



ARNDALE CENTRE

Even These Things

Three Centuries. Three Moments. Our City.

World Premiere

Schools
Resource
Pack

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Pre-Visit Information

Running time:

Approx 1 hour 45 minutes, no interval

Content Warnings

Thematic Content

Even These Things explores complex and potentially distressing themes. This production includes strong language, depictions and references to physical violence, animal cruelty, depression, baby loss, and bombings/explosions.

Technical Content

This production includes the use of fake blood, smoke, haze, strobe and flashing lighting effects, and sudden loud noises including an explosion. A live dog appears on stage.

Age guidance: 14+

Even These Things contains strong language and explores complex and potentially distressing themes. The production includes haze, strobe and flashing lighting, and sudden loud noises. A live dog appears on stage.

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Travel Recommendations

Trams

If your school or college is near a tram stop, you can bring your students to us for just £1 each, and £2 per teacher. This is a great way to save money on coaches, while also giving students the experience of using public transport – just like many of our audiences do when they visit the theatre.

More information is available [here](#).

Coaches

For information about coach drop-offs and parking, please click [here](#).

About the Show

**Three centuries.
Three moments.
Our city.**

'Do you think the city's forgotten?'

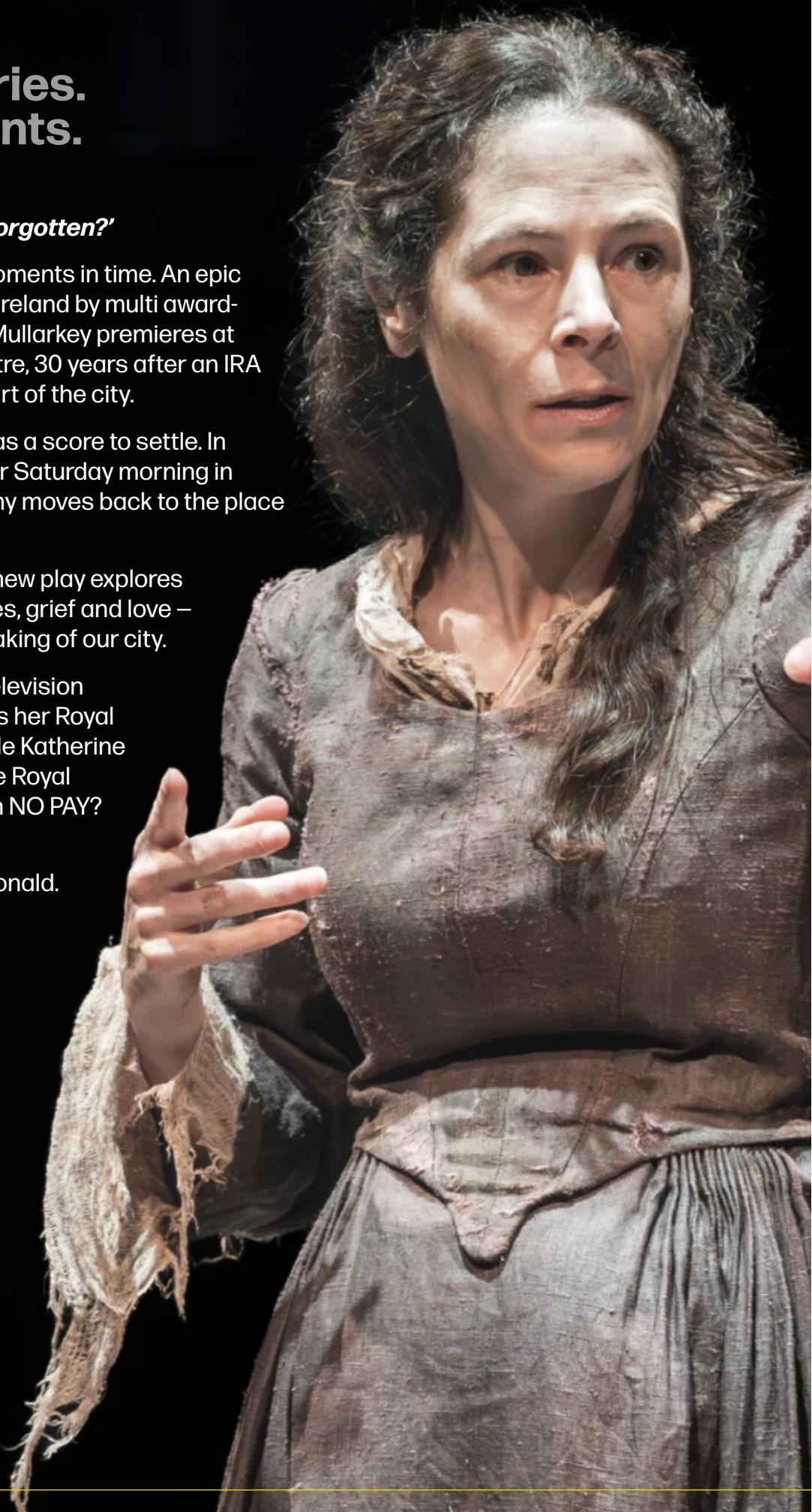
Three centuries. Three moments in time. An epic story of Manchester and Ireland by multi award-winning playwright Rory Mullarkey premieres at the Royal Exchange Theatre, 30 years after an IRA bomb devastated the heart of the city.

In 1846, Annie Donovan has a score to settle. In 1996, it looks like any other Saturday morning in Manchester. In 2026, Jenny moves back to the place where she grew up.

This original and moving new play explores private and public histories, grief and love – and the making and re-making of our city.

Award-winning film and television star Elaine Cassidy makes her Royal Exchange debut, alongside Katherine Pearce, who returns to the Royal Exchange after starring in *NO PAY? NO WAY!* (2023).

Directed by James Macdonald.



Cast & Creative Team

Creative Team

Playwright: **Rory Mullarkey**

Director: **James Macdonald**

Casting Director: **Amy Ball CDG**

Associate Director: **Katie Greenall**

Assistant Director: **Sadie Mears**

Dramaturg: **Emily McLaughlin**

Children's Casting Director: **Keston & Keston**

Designer: **Laura Hopkins**

Lighting Designer: **Charles Balfour**

Sound Designer: **Ian Dickinson**

Movement & Intimacy Director: **Georgina Lamb**

Professional Cast



Elaine Cassidy:
Annie Donovan / Kaz



Katherine Pearce:
Jenny



Fionnuala Dorrity:
Helicopter Pilot / Queen Victoria

Community Cast

Jada Adewale	Milly Doregos	Kayden Lai	Eira Short
Sophia Aiello	Dorretta Lorraine Maynard	Stephen Lee	Paula Simbu
Heritage Awesanya	Isabelle Dorrian	Zheng Yuan Lee	Sofiia Skorytska
Willem Babrovskie	Harriet Eaton	Olivia Leishman	Tilly Spencer
Gemma Barrington	Sophie Edmunds	Ava Lewis-Vasco	Harry Spooner
Gill Bassam	Elaine Fell	Nathaniel Lewis-Vasco	Ethan Stringer
Steve Bassam	Paul Foster	Joanne Lowndes	Steven Szoltysek
Ettie Bennett	Damian Frendo	Emer Mac Manus	Wesley Thistlethwaite
Colin Blackledge	Catherine Fyfe	Yuan McCabe	Emmeline Thomas
Nathan Bradley	Stephen Garratt	Peter McKinney	Rosie Thomas
Marcus Bradshaw	Chloe Gorrod	Thomas McLeish	Ez Thompson
Ellen Breheny	Dave Gorvett	Beya Milan	Lenny Tunnicliffe
Belle Brien	Paul Green	Peter Mungovan	Anthony Walsh
Melanie Broughton	Stephen Hall	Eve Njoroge	Aaron Watts
Chloe Buckley	Finch Hamil	Victoria Okhiria	David Weston
Nick Burke	Charlie Hill	Jayran Oskoei-Lear	Jennifer Wightman
Elizabeth Cameron	Anthony Houghton	Myra Pennington	Emily Williams
Rob Caudwell	Victoria Hoyle	Emmy Quall	Robin Wright
Simeon Caudwell	Annabelle Lloyd Hughes	Stewart Racle	Choirs
Cherry Chan	Joy Hewlett	Tina Ramos Ekongo	Kitty Watson
Cyrus Choy	Nicole Iwobi	Tabitha Reid	Academy of Performing Arts, Manchester
Levinia Clemeston	Jane Martin	Marlies Reisch-Gallagher	Razzamataz Theatre Schools, Manchester South
Heather Cole	Jack Kirkpatrick	Rebecca Riley	Shooting Star Theatre School, Manchester
Ellie Cordwell	Laila Khan	Freddie Rimmer	St Philips CofE Primary School, Salford
Ophelia Cordwell	Noa Kidane	Terry Robinson	
Tom Cunningham	Esther Kimani	Patricia Russell	
Evan Cunliffe	Ryan Kinsi	Ann Sarge	
Konde Dauda	Ryan Kinsi	Abosede Sanusi-Shoga	
Ivan Davis	River Kerr	Mike Seal	
Mark Dawson	Helen Kozak	Reggie Shirley	
Brendan Delphinus-Lopez	Kai Lilley		

Rehearsal Photos



Director & Cast in Conversation

Go behind the scenes of *EVEN THESE THINGS* with conversations from the cast and creative team.



In our first interview, Director James Macdonald and Designer Laura Hopkins discuss the process of bringing the play to life on our in-the-round stage. Together, they explore the inspiration behind the set design, Manchester's influence on the production, and how the show moves across three different time periods.



In our second interview, cast members Elaine Cassidy and Katherine Pearce reflect on the themes of the play, their characters, and what it's been like working on this ambitious new production alongside a Community Cast of over 100 people from across Greater Manchester.

EVEN THESE THINGS:

A Piece of New Writing – What is History? The Art of Telling Stories

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[...]

It's 11:17am on Saturday the fifteenth of June 1996, and an almighty boom breaks the air and sucks everything inwards.

The goths and the veteran, the drunk and the police, the buildings and the streets and the streetlights and the windows and the offices and the bus stops and the cafes and the homes and the shops and everything in the shops, the people and everything they want, everyone they're here with, the people people love, the city on this hot June day, the woman who stepped forward to see what's going on.

Oh, it's all so fragile!

How do you tell a story about history? This was one of the questions posed to playwright Rory Mullarkey when he was commissioned by Selina Cartwright, Artistic Director at the Royal Exchange, to write a new work marking the 30th anniversary of the Manchester bomb. Another question quickly follows: why tell this story at all?

Every story rests as much on what is said as on what is left unspoken. Think about making a film: what makes it onto the screen, and what is left on the cutting room floor? It is never possible to record every moment of an event. Even a photograph carries a trace of what is left unseen: the view behind the camera.

When it comes to history, this is even more true. As time moves forward, parts of the whole picture can start to vanish or fall into forgotten silence. Seen and unseen, silent and spoken – each choice a storyteller makes is a choice about value. To tell a story is to ask: whose voice counts?

So whose story is the story of the IRA bomb, which detonated on Corporation Street on 15 June 1996? And why does it matter today?

EVEN THESE THINGS could be said to answer it is a story of place – of Manchester, of England and Ireland. Or a story of time – of 1846, 1996 and 2026; of the minutes and hours before the bomb; or of the 30 years after the explosion. Or it is a story of people: of Pig Annie, of 75 Mancunians, of two women on a bench, and of a child dressed as an angel.

It is a story of English colonisation of Ireland that stretches back to the first Anglo-Norman invasion in 1169. It is also a story of buildings: those which emerged in the spaces cleared by the bomb, and the new-build flats that now stud the skyline. It is an epic tale of a fight for a pig. It is 100 stories, tiny fragments of daily life. It is the tragedy of a miscarriage and a conversation between strangers. At every turn, one story fractures, doubles and multiplies.

Why do you think Rory Mullarkey writes the story of the 1996 Manchester bomb this way? How do you think the play asks us to look at history?

Pig Annie: “*Una salus victis nullam sperare salutem* Father” I say as I turn and snatch my skirts out of a pile of horse manure I didn’t realise was there “The only hope for the vanquished is to have no hope at all enjoy your matches”

In the play’s final act, we meet “a little girl wearing an angel costume, and she’s running around in circles, lost in her own little world.” Her name is Annie and her mother says she is “completely obsessed” with Swiss German painter Paul Klee.

The little girl brings to life the image of Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus*, signalling a particular idea of history at work in the play.

Walter Benjamin, a German Jewish philosopher, writer and thinker, wrote *Theses on the Philosophy of History* in 1942 during the rise of the Third Reich. His theory of history centres on an analysis of Klee’s painting.

In his thesis, Benjamin warns of the danger of history becoming “a tool of the ruling classes”. In other words, history can be told in a way that makes current power structures seem natural – including those linked to class, gender, nation and race – while making any story that challenges them disappear.

Walter Benjamin writes, “One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm.” In other words, we risk sacrificing our morality to the steady movement of “progress” or so-called modernisation. We normalise the unacceptable in order to maintain the momentum of our own lives, and the value of a world order in which we have invested so much of ourselves. To protect an idea of our own future, we forget our history – and then we forget our humanity.

He writes: “Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.” In other words, oppressors in power will distort, erase or misuse the history of the oppressed, attempting to destroy even their memory.

Where can you hear echoes of this idea in the play?

Benjamin sees Klee’s painting as the image of an alternative relationship to the past. He names the painting “the angel of history”, who stands and bears witness to what has happened. For Benjamin, the possibility of change – of a future free from fascism – lies in “the image of our ancestors”, and in remembering their lives and their struggles for freedom.

Benjamin offers storytellers this guidance: “A chronologer who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history.”

In the midst of Hitler’s rise to power, Benjamin put faith in a future found by looking back to history: in stories of protest, everyday acts of resistance, and the beauty and value of ordinary lives.

These words echo in the procession of 55 Community Cast members, who bring to life moments of everyday life on the morning of the bomb. In Part Two, the smallest gestures are framed as art:

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In a coffee shop on Princess Street an old woman asks for a cup of hot water, then sits down at a table near the back of the shop. She takes a teabag out of a zip-lock packet, puts the teabag in the cup, and begins her day

Why do you think Rory Mullarkey brings our attention to the hours before the bomb exploded? Why do you think he offers us an image of a little girl dressed as the Angel of History?

.....

Kaz: *I love this park but it used to be Hell in the past / Bare-knuckle fights here every weekend / Then it was a giant paupers' grave / There's forty thousand people buried here you know / Most of them probably Irish [...] / Say all their names out loud you'd be here for twenty-two hours [...]*

Jenny: *Do you think the city's forgotten*

Kaz: *I don't think a place can forget*

.....

To tell the story of the Manchester bomb, *EVEN THESE THINGS* takes us from 14 June 1846 up to the present moment. In the play's final beats, it arrives at the time of now:

.....

Kaz: *It's* (she looks at her watch, then says the time and date right now, as this is happening, as the audience are watching the show, in the following format – “*It's [time] am/pm on the [number] of [month], [year].*”)

.....

The play's triptych – or three-part – form offers an image of history that stretches back in time and continues long after the moment of the bomb's blast. Look at the titles and stage directions that open each part of the play:



Part One: Pig Annie

Place: Angel Meadow, Manchester.

Time: Sunday, 14 June 1846.

Part Two: So Many Mornings

Place: Manchester City Centre.

Time: Saturday, 15 June 1996.

Part Three: Coming Home

Place: Saint Michael's Flags and Angel Meadow Park, Manchester.

Time: Now.

Tracing and re-tracing each other's steps across the stage, the characters show how one era shapes the next. The play starts and ends in Angel Meadow. Part One is voiced by Pig Annie, and in Part Three we watch a little girl named Annie, dressed as an angel, play in a park that was once known as “Hell”.

Why tell the story of the 1996 Manchester bomb? Remembering the bomb's blast, Kaz tells us: “*Hope in the moment of hoping just feels like / Fear.*”

To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, the struggle of our ancestors is the inheritance of our children. Folding back on itself, *EVEN THESE THINGS* seems to suggest that there is something in Pig Annie's fight in the meadows that makes possible the little girl's innocent play in the park.

The actions of the IRA, including the 1996 Manchester bomb, were part of the context in which the **Good Friday Agreement** was eventually reached. The daily lives of people across Manchester, as imagined in **Part Two: So Many Mornings**, shape the city we walk through today. The gravestones that line the set, each a recreation of stone from Saint Michael's Flags, are an invitation to listen to our landscape, and to see how the city remembers even when people forget.

Tracing the reverberations of a single bomb in the city of Manchester, *EVEN THESE THINGS* invites us to recognise the impact of bombs falling now in countries other than our own. The last moments of the play are set in the shared minutes of the performance: the time of live performance, witnessed by a live audience. It is a moment of people coming together to share a story.

Associate Director Katie Greenall reflects:

“The play is so much about grief, but as an audience we never face that directly; it always comes to us indirectly. I think it speaks to something about life today – we are witnessing and experiencing so much continual loss of life. Yet for many of us, it is at once removed. The play asks: what is it to sit and watch people experience collective or deeply personal loss without, as an audience, being directly part of it?”

If **Part Two: *So Many Mornings*** reminds us that every life is “fragile”, and rests on the assertion that every moment of a life is beautiful and worthy of being framed as art, can we say this without also saying that every life is beautiful?

In its last moments, *EVEN THESE THINGS* asks us a final question: can we speak of the Manchester bomb without talking about the countries where bombs are now falling every morning? When faced with violent oppression, where can we find hope? What is hope without action?

Part One

- Why do you think Rory Mullarkey chose to tell a history of Irish life in 1840s Manchester through a monologue?

Part Two

- Why do you think Rory Mullarkey chose to represent the day of the bomb through 43 scenes and characters played by two Community Casts of 55?

Part Three

- Why do you think the play ends with a dialogue – a conversation between two women?



Image: Angelus Novus (New Angel), **Paul Klee**



Image: An attic room in a lodging house in Angel Meadows, 1800s – photo from Manchester Libraries



Image: Angel Meadows, 1800s – photo from Manchester Libraries



Image: St Ann's Square, 1991



Image: Arndale Centre, 1996



Image: People in Derry celebrate the **Good Friday Agreement**, 1998



Image: Angel Meadows today – **Angel Meadow: from hell hole to tranquillity – Life In The Mouse House**



Making EVEN THESE THINGS:

Set Design and the Stories Beneath Our Feet

“EVEN THESE THINGS is about dealing with catastrophe and loss, but it’s also about immigration – some of its key characters are Irish immigrants, or descendants of Irish immigrants; some of the original people who fuelled the Industrial Revolution. It’s also about hope, and the fabric of the city, and how that has evolved over time. It’s about Manchester and the people who made Manchester, and how you survive disaster.”

James Macdonald

Director James Macdonald highlights the influence of Friedrich Engels’ *The Condition of the Working Class in England* on *EVEN THESE THINGS*. Engels’ work marks the human cost of the Industrial Revolution, mapping the impact of factory work on people, towns and cities. A large part of the book is reportage from Engels’ time in Manchester, and the slums around Angel Meadow.

The first act of *EVEN THESE THINGS* is set in “Irish Town”, a common name for Angel Meadow that refers to the large population of Irish immigrants who lived there, in 1846 – the year after Engels’ book was published.

Engels was sent to Manchester by his parents as a cotton merchant, and became a subscriber at the Royal Exchange, the site of much of Manchester’s cotton trade. His time in the city further shaped his radical thought. It was in Chetham’s Library that Marx and Engels studied and wrote notes for a text that would become *The Communist Manifesto*.

In Manchester, Engels also met Mary Burns, a working-class Irish woman. While they never

married, as they saw marriage as “bourgeois”, they lived together as a couple for 20 years. Little is known or written about Mary. Her voice has been lost in formal accounts of the history of the period and the birth of socialism. However, some historians argue that it was Mary who led Engels through the streets of the slums and the city that was her home.

Engels described what he saw in Angel Meadow as “composed of single rows of houses and groups of streets which might be small villages, lying on bare clayey soil which does not produce even a blade of grass”. He went on to describe the houses as “in a disgraceful state because they are never repaired. They are filthy and beneath them are found to be damp, dirty cellar dwellings; the unpaved alleys lack any form of drainage... The lanes in this district are so filthy that it is only in very dry weather that one can reach it without sinking ankle deep at every step.”

There is a strong case to be made that it was not only studying, but walking in the city, that gave rise to Marx and Engels’ socialist writings. It was witnessing and listening to the stories of people, their work and their homes, that helped shape socialism’s foundational texts.

Can you see any parallels between the life of Mary Burns and Pig Annie? Why do you think the play offers us this connection between fictional and real women?

How do you think the set and costume capture the squalid living conditions described by Engels?

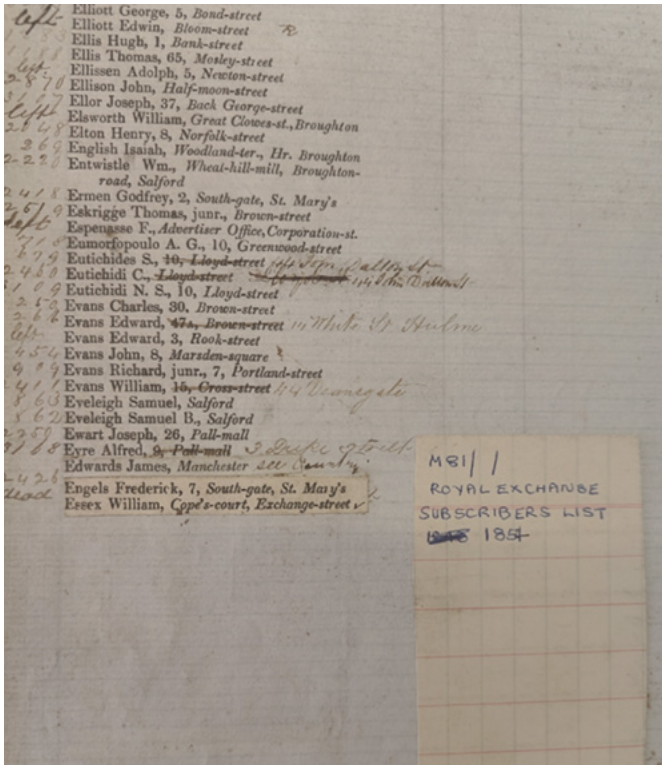


Image: Royal Exchange Subscribers List, 1854



Image: Engels statue, originally housed in Ukraine, outside HOME, Manchester



Image: Syers Ready Reference and Cab Fare Plan of Manchester and Salford, 1868

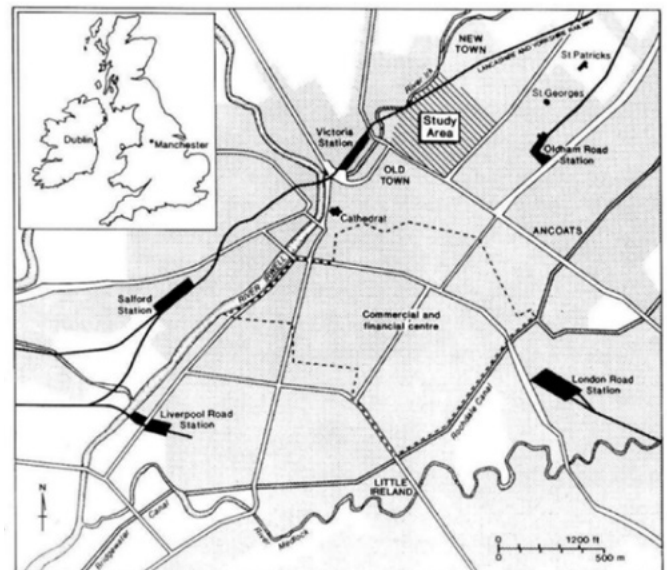


Image: Map of Irish living areas in Manchester – Angel Meadow: A Study of the Geography of Irish Settlement in Mid-Nineteenth Century Manchester

Feminist geographer Doreen Massey writes that place is composed of relationships across time and space. A city is built over decades. The natural landscape is slowly transformed into paved streets, shaped by the lives of its inhabitants. A city centre emerges around the places people gather, and around their labour. In 1800s Manchester, factories were built around the river. Around the factories, housing was built for the workers. Around the houses came churches, pubs and schools. New technologies bring new transformations: today, tower blocks made from glass rise in the city's skyline, old mills become luxury flats, and a trading hall became a theatre.

Built by hands and shaped by lives, the city in turn shapes us – directing where we go to

see friends and family, where we study, where we play football or dance, and where we find places to share stories.

Designer Laura Hopkins evokes the stories that shape our city by incorporating Manchester's architecture and history into her design, helping the play travel from century to century across its three acts.

Reflecting on the design process, Laura says: "As the Royal Exchange is in the round, the main element of the design is the floor." Notice how the space of the theatre also shapes the build of the show. In-the-round staging means large set pieces can risk blocking the audience's view of the stage, so designers must work creatively within these limitations to build a sense of the play's world.



In each act, the stage is reimagined through the theatre floor.

Part One:

a large sheet of dirty cloth covers the stage.

Part Two:

a collage of different pavement slabs and gravestones is revealed.

Part Three:

the stage is blanketed in AstroTurf.

Reflecting on Laura's design, Director James Macdonald says that "what's central [to Manchester today] is the experience of the paved-over city, which isn't the original Victorian city." The bones of old slum houses and roads lie beneath our feet. The design evokes the changing landscape of the city, covering and uncovering the histories beneath us.

For Part Two: *So Many Mornings*, the challenge was to create a set that would anchor the procession of short scenes within a sense of the city, while allowing the scenes to move across Manchester and follow all

the place names written into the text. Laura says: "We wanted to have a generic urban landscape rooted in Manchester, referencing the different Manchester locations referenced in the text – including Market Street, the Arndale Centre and King Street."

"Originally, we'd talked about a textured floor. We wanted to do something that was really drawn from Manchester's streets, so we were thinking of taking casts from some of the grave slabs [at St Michael's] and pavement slabs [across the city] – recreating them by taking real moulds. However, in Part Two, we have all these things travelling across the space on wheels, so that ruled out texture. Then we hit on the idea of having photographic representation – so it will be a collage of real bits of ground in Manchester."

Why do you think cloth was chosen to represent the Irish slums in Angel Meadow in Part One? A clue lies in a common name for Manchester, earned from a key product of the factories.

Why do you think the choice was made to recover the paving slabs in Part Two?



Photos of each three floors

Angel Meadow & Engels

Taken from the BBC: *BBC – Manchester – Angel Meadow: “Hell upon Earth”*

The most infamous part of Angel Meadow was the former burial ground of St Michael's Church, which contained the mass graves of 40,000 paupers.



Photo: BBC Manchester – Angel Meadow: ‘Hell upon Earth’

1838: how the poor of Angel Meadow lived

Unpaved for 40 years, it was finally laid with flagstones and thereafter known as “The Flags”. A resident of Rochdale Road described it as follows:

“There was at one time a number of gravestones covering the remains of some dear lost ones, but these have been removed and a few are to be seen in some of the cottages... Very often are the bones of the dead exposed and carried away and a human skull has been kicked about for a football on the ground.”

Friedrich Engels, socialist reformer and author of *The Communist Manifesto*, described Angel Meadow – an area he called the Old Town of Manchester – in his hugely influential book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*.

“Such is the Old Town of Manchester,

and on re-reading my description, I am forced to admit that instead of being exaggerated, it is far from black enough to convey a true impression of the filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterise the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city of the world.

If any one wishes to see in how little space a human being can move, how little air – and such air! – he can breathe, how little of civilisation he may share and yet live, it is only necessary to travel hither. True, this is the Old Town, and the people of Manchester emphasise the fact whenever any one mentions to them the frightful condition of this Hell upon Earth; but what does that prove? Everything which here arouses horror and indignation is of recent origin, belongs to the industrial epoch.”



Cottonopolis & The Royal Exchange

Doreen Massey writes that “the local is global”. The cotton sheet that cloaks the stage in Part One reminds us of the international history of Manchester’s industrial past. The cotton trade that transformed Manchester’s industry and landscape relied on the labour of enslaved people across America. The oppression of Irish immigrants was produced by a powerful elite whose money was extracted from the bodies of African and Caribbean people removed from their lands and their freedom. The fabric of our city was made by people across the globe.

The Royal Exchange building, originally a trading hall where many merchants dealt in cotton and cloth, offers a striking example of this connection between trade, oppression and place.

To find out more about the history of the building and its connection to the transatlantic slave trade, reflected in the very land on which it is built, take a look at our ***Uncovering the History of the Building project*** – a research project in partnership with students from the University of Manchester.



Photo: H. L. Saunders and Frederick Sargent's painting of the Interior of the Royal Exchange, 1877

References

Friedrich Engels - Manchester Histories

How Friedrich Engels' Radical Lover Helped Him Father Socialism

Selections from The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845) – Caitlin Duffy

Making EVEN THESE THINGS:

The Story of a Statue

XXXIX

On Piccadilly Gardens the great bronze statue of Queen Victoria wrinkles her nose disgustedly as a group of confused German football fans sweat on her plinth. It's 10.52am.

The procession of Mancunians in **Part Two: So Many Mornings** required bespoke props and costumes to anchor each moment in its particular time and place.

Moment 34 posed a unique challenge: how do you bring the statue of Queen Victoria to life? The answer: something part prop, part costume, capable of holding an actor while suspended in mid-air.

After making a small model to act as a guide, our Wardrobe and Props departments worked at the same time. Wardrobe created a corset for our aerialist, while Props built the plinth that would hold her and form the skirts

of the statue. The final effect is tied together using the same leather across the costume and set piece.

The statue was commissioned in 1897 to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee but was unveiled in 1901 after her death. It was originally supposed to be a marble statue. Queen Victoria herself felt that a marble statue would not survive well in Manchester's industrial air and suggested changing it to bronze.

Designed by sculptor Onslow Ford, it was described by *The Westminster Review* as "at once the most pretentious, the most incoherent and most inept of any sculptural monument one has ever seen in England, which is notorious for its inadequacy in this particular line".

Why do you think playwright Rory Mullarkey brings the statue to life? What is the relevance of Queen Victoria to the story of the play? Why does she wrinkle her nose?



Making EVEN THESE THINGS:

Don't Look Back in Anger – Dressing the 90s

The simplicity of Part Two relies on the power of an image to transport us to another time. Costuming the Community Cast was therefore crucial to conveying the atmosphere of 1996.

The process began with mood boards, mapping subcultures from the decade, exploring the differences in dress between different teenage subcultures, and tracking the kits of 90s hockey and football teams.

Sourcing costumes involved pulling pieces from our stores, scouring the web for vintage items – such as an actual 90s Disney Store employee cardigan – and crafting bespoke pieces, including recreations of Quick Market uniforms.

With Costume and WHAMa – Wigs, Hair and Make-Up – fittings required for 110 people, we took over a new room within the Exchange building, transforming it into a second wardrobe department for the cast.

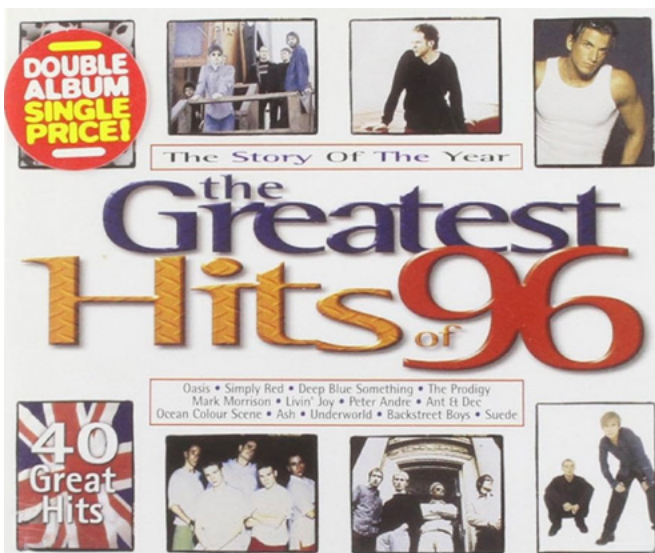


Image: Royal Exchange Wardrobe Department

Community Cast

Over 100 Mancunians on Stage

Reflections from James Macdonald

Director James Macdonald speaks about the experience of working with a cast of 110 people from across Greater Manchester.

“The feeling [of reading the script for the first time] was joy – it was just so unlike anything I’ve read before.

I love doing plays with tiny scenes in; it’s one of my favourite things. But the rules for directing a tiny scene are no different from directing a great epic scene – it’s just about asking who these people are, why they’re there and what’s on their mind.

The fun of making EVEN THESE THINGS has been meeting all these brilliant people from all around Manchester and working with them on the stories of each vignette.

[Working with a Community Cast is no different from working with professional actors]. What is different is the energy of endlessly different and fascinating people coming into the room, each with stories to tell.”

Working with a Community Cast: An Interview with Associate Director Katie Greenall

What is it like working with a Community Cast?

Brilliant. We couldn’t do it without them. There is no way of staging the middle section without the ensemble. Act Two tries to capture a snapshot of the morning of that day, and it feels so important to bring that to life with people from Manchester. It’s exciting to fill the rehearsal room with people who are representative of Manchester today. Bringing 110 people onto the stage is a beautiful celebration of 50 years of work at the theatre, while also being an amazing declaration of intent for the future work of the building.

What has been the process of building the Community Cast?

We began with a public call-out and received 440 applications. We then met around 200 people at auditions. We wanted to meet as many people as possible and prioritised seeing a wide mix of people from across Greater Manchester.



What were you looking for in auditions?

It was less about being a “good actor” and more about how people were able to show up as themselves, and how we thought people could work in an ensemble. We were looking for authenticity to help capture the extraordinary within the ordinary at the heart of each vignette.

How did you make casting decisions?

As with all casting, it was a bit like making a jigsaw: finding people to help fit the characters with the right ages and demographics. This sat alongside our commitment to represent Greater Manchester and the story of the play, which meant prioritising people from the Irish community, looking for a mix of ages, and including people from across the Greater Manchester boroughs.

How do you hold the rehearsal room when working with 110 non-professional performers?

Like any rehearsal room, it’s about setting clear expectations, helping everyone understand what’s needed from them, allowing them to ask questions, and encouraging a sense of ownership over the project. It’s about building a space where people feel comfortable bringing their authentic selves to the process.

What’s important when working in an ensemble – and what advice would you give young actors?

What’s key is listening to instructions and to others around you. It’s also about understanding that we each take responsibility for ourselves, rather than trying to worry about everyone else’s parts.



Has anything surprised you about working with this Community Cast?

I've not done lots of intergenerational work before, so it's been beautiful to see how everyone works together, and how the cast looks after one another. Another surprise has been working with the two teams – each part is played by two people who alternate shows – and seeing how much people learn from watching their counterparts. It has become a key part of the rehearsal process.

What were your first thoughts on reading EVEN THESE THINGS?

Spellbinding. One of the best pieces of new writing I've read. It's so deeply human. The form is so unexpected yet perfectly fits the three very distinct parts of Manchester's history.

So much of the play is about arrivals and departures, immigration and migration. In a climate where people arriving in our cities are often portrayed in such a negative light, one of the things I love about the story is how it shows that our cities are made and built by a huge melting pot of people, and how that is the backbone of the city.

Working on this show as my first show in Manchester and at the Royal Exchange has been a very special experience. I recognise place names from the script as I walk the streets. It's shown me the radical history of this city, how that history was built by people across the globe, and how it has in turn shaped the world.

What is really beautiful about this show is that, through everyday moments, it is able to talk about an extraordinary day. Often in rehearsals, I find myself forgetting about the bigger themes. The play has a very human feeling of time: in each of the three parts, people face catastrophe. There is a moment of looking to the future, like standing on a precipice, and in each part we hear the same words echo: I just want to survive. It shows that every life is extraordinary.



Walking & Writing Prompt

EVEN THESE THINGS highlights the value of listening to a city. Looking at small details – from place names to paving slabs – helps uncover its histories and shows how we stand in relation to the people who lived here before us.

You might like to try this yourself. You could go on a walking tour (such as **Invisible Cities**), a walking tour led by people with lived experience of homelessness, or the free LGBTQ+ Manchester Walking Tour. You could join a group like the Loiterers Resistance Movement, who walk slowly around Manchester, aiming not to go anywhere in particular, but instead slowing down to catch a glimpse of the city from a different perspective. Or you could simply go for a walk around town with a friend.



As you walk, you might talk or think about these questions:

- Notice how the space of the streets shifts and changes from place to place. Ask yourself: why?
- Do different parts of the city make you feel different things?
- What sounds can you hear as you walk?
- What can you smell?
- Are some places easier to move through than others?
- Can you imagine the people who walked down this road before you? Where does it lead? Where do you think they were going?
- What signs of working life can you see around you – both today and from years gone by?
- Where can you see places where communities gather?
- Where does the city point to places in other parts of the world? How do relationships of trade and migration show up in our streets, buildings and homes?
- Can you see signs of times when people have cut a new path for themselves – perhaps a break in a fence, or a path trodden into grass by people taking a shortcut repeatedly? Do they tell a different story to the roads laid out in tarmac?

Taking inspiration from **Part Two: So Many Mornings**, write a vignette based on something you saw on your walk. There are no right or wrong answers. Write one line or ten. Think about a small moment that caught your eye.

Ask yourself: how does this small moment speak to bigger themes and issues? What history lies behind this moment? Let these questions guide how you shape the image.

As you write, you might consider how words and grammar help shape the rhythm of your vignette and build the feeling of the image. You might think about alliteration, internal rhymes, varying sentence length, and using pauses to shape the pace of your vignette.

A vignette is "a short piece of writing, music, acting, etc. that clearly expresses the typical characteristics of something or someone"

Cambridge Dictionary.



Questions & Talking Points

- Why do you think Rory Mullarkey chose to tell the story of the bomb through a triptych, or three-part, form?
- How does the staging of the play reflect the criss-crossing of time and place across the three acts? You might think about who plays which roles, as well as the set, costume and lighting.
- Which of the small scenes that make up Part Two stuck in your mind? Why do you think it caught your attention? Does the narrative of this tiny story echo the themes of the whole play? How does one vignette help tell the story of the 1996 bomb?
- How does *EVEN THESE THINGS* ask us to think about what it means to write or share history?
- How does *EVEN THESE THINGS* reflect on the connection between a place and its people? You might consider the text, staging and set.
- Do you think *EVEN THESE THINGS* is an important story to tell today?
- Does the history of the Manchester bomb feel relevant to you?
- Do you know anyone who was in Manchester on the day of the bomb – perhaps a family member or friend? Have you asked them what it meant to them?

