Geraghty, the head teacher at school in to amateur dramatics. Whilst at school he was asked to be in productions like 'Pyjama Game'. You had to be part of the am dram society at school.

## Teechers - Storytelling

The basis of 'Teechers' is simple story telling. You use the story in a very direct way. Yes there is illusion but you break down the illusion the more you break down the illusion, paradoxically you

create an illusion. (Brecht). What is theatre is it posh red curtains or does it mean something to your life.

## Teechers – Godber writes about himself

When 'Nixon' smacks 'Oggy' it is a real incident. Yes it was me, I had to hit him. A kid jumped into his car and told him to take him home. Paul Firth was his name. I was wrong. I drew on my own experience. I taught the wrong book at O level for example. I was writing 'Brookside' at the same time and 'Grange Hill'. I kind of overlooked the fact that I was teaching the wrong book. Then I left.

Eventually as 'Nixon' did, I had to say sorry and I had to go. He left them in the play for 'St George's' I am absolutely against the likes of 'St. George's'.

Now I have got kids and maybe 'St George's' is an option. Hypocrisy looms large in the mirror as it's a topic for serious discussion in our house.

## Teechers and imagination

I was in Brighton seeing a friend of mine and was asked to take a class because the drama teacher had died. The kids were uninterested in me, drama and the world. I said to them "have you seen or done any plays"... "Yeh, a play called 'Teechers' and its rubbish." "I don't know it". "Nothing happens in it and you have to use your imagination". I thought 'Wow! That's scary!'

The whole point of 'Teechers' is that you have to use your imagination. There were kids who didn't want to engage or pretend and play and I think that once you stop wanting to play, intellectually, you are dead.

What plays like 'Teechers' and 'Bouncers' do is give you a frame work for you to use your imagination, so when an actor says they are 'Mrs Parry' you immediately you go that isn't the person I am looking at its in my head. It's like joining the dots. Television does it for you.

In the Theatre it tells you what to do in 'Teechers' it creates another illusion.....

...And it is called 'Teechers' you have to use your imagination' etc. It demystifies the play.

When you say I'm going to tell you a story you say "Oh a story" and so you go with it. This is a play and this is how it starts if you don't play the game there is no game you might as well put a bag on your head.

## Acting

I once took a play that I wrote for 26 kids who had never been in a play. We put the set in a back of a coal lorry and ended up winning awards for acting. The acting was just natural and honest having emotions that are raw, emotionally close to you. Real.

## Comedy

You know why you are laughing because it's true. I call it the black head syndrome. When we laugh at it we recognize it. That actually says that we are not that different. Humour conjoins us. That's what stories theatre, novels, film does. They say of novel writing and theatre that we read to realize that we are not alone deep in our experience is truth. Yes I have told porkys or bent the rules etc. That's where plays like 'Teachers' score, 'cos if it was untrue we would say I do not believe this.

## Language

Language changes "Knackers" doesn't have the same weight as it had in 1987. I hate bad language to tell it like it is you have to have those references. I'm going to play truant', 'Oh look there are the truants"

## Popular Culture

It has to feel like it's happening now. (References to popular culture.) In order to make it contemporary you have to change things.....you have to make it work for the people watching it...we only read the books we want to read....

## About Teachers

The relationship between the staff and the student is absolutely crucial some teachers mean something to your life. If they don't mean something it doesn't matter to you.

## What theatre does...

It is crucial you understand how other people feel emotionally. It is absolutely at the core of education. A simple test for you. (from Brian Way's book?) 'What's it like to be blind?' someone

puts their hand up. 'You can't see!' then the person is blindfolded, then the kid has a completely different answer. 'You feel frightened and alone.' That is a simple way to show how other people feel.

## Why write?

The world we are living in is your world. That's what literature is about. I spend my living writing stuff that people can connect with. We are fed Hollywood films that have nothing to do with your life. We must write about what is going on now. Literature is 'in the now'.

I used to think writers were just blokes with beards some are but they are living breathing people who have the same kind of worries everyone else has William Shakespeare was just a bloke. Find out how what you are studying relates to you it is essentially about life you are living now.

I don't do topics that won't sell. I write with specific writers in mind for me that is the best way to work. I cast in my mind. Got to get the dialogue right.

## Dialogue

When you watch television, the dialogue is wooden. It reminds you of information all the time. In theatre dialogue you try to hide what is said, so the actor can play it. Like musical notes. It has to be acted. When you watch 'telly' dialogue, you turn off. Television is a sausage machine. The good thing about theatre is you have to be there.

## Actor and audience relationship

The actor knows you're there in Teachers. Some plays say we are going to pretend that you are not there that really is a fundamental starting point.

## Playing characters

Character is about intellectual colour. It's actually in your head. Describe how you feel that's your character. Who are you?

## Imagination

The scene in the toilets has been called vulgar what's vulgar is what is in your head you are doing all the work the power is in how little you can get away with. 'We are in a



In a way that graphic is there like a cartoon. 'I am French with a moustache bonjour', the audience is just filling in, there is an intellectual dynamic that goes on between the performer and the audience. "Oh yeh, I've got it I know what its is."

*(Godber storyboards using images).*

Road mapping the story in visual images. There is simplicity to the physical style. It's not magic. In a way the simplicity is everything. That's why for 'Teechers' the stage set is just a room a classroom etc.

## Expressionist influence

I wanted to 'eat' plays I played rugby at a fairly high level.

Before I would go on I would read a play two hours before the match. I like short plays.

'Stallerhoff' a play by Kroetz for example.

In "Scene One Seppe has a shit." "Scene 2 Seppe has another shit".

It has brevity and the ability to show something and then it's gone. It can say "time is moving on", we expect middle class theatre (In posh accent) "Simon the digger s here!" Snapshots are straight out of 'Stallerhoff' it builds a picture like 'snapshots' from a movie.

You can't bore the audience. You are to blame for boring the audience. You are there live in front of them. They are all influences. Brecht, Kroetz, Woyzeck. Theatre has got to be engaging.

Films in your head, that's what plays are.

## Imagination

In Mary Warnock's book 'Imaginations' if we don't train people to use their imaginations how can they think?

We think in pictures. Not words. The bizarre thing about theatre is that we call it an 'auditorium' and auditorium a place where we hear plays, but we don't actually remember the words. This is from famous practitioner Peter Brook).

In 'Waiting for Godot' we remember a tree and two people doing nothing. In theatre you remember the visual.

## Dialogue

You try to write with dialogue that gets to the point. You can feel tedium. I don't leave the cinema but I would leave the theatre. I have. I'll watch anything in the cinema it is just a warm shower, it has nothing to do with my life.

## Writing

I am non-conformist I don't want to write a play like anyone else. I write very quickly. Teachers a week. Bouncers three days.

## Film

I would like to do more film in order to reach more people. 'Teachers' would attract more people as a film.

## Actors

Don't use well-known actors. You can believe the people you are seeing....It's not 'Darren Day as Mother Goose'. 'Lionel Blair as Salty'.

## Music

I use the music because it is evocative, it changes atmosphere very, very quickly, "Oh yeh, I've got this, I like this track", it keeps the connection. It's popular culture, its part of your life.

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