

ROYAL

Road

By Jim Cartwright

Directed by John Tiffany

Press Highlights

Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court

21 July 2017 – 9 September 2017

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BLOUINARTINFO

'Road' by Jim Cartwright at Royal Court Theatre, London

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | APRIL 12, 2017



[View Slideshow](#)

A scene from 'Road' by Jim Cartwright

(Courtesy: Bench Theatre)

RELATED

- **VENUES**

[Royal Court Theatre](#)

A well-known play entitled "Road" by Jim Cartwright will be presented at the Royal Court Theatre, London, from July 21 through September 9, 2017.

A novel production of Cartwright's 1986 transforming play, now being directed by Royal Court Associate Director John Tiffany, adroitly offers a manifestation of the populaces of an anonymous northern road in Eighties Britain. It reconnoiters the livelihood of the folks in an underprivileged working class area at the period of high redundancy. The action takes place over the course of one

ROYAL

evening as the residents of the road prepare to go out, follows them at the club they go to and then on home afterwards. A passionate, poetic and positive portrayal of working class life it is often performed on a promenade, allowing the audience to follow the narrator (Scullery) along the road and visit different sets and the different homes of the characters.

The show will be staged at Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London SW1W 8AS, United Kingdom.

For details, visit: <https://royalcourttheatre.com>

Click on the slideshow for the sneak peek at the show.

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WhatsOnStage
Will Longman
12.06.17

WHATSONSTAGE

THEATRE NEWS

Casting announced for John Tiffany's production of *Road* at the Royal Court

Jim Cartwright's debut play is set in Lancashire during Margaret Thatcher's government

Will Longman • London, West End • 12 Jun 2017



Michelle Fairley, John Tiffany and Mark Hadfield
© Dan Wooller for WhatsOnStage

Casting has been announced for [Jim Cartwright's](#) play *Road*, which opens at the Royal Court in July.

Directed by [John Tiffany](#), the play is Cartwright's first and is about a group of people who live on the same road in a working class area of Lancashire during Margaret Thatcher's government.

It will star Michelle Fairley (*The Wild Duck*, Donmar), Mark Hadfield (*The Libertine*), Faye Marsay (*Black Mirror*) and Mike Noble (*Game*, Almeida) when it opens on 28 July.

Joining them will be Shane Zaza, Liz White, June Watson, Dan Parr and Lemn Sissay, who recently appeared at the theatre in *The Report*.

The production runs from 21 July with designs by Chloe Lamford, lighting by Lee Curran, sound design from Gareth Fry and movement by Jonathan Watkins.

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Road runs at the Royal Court from 28 July to 9 September, with previews from 21 July.

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Official London Theatre
Robin Johnson
12.06.17



ROYAL COURT'S ROAD REVIVAL CAST ANNOUNCED

Reporter: Robin Johnson, first published Mon 12 Jun 2017 13:01

Casting has been announced for the Royal Court's revival of Jim Cartwright's seminal drama *Road*, with Olivier Award winner John Tiffany directing a company including Michelle Fairley and Lemn Sissay.

Harry Potter And The Cursed Child director John, former Game Of Thrones star Michelle (as Helen/Marion/Brenda), and author and broadcaster Lemn (Scullery) are joined in the exciting cast by Mark Hadfield (Brian/Jerry), Faye Marsay (Louise/Clare), Mike Noble (Eddie/Skin-Lad), Dan Parr (Brink), June Watson (Molly/Linda), Liz White (Carol/Valerie) and Shane Zaza (Joey).

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Sardines
13.06.17



Road

Jim Cartwright

society/company: West End & Fringe ([directory](#))

from: 21 Jul 2017 - 09 Sep 2017

venue: The Royal Court Theatre



**ROYAL COURT THEATRE ANNOUNCES CAST FOR ROAD,
WRITTEN BY JIM CARTWRIGHT, DIRECTED BY JOHN
TIFFANY.**

Michelle Fairley, Mark Hadfield, Faye Marsay, Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Lemn Sissay, June Watson, Liz White and Shane Zaza have been cast in Jim Cartwright's game-changing play *Road* which opened at the Royal Court in 1986. It is directed in a new production by Royal Court Associate Director John Tiffany. *Road* runs in the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs 21 July 2017 – 9 September 2017 with press night on Friday 28 July at 7pm.

With design by Chloe Lamford, lighting by Lee Curran, sound by Gareth Fry and movement by Jonathan Watkins.

"I feel like England's forcing the brain out me head."

A Road, a wild night, a drunken tour guide, a journey to the gutter and the stars and back.

"Why's the world so tough? It's like walking through meat in high

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heels.”

Jim Cartwright’s seminal play gives expression to the inhabitants of an unnamed northern road in Eighties Britain.

“Road is coming round us.”

Road

By Jim Cartwright

Directed by John Tiffany

Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square,
London SW1W 8AS

Friday 21 July – Saturday 9 September 2017

Monday – Saturday 7.30pm

Thursday & Saturday matinees 2.30pm (from 3 August)

Captioned Performance 22 August 7.30pm

Press night: Friday 28 July 7.00pm

Audio Described Performance 2 September 2:30pm

Age Guidance 14+

Standard Tickets £12 - £45 (Mondays all seats £12 available from
9am online on the day of performance)

First Look Tickets** £12, £16, £25, £35

Concessions* £5 off top two prices (available in advance for
previews and all matinees)

Under 26s £15 (available across all performances for individual
bookers, Bands B and C only)

Access £15 (plus a companion at the same rate)

*ID required. All discounts subject to availability.

**First Look Tickets

At the Royal Court no piece of work we premiere has ever been seen before and the first few performances in front of an audience are the final part of a long creative process that starts with the playwright. We need the audiences’ feedback to complete this and have decided to open up the first three previews in a new way to make this an integral part of the process. As a result we will be inviting online feedback from audience members who attend First Look performances with the artistic team that may influence the final piece.

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Michelle Fairley, Mark Hadfield, Faye Marsay, Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Lemn Sissay, June Watson, Liz White and Shane Zaza

Cartwright's influential play first opened at the Royal Court in 1986, and follows the inhabitants of an unnamed northern road in Eighties Britain.

Highly controversial in its time, the show portrays their desperation amidst a socially turbulent landscape, delving into their houses and personal lives during the course of one particularly wild night.

The multi award-winning text has previously been adapted for TV and broadcast by the BBC.

The show will feature design by Chloe Lamford, lighting by Lee Curran, sound by Gareth Fry and movement by Jonathan Watkins.

Road runs in the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs from 21 July 2017 to 9 September, with press night on Friday 28 July at 7pm.

You can book your tickets through [the venue's website](#).

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The Arts Shelf
12.06.17



[About Us](#)

The Royal Court Theatre announces full casting for Jim Cartwright's 'Road'

ADMIN JUNE 12, 2017 [0](#)



Michelle Fairley, Mark Hadfield, Faye Marsay, Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Lemn Sissay, June Watson, Liz White and Shane Zaza have been cast in **Jim Cartwright's** game-changing play *Road* which premiered at the Royal Court in 1986.

Directed in a new production by Royal Court Associate Director **John Tiffany**, *Road* runs in the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs from 21 July 2017 – 9 September, 2017.

"I feel like England's forcing the brain out me head."

A Road, a wild night, a drunken tour guide, a journey to the gutter and the stars and back.

"Why's the world so tough? It's like walking through meat in high heels."

Jim Cartwright's seminal play gives expression to the inhabitants of an unnamed northern road in Eighties Britain.

"Road is coming round us."

Road will feature design by **Chloe Lamford**, lighting by **Lee Curran**, sound by **Gareth Fry** and movement by **Jonathan Watkins**.

For more information, and to book tickets, please [Click Here](#).

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12.06.17

There Ought To Be Clowns

Monday, 12 June 2017

Casting for Royal Court's *Road* announced



"Why's the world so tough? It's like walking through meat in high heels."

Michelle Fairley, Mark Hadfield, Faye Marsay, Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Lemn Sissay, June Watson, Liz White and Shane Zaza have been cast in Jim Cartwright's game-changing play *Road* which originally opened at the Royal Court in 1986. *Road* is a seminal play gives expression to the inhabitants of an unnamed northern road in Eighties Britain and most importantly for me, it is on the list.

It is directed in a new production by Royal Court Associate Director John Tiffany, with design by Chloe Lamford, lighting by Lee Curran, sound by Gareth Fry and movement by Jonathan Watkins.

Road runs in the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs 21 July 2017 - 9 September 2017.

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Theatre News
12.06.17



NEWS

Road by Jim Cartwright announce casting

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✍ Newsdesk

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Michelle Fairley, Mark Hadfield, Faye Marsay, Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Lemn Sissay, June Watson, Liz White and Shane Zaza have been cast in Jim Cartwright's game-changing play Road which opened at the Royal Court in 1986. It is directed in a new production by Royal Court Associate Director John Tiffany.

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"Road is coming round us."

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The Stage
15.06.17

Magazines Trade & Overseas

Yellow News...

Client: Royal Court Company Yellow News
Source: The Stage
Date: 15/06/2017

Keyword: Road
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PRODUCTIONS

PLAYS

Yael Farber will make her **Donmar Warehouse** directing debut with a version of **David Hazzler's Knives in Hens**, which runs from August 17 to October 7. It forms part of the London venue's autumn programme, which also sees **Elinor Cook** adapt **The Lady from the Sea**. Cook's new version of Henrik Ibsen's play will be directed by **Kwame Kwel-Armah** and will star **Nikki Amuke-Bird**.

Michelle Fairley, Faye Marsay and **Mark Hadfield** will star in **Jim Cartwright's Boad** at London's **Royal Court**. They will be joined by **Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Lemn Sissay, Jura Watson, Liz White** and **Shane Zaza**. It runs from July 21 to September 9, with press night on July 28.

Director: John Tiffany
Design: Chloe Lamford (set), Leo Curran (lighting), Gareth Fry (sound)

Movement: Jonathan Watkins
Producer: Royal Court

Chris Goods is to adapt **Derek Jarman's** cult film **Jubilee** for the stage at the **Royal Exchange** in Manchester. The production will star original film cast member **Toyah Willcox**, and opens in November. It forms part of the **Royal Exchange's** autumn season, which also includes a new production of **Our House**, directed by **Sarah Frankcom**, and **Guys and Dolls** – co-produced with **Talawa Theatre Company** and featuring choreography by **Boy Blue Entertainment's** **Kendrick H2O Sandy**.

Shakespeare's Globe in London has announced casting for its production of **Much Ado About Nothing**, which is set in revolutionary Mexico in 1910. The production will run from July 14 to October 15, with press night on July 20.

Author: William Shakespeare
Director: Matthew Dunster

Cast: Beatriz Fornally, Matthew Needham, Anya Chalotra, Marcelo Cruz, Martin Marquez, Steve John Shephard, Ewan Wardrop

Producer: Shakespeare's Globe

Theatre Royal Stratford East in London has announced an all-transgender cast for the world premiere of **Summer in London**, a play about four young homeless men. It will run from July 8 to July 29, with press night on July 13.

Author and director: Rikki Beadle-Blair

Cast: Tigger Blalze, Kimberley Clarke, Tyler Luko Cunningham, Emma Frankland, Victoria

Gigante, Ash Palmisciano, Kamei Fomeo

Producer: Theatre Royal Stratford East

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Time Out
01.07.17

TimeOut

The top ten theatre openings this month

Our theatre critics pick the new theatre shows they think will wow London this month

London's theatre calendar is flooded with exciting new shows, [big names](#) and hotshot directors, and there's no way anyone can see them all. Check out our [latest theatre reviews](#) for the full rundown, or shortcut to the list below for ten [critics' choice theatre shows](#) opening in London this month that you won't regret booking for.

Need somewhere to stay while you're taking in a show? Check out the [best hotels near the West End](#).

London's top ten new theatre shows

10

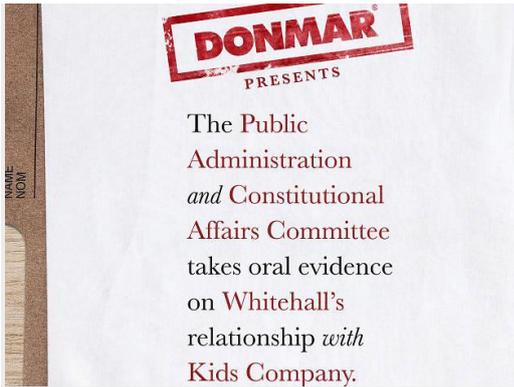


Touch

Theatre company DryWrite has had one enormo-smash: its co-founder Phoebe Waller-Bridge's outrageous monologue-turned-telly hit 'Fleabag'. Now time for a look at how the company fairs without her, in this tale of a single woman's wild sexual escapades (sounds familiar) by Vicky Jones, starring Amy Morgan.

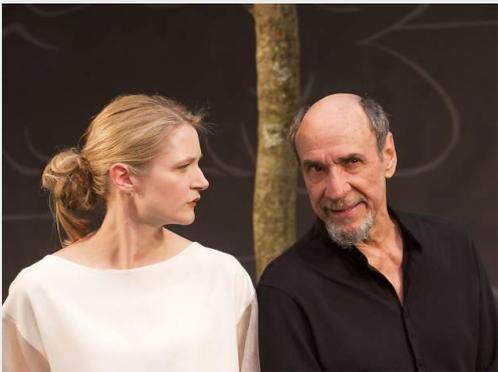
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The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee Takes Oral Evidence on Whitehall's Relationship with Kids Company

Yes, that really is the title. This new musical (yes, it really is a musical) is a verbatim piece compiled from the titular transcripts into the 2015 parliamentary enquiry into what went wrong with the ill-fated charity Kids Company, edited by Donmar boss Josie Rourke and regularily-starring actor Hadley Fraser.



The Mentor

German playwright Daniel Kehlmann's spiky comedy 'The Mentor' is a story of two writers - one young wunderkind, one old croc - who battle it out on questions of subjectivity, truth and art. This version, translated by Christopher Hampton, is hitting the West End after hitting the spot on its opening in Bath earlier this year. and stars Academy Award-winner F Murray Abraham.

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A Tale Of Two Cities

As the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, Dickens' Victorian novel about social inequality feels as timely as ever. Or at least, that's what Regent's Park Open Air Theatre are banking on with Matthew Dunster's contemporary adaptation. Timothy Sheader will direct this fresh take on 'A Tale of Two Cities'.

[BUY TICKETS](#)[READ MORE](#)

[Regent's Park Open Air Theatre](#) , Regent's Park Friday July 7 2017 - Saturday August 5 2017

6



Queen Anne

Helen Edmundson's history play for the RSC is a peek behind the immaculate furniture of Queen Anne's reign. Romola Garai will play her conniving friend Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in a look at how a close bond became distorted by power and ambition. And Emma Cunniffe will take the role of the little-known queen, coming to the throne in a country on the brink of war.

It's a big month for the RSC, with it's Simon Russell-Beale-starring ['The Tempest'](#) opening at the Barbican.

[BUY TICKETS](#)[READ MORE](#)

[Haymarket Theatre Royal](#) , Soho Until Saturday September 30 2017

5

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Girl from the North Country

Acclaimed Irish playwright Conor McPherson is known for plays like 'The Weir' and 'The Seafarer', which mix witty naturalism with a touch of dark magic. His latest, 'Girl from the North Country' is a story of a lost family running a bleak guesthouse in Depression-era Minnesota. Their wind-swept misery will be soundtracked by classic songs from Bob Dylan.

[BUY TICKETS](#)[READ MORE](#)

[Old Vic](#) , Southwark Monday July 10 2017 - Saturday October 7 2017

ADVERTISING

4



Road

It's rare for new writing powerhouse the Royal Court to revive a classic play. So this looks pretty pointed: a new production of Jim Cartwright's 'Road', his seminal, humorous depiction of a Lancashire town in the poverty-stricken '80s, which began life at the Court in 1986. 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child' director John Tiffany helms the project.

[READ MORE](#)

[Royal Court Theatre](#) , Belgravia Friday July 21 2017 - Saturday September 9 2017

3

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Much Ado About Nothing

After his explosive gangland reimagining of 'Cymbeline', last year's 'Imogen', what a treat to see that Matthew Dunster is reimagining well-loved comedy 'Much Ado About Nothing'. Dunster's amped up the tension by relocating Beatrice and Benedick's sparring to 1910 Mexico, a country locked in revolution.

[READ MORE](#)

[Shakespeare's Globe](#) , South Bank Friday July 14 2017 - Sunday October 15 2017

2



Cat On a Hot Tin Roof

The West End never got to see hotshot Aussie director Benedict Andrews's brilliant 'Three Sisters' or very good 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. But south London's hippest theatre goes straight for the kill by producing Andrews's West End revival of Williams's 'Cat On a Hot Tin Roof'. Sienna Miller, Jack O'Connell and Colm Meaney star in this drama about a Southern family whose hidden truths threaten them all.

[BUY TICKETS](#)[READ MORE](#)

[Apollo Shaftesbury](#) , Soho Thursday July 13 2017 - Saturday October 7 2017

ADVERTISING

1

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Mosquitoes

'Chimerica' playwright Lucy Kirkwood is back at the NT with a new play about sisterhood and tragedy, directed by NT boss Rufus Norris. A scientist working on the Large Hadron Collider is thrown back in contact with her sister, who's living a somewhat less exciting life in Luton. Starring Olivia Colman and Olivia Williams.

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The Upcoming
Connor Campbell
03.07.17



Top ten theatre shows openings in July 2017

CULTURE THEATRE



CONNOR CAMPBELL



3RD JULY 2017

A steady trickle of openings leads to a mid-summer stunner in the final week of July, complete with some West End Tennessee Williams, a new play from Conor McPherson, an appearance from national treasure Olivia Coleman and a rare revival at the Royal Court.

***Committee...(A New Musical)* at the Donmar Warehouse**

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee Takes Oral Evidence on Whitehall's Relationship with Kids Company, to give the production its full title, is a verbatim musical a la the National Theatre's *London Road*. Donmar AD Josie Rourke and Hadley Fraser have adapted the transcript of the evidence session dealing with the charity scandal, set to music by Tom Deering.

Committee...(A New Musical) is at the Donmar Warehouse from 24th June until 12th August 2017, with a press night on 3rd July. [For further information or to book visit here.](#)

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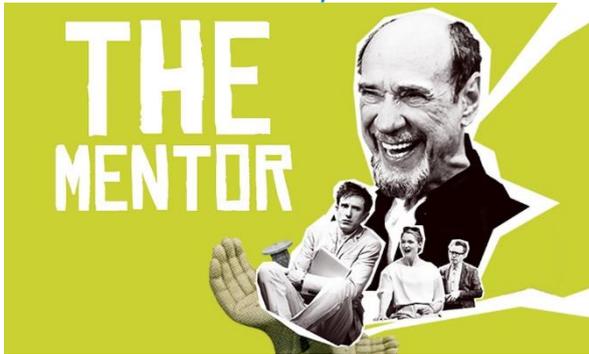
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***The Mentor* at the Vaudeville Theatre**

Transferring from Theatre Royal Bath following a well-received run, Daniel Kehlmann's *The Mentor* stars Oscar winner F Murray Abrahams as Benjamin Rubin, a "cantankerous old writer" tasked with overseeing an up and coming literary hotshot. *The Mentor* is at the Vaudeville Theatre from 24th June until 2nd September 2017, with a press night on 4th July. [Book your tickets here.](#)

[For a chance to win a pair of tickets to *The Mentor* visit here.](#)



***The Tempest* at the Barbican**

A tech-heavy *Tempest* arrives at the Barbican this month, with Bard behemoth Simon Russell Beale slipping on the robes of Prospero. The RSC has worked with Andy Serkis's Imaginarium Studios on the production to create an island of digital magic. *The Tempest* is at the Barbican from 30th June until 18th July 2017, with a press night on 6th July. [Book your tickets here.](#)



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Photo: Topher McGrilli

***Girl From the North Country* at the Old Vic**

A 20-piece company of actors and musicians – including Ron Cook, Ciarán Hinds, Shirley Henderson and Arinze Kene – bring to life the Minnesota-set *Girl From the North Country*, written and directed by Conor McPherson. Yet the most interesting part of the production isn't the big-name playwright or stellar cast, but that it features the music of Bob Dylan, green-lighted by the difficult legend himself.

Girl From the North Country is at the Old Vic from 8th July until 7th October 2017, with a press night on 26th July. [Book your tickets here.](#)



***Queen Anne* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket**

July's other RSC transfer is Helen Edmundson's *Queen Anne*, which comes to the Theatre Royal Haymarket after a sell-out run at the smaller Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The returning Emma Cunniffe is joined by Romola Garai, who replaces Natascha McElhone as the monarch's close adviser Sarah Churchill, while Natalie Abrahami (*Happy Days*) directs.

Queen Anne is at the Theatre Royal Haymarket from 30th June until 30th September 2017, with a press night on 10th July. [Book your tickets here.](#)



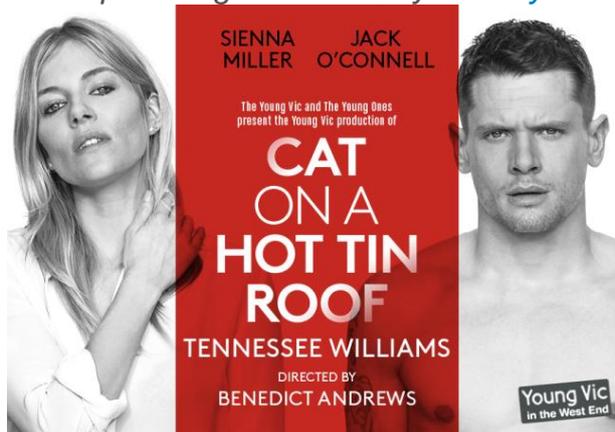
***Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at the Apollo Theatre**

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Bypassing the Young Vic altogether to head straight to the West End, Benedict Andrews – who directed the Gillian Anderson-starring *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the same theatre – has corralled Jack O’Connell, Sienna Miller and Colm Meany to star in Tennessee Williams’s sweltering classic. Let’s just hope that London can muster up some thematically appropriate weather.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is at the Apollo Theatre from 13th July until 7th October 2017, with a press night on 24th July. [Book your tickets here.](#)



***Much Ado About Nothing* at Shakespeare’s Globe**

Continuing Emma Rice’s final (and still controversial) summer season at the Globe, Matthew Dunster directs a Mexican Revolution-set *Much Ado About Nothing*. If previous productions under Rice are anything to go by then it is safe to assume there will be plenty of grumbling purists among those delighted by the sight of new life being pumped into the Bard.

Much Ado About Nothing is at Shakespeare’s Globe from 14th July until 15th October 2017, with a press night on 20th July. [For further information or to book visit here.](#)



***Mosquitoes* at the National Theatre**

Now this is exciting. A new play by Lucy Kirkwood in the National Theatre’s best space – that’s the Dorfman in case there was any doubt – about a pair of sisters and the Large Hadron Collider, starring Olivia Williams and Olivia Coleman. No wonder it’s sold out. Make sure to keep an eye on the NT’s Friday Rush to try and nab a last-minute ticket.

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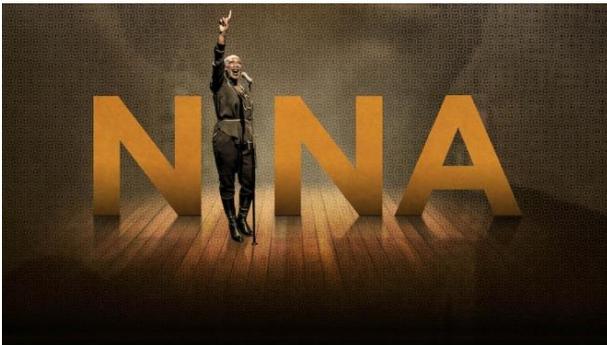
Mosquitoes is at the National Theatre from 18th June until 28th September 2017, with a press night on 25th July. [For further information or to book visit here.](#)



***Nina* at the Young Vic**

A biopic-cum-gig-cum-political examination, *Nina* sees Josette Bushell-Mingo look at the life of the divine Ms Simone, as well as her own career and the Black Lives Matter movement. The Young Vic brings the play, a co-production between Liverpool's Unity Theatre and Sweden's Riksteatern, to its intimate Maria space.

Nina is at the Young Vic from 19th June until 29th July 2017, with a press night on 21st July. [For further information or to book visit here.](#)



***Road* at the Royal Court Theatre**

Revivals are so rare at the Royal Court that when the theatre does dust something off it's worth paying attention. This time the honour goes to Jim Cartwright's *Road*, originally written in a Thatcher-blighted 1986. The play's getting a pretty special remount, directed by *Harry Potter*'s John Tiffany and starring Westeros regulars Michelle Fairley and Faye Marsay.

Road is at the Royal Court Theatre from 21st July until 9th September 2017, with a press night on 28th July. [For further information or to book visit here.](#)

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Connor Campbell

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AnOther
03.07.17

AnOther

Brilliant Things To Do in July

– July 3, 2017 –

Whether you're venturing abroad or becoming a tourist in your own city, here are plenty of cultural happenings with which to while away the month ahead



Great Performances

This month is a dream for theatre lovers, with a host of brilliant new plays opening across the capital. *Mosquitoes*, the new offering from celebrated playwright Lucy Kirkwood (*Chimerica*), arrives at the National Theatre, starring Olivia Colman and Olivia Williams as two sisters with two very different lives, who find themselves unexpectedly reunited in what proves a searing examination of tragedy. For a dose of steamy Southern drama, look no further than the new West End production of Tennessee Williams' masterful family drama *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, starring Sienna Miller and Jack O'Connell. Meanwhile the Royal Court presents revival of Jim Cartwright's seminal 1986 play *Road*, a darkly humorous depiction of the inhabitants of an unnamed Lancashire road in 80s Britain. Make sure to catch this year's Manchester International Festival, currently in full-swing until July 16, and promising a breathtaking array of new works across the arts, from *Cotton Panic!*, a collage of film, drama, live music and spoken word by Jane Horrocks, Nick Vivian and Wrangler, that evokes the devastating Cotton Famine that befell Northern England in 1861 to *Available Light*, a revival of the mesmerising, 1983 dance production that united "three giants of postwar American culture": choreographer Lucinda Childs, composers John Adams, and architect Frank Gehry, who designed the set.

COULDT

The A-List
03.07.17



What to see at the theatre this July

July 3, 2017

ART & CULTURE

“OK, you listening?”

“Good, ‘cause I want to tell you a story,” hisses a young Rupert Murdoch, standing on the Almeida’s dimly lit stage. “And it’s true. That’s what makes it a good f***ing story, right, ‘cause all the best stories are true.”

So begins [James Graham’s](#) latest play *Ink* (until August 5) which, set in the 60s, charts *The Sun’s* dramatic journey from an ailing broadsheet to the brazenly influential tabloid *Wot Won It*, crammed with TV and topless girls, sport, weather and sex—things editor Larry Lamb decided people would actually want to read. The first half, following the establishment of the revolutionary title, sees the cast frantically brainstorming amongst Bunny Christie’s stunning set, clambering over an artfully stacked assemblage of old-school wooden desks, and scattering sheaves of paper over the floor.

Post-interval, the plot is more acute. Probing Lamb’s frenzied emphasis on circulation and commerciality at the cost of all else, it asks an array of moral questions—all too familiar in the current climate—but, gracefully, avoids being overly moralizing.



The cast of Ink at the Almeida

ROYAL

Down at the National Theatre, **Rufus Norris** is directing **Lucy Kirkwood's** latest play, [Mosquitoes](#) (until September 28). With a cast that includes **Olivia Colman**, the plot pivots around family and particle physics. A quick walk past Waterloo, the [Old Vic](#) are staging [Girl from the North Country](#) (until October 7), written and directed by award-winning **Conor McPherson**. Set in Duluth, Minnesota, 1934, the spiralling story—featuring a boxer and a bible-selling preacher—is artfully woven through with the music and lyrics of Bob Dylan.

Moving metaphorically some states South, and literally a few yards down the road, **Sienna Miller** and **Jack O'Connell** star in an adaptation of Tennessee Williams's Pulitzer Prize-winning [Cat on a Hot Tin Roof](#) (until October 7) at the [Young Vic](#). Set on a plantation, where the bourbon flows freely, it is a quintessential tragedy about lies and loneliness and patriarchy. A shuddering look at human isolation, it was Williams's favourite of his plays.

For something more current, don't miss [Touch](#) (until August 28) at the Soho Theatre which, from the creators of smash-hit, sex-filled, feminist sitcom *Fleabag*, couldn't be more zeitgeist-y. Centred around 33-year-old Dee, who lives in a small London flat, and has a large and messy love life, it's a shameless and searingly funny play about sex, connection and control.

Across town at the [Royal Court](#), **Jim Cartwright's** seminal [Road](#) (until September 9) is being reprised. Set on the main drag of a small, anonymous town in Thatcher-era Lancashire, it unfolds across a series of vignettes, slipping in and out of the lives of its subjects with a twist of desperation and humour administered so skilfully that, when the show premiered in 1987, *The Observer* deemed it "the most significant and original new English play" for years.—[Isobel Thompson](#)

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Theatre

'An extraordinary piece of work': Jane Horrocks on the return of *Road*, an anti-austerity battle cry

Jim Cartwright's brutal, beautiful play railed against the breakdown of society in Thatcher's Britain. The original cast, and stars of the revival, explain why it speaks to us more powerfully than ever



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Catherine Love

Friday 21 July 2017 12.31 BST



Street-fighters ... the BBC adaptation of *Road*, with Jane Horrocks as Louise on the right. Photograph: BBC

'England's cruel,' says Eddie in Jim Cartwright's debut play, *Road*, first performed at the Royal Court in 1986. Cartwright's powerful snapshot of northern life is a searing indictment of Thatcher's England, where jobs and hope are scarce. "There is no solution," as another character puts it.

Three decades on, in another era of welfare cuts, *Road* feels chillingly resonant. Rereading the play, director [John Tiffany](#) was struck by how the sort of working-class lives depicted by Cartwright have changed for the worse. "It felt as though it was written from a place where things couldn't get any worse, but they have," he says. "The rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer."

When Lancashire-born Cartwright wrote the play, in the mid-1980s, he was among the swelling numbers of the unemployed and had witnessed firsthand the sort of lives that *Road* portrays. It began as a series of scraps: scenes and characters without a structure. The Royal Court saw potential in those fragments and commissioned Cartwright, who was an actor at this point, to write a full play.

The play flits in and out of the lives of the residents of one street, stitching together a series of intimate scenes and monologues. "I wasn't sure what to make of the script when I first read it," says Neil Dudgeon, who appeared in the original production. "Every scene, every speech is so beautifully, strangely written. It's poetry as speech."

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‘I’d never been to a play where a whole record was played’ ... Dan Parr, Michelle Fairley and Shane Zaza, who star in the new production. Photograph: Sarah Weal



Matching the brutal beauty of the dialogue was the play’s striking promenade form, which took audiences on a journey around the [Theatre](#) Upstairs at the Royal Court. “In the scenes where the characters are talking directly to the audience, you have to actually look them in the eye and engage them,” he remembers. “And sometimes they would talk back. Which was a bit weird until we got used to it. Weird, but eventually thrilling.”

Lesley Sharp was also in the original cast and describes the play and its innovative form as “a creative game-changer for all of us”. After moving downstairs to the Royal Court’s main stage, *Road* was also made into a film for the BBC by director Alan Clarke in 1987, helping to launch the careers of young actors including Sharp, Dudgeon and [Jane Horrocks](#), for whom Cartwright later wrote *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*.

“I saw *Road* at the Royal Court Upstairs when it was first put on and loved it,” says Horrocks. “It was an extraordinary piece of work and something I’d never seen before – visceral, emotional and memorable.” She was particularly struck by the famous final scene, in which the Otis Redding song “Try a Little Tenderness” is played from start to finish. “I’d never been to a play where a whole record was played.”

In the film version the camera replaces narrator character Scullery as the storyteller. Shot entirely on Steadicam – one of Clarke’s aesthetic hallmarks – the film moves with the characters, who walk as they deliver soliloquies. “The film and the audience is constantly moving, constantly restless, just like in the theatre,” says Dudgeon. Horrocks feels that the screen adaptation, with its close-up, gritty realism, is “starker and much more brutal than the stage version”.

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“Society was being unravelled” ... Pontypridd in Wales during the miners' strike. Photograph: Sipa Press / Rex



Tiffany's new production at the Royal Court aims to celebrate the play's history while also reimagining it. "It's absolutely *Road* as written," he says, "but it's a very different presentation of it." This revival is abandoning the now familiar promenade form, but it still bridges the usual gap between performers and audience. Chloe Lamford's design features a set of steps that will connect the stage with the audience, allowing the cast to get in among the spectators.

The play has particular significance for Tiffany, who first read it while at sixth form college in Huddersfield. "It blew my mind," he says. "I didn't think that plays could be written in my voice, in my dialect, my accent, that were also poetic and lyrical without feeling pretentious." In the language of the play, lyricism is flecked with grit. Cartwright's characters talk about life as being "like walking through meat in high heels" or "swimming in ache". As Horrocks puts it, the speeches in *Road* are "like open sores".

The play's structure, too, subverts familiar forms. "There is a coherence in the unity of time and place," explains Tiffany. "It's really classical in that way, which is amazing, because it starts at sunset and goes on to sunrise. However, there's something about the structure that still feels very modern. It's like an accumulation: they all layer on top of each other, these lives that we engage with and look into."

Talking to Tiffany in the aftermath of the surprise general election result – "I think it is an absolute reaction against austerity" – and the fire at Grenfell Tower, conversation inevitably veers into politics. "It's all on topic with *Road*," says Tiffany. Though his production is sticking firmly with the time and place of Cartwright's script, it also speaks to the present-day context of austerity, food banks and housing crisis.

"Those people are poorer now," says Tiffany, "and austerity has really started to dissolve the structure of civic life as we know it." One of the most powerful things about *Road*, says Dudgeon, is that "it shows ordinary, struggling working-class characters and makes them into heroes". Now, even more so than when the play was written, it's rare to see honest yet positive portrayals of working-class life.

"The inequality and hopelessness of then is at least as prevalent now," Dudgeon continues. "And I think the strength and humour of the characters is as beautiful and funny and moving now as it was then."

"I think the play had such impact because of its raw outspoken truth," suggests Horrocks. Sharp agrees: "There was a sense that the north was being slowly starved to death, that oxygen was being

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cut off, and Jim's play was full of that. It's impressive in its lack of tub-thumping and grandstanding, heartbreaking in its cry for dignity and justice to be restored to the old powerhouses of the UK. It was a hugely political play in a brand new form. Jim left behind rhetoric and polemic and quietly delivered a battle cry, a sob for the forgotten."



🔍 'It's talked of with such fondness' ... Shane Zaza and John Tiffany during rehearsals.
Photograph: Johan Persson



That battle cry has become a modern classic, regularly taught in schools and performed around the world. *Road* had its New York premiere in 1988, in a production at La Mama starring Kevin Bacon and Joan Cusack – though the [New York Times](#) suggested that something was lost in the journey across the Atlantic. In 1995, the play came home to the north-west with a production at the Royal Exchange theatre in Manchester featuring Matthew Dunster. This new production, though, is the first major London revival since the play's Royal Court debut.

Despite the Sloane Square location, Tiffany wants his production to feel "very northern", honouring the impact the play made on him and fellow northerners. "People talk about this play – certainly a lot of actors and directors who are from the north – as a fundamental moment in their journey into theatre," he says. "It's talked of with such fondness, such pride."

Sharp describes the writing of *Road* in 1986 as "an urgent response to the society that was being unravelled and reimagined under our noses". More than 30 years later, it still has a sense of urgency. "It's nostalgic while being prophetic," says Tiffany, observing how the drama both looks to the past and anticipates the widening gap between rich and poor. His production, he hopes, will demonstrate how relevant – politically and artistically – *Road* remains. "It's another chance to explore the play and to see its place in theatre history, and how much it still says about now."

- *Road* opens at the Royal Court, London SW1W, on 21 July. royalcourttheatre.com.

COULDT

ROYAL

Lemn Sissay Blog
21.07.17

“This is our Road”

Posted on July 21, 2017 by Lemn Sissay



From a distance I've respected the skill of actors – in the way a poet respects a great teacher but I hadn't realised the sheer work ethic. Every day for the past five weeks between 10am and 6pm, (and from 10am to 10pm on some days) I've been rehearsing [ROAD by Jim Cartwright](#) at The Royal Court Theatre. The director is Olivier award winning [John Tiffany](#). The movement director is [Jonathan Watkins](#), The Artistic director of The Royal Court Theatre is [Vicky Featherstone](#). Here we all are. [The ensemble cast](#): Michelle Fairley, Mark Hadfield, Faye Marsay, Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Lemn Sissay, June Watson, Liz White and Shane Zaza.

Tonight is the first preview. There are previews each night until press night on 28th July. The play will be on each night until Mid September. Road is the story of one night on one road in a small Lancashire town in the mid nineteen eighties. That is exactly when I lived there. I didn't fit in then and I don't fit in now. So I'm perfectly placed. Theatre is full of misfits: Outsiders looking in. Insiders looking out. Acting is self centred and selfless in equal measure. Isn't all art? I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the

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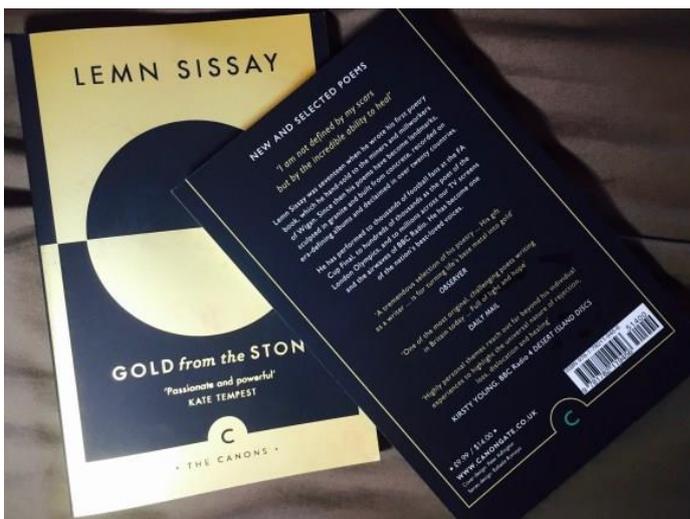
ROYAL

world. After all it's where I am from.



My character in ROAD is Scullery. He was played famously by [Ian Dury](#). But Ian Dury I am not. Edward Tudor Pole also played the part. Edward Tudor Pole I am not. ROAD is full of people *I grew up with*. Their children were in the children's homes with me. For a time *this was my world*. Pic above. It is an honour to revisit through the poetic political and deeply personal writing of Jim Cartwright. The actors have been nurturing to me in the way lions would to a cat who'd wandered into their pride. I am loving it. I am loving them. I am loving this.

There's a lot of other stuff going on in the background. I've a new series on BBC Radio four which was commissioned yesterday. Some exciting TV stuff for Ten Pieces presented with Naomi Wilkinson. There's a public art poem going up in Old Trafford on Saturday. There's a concerto coming up at The Proms inspired by a poem of mine called Spark Catchers. I received my paperback from Canongate Books through the post today.



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A painting yours truly on display at The National Portrait gallery is advertised in tube stations in London.....

The other day I did a Letters Live with some incredible actors including Amanda Abbington, Alan Carr, Nick Moran, Zawe Ashton, John Simms and more. See you next time.



COULDT

Language & Culture
21.07.17

language&culture

Jim Cartwright: a theatrical road less travelled



Cast of 2017 Royal Court Theatre production of Road by Jim Cartwright (image credit: Sarah Weal)

Tonight (21 July), the [Royal Court's Jerwood Theatre Downstairs in London's Sloane Square begins its revival of Jim Cartwright's play, Road](#). This production, directed by [John Tiffany](#) and starring the actor, writer and [Chancellor of the University of Manchester Lemn Sissay](#), comes three decades after its [world première](#) at the same theatre.

When *Road* first graced the stage in 1986, British theatre discovered in Cartwright a distinctive and vital new voice. His account of a journey along a derelict street in Lancashire's post-industrial wasteland on a Friday night contrasted so vividly with the work of prominent Oxbridge-educated playwrights. Led by Scullery, a boozy and piratical master of ceremonies, *Road* depicts a weekly ritual of inebriated escapism, desperate aspiration and upbeat defiance among Britain's working class.

The popularity of *Road*, as well as its resonances with subsequent generational hardships, has persisted. Indeed, in a [poll organized by the National Theatre](#), it was voted the 36th best play of the 20th century.

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In 1995, Cartwright made his directorial debut by staging a revival of [Road at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre](#). During rehearsals for that production, Language and Culture co-founder [Dr Stephen Gregson](#) interviewed the playwright-turned-director for the magazine [Plays International](#). Extracts from the article are reproduced below:

A director's Road

To put it mildly, Jim Cartwright is an enigma. "I didn't go to university or anything," he admits. "I haven't got a massive vocabulary. I'm not well read. I can't spell." He even dares to be politically – or should that be culturally? – incorrect. "My major influence is [Elvis](#). [Bruce Lee](#)'s a reference. [Confessions of a Window Cleaner](#) is a reference." Not exactly the stuff of [Establishment](#) playwrights.

Born and educated in [Farnworth, near Manchester](#), Cartwright's theatrical talent was very much fostered by the [Welfare State](#). "I was a working-class lad," he says. "[Soul music](#) I got into. I liked all the things that lads like, I suppose. We had a good drama teacher at school and I did some acting. It excited the hell out of me, it was great." Enough it seems to have pushed him into an initial career as a jobbing actor. "I was a professional, darling," he says, tongue in cheek. "But that's what got me to know the [Royal Court existed and that was the place to send new writing](#)."

His playwriting career began when, egged on by friends, he posted an amorphous collection of scenes to [Sloane Square](#). "I'd done bits of writing, but really for myself. I sent this, well, it wasn't even a script. Bits of scenes. And they liked it." An ensuing commission led to his first play, *Road*, which premiered at the [Royal Court Theatre Upstairs](#) in 1986 and subsequently transferred to the main stage. Cartwright easily enjoyed the most impressive debut for a playwright since [John Osborne](#) and [Look Back in Anger](#) 30 years previously.

In every sense, Cartwright is British theatre's equivalent of a punk rocker: in the same way that [punk](#) challenged the music industry, Cartwright has thrown out all convention on what constitutes a playwright. "How many geniuses have been squashed while we speak?," he muses. "I'm just doing my own thing and I've got my tools that I can work with. Like a lot of working-class artists. Somebody said when punk came out, you just learned three chords and started a band. So, don't worry that 'writing land' is over there and you got to go to university. Express, and express with passion. That's all that matters."

Almost 10 years now as a professional writer, he boasts an enviable CV: numerous commissions (including from the [National Theatre](#)) and critical acclaim for the international productions of his plays. There has even been a run on [Broadway](#) with [Steppenwolf Theatre Company](#)'s staging of [The Rise and Fall of Little Voice](#), albeit for nine performances. "The critics hated it. I almost imagined they were going to do the cleaning lady next," he wryly recalls.

But Cartwright is also a pragmatist. It was to Britain's regional theatre that he turned to hone his craft, under the auspices of [Andrew Hay](#), first at the [Bolton Octagon](#) and then at the [Bristol Old Vic](#). Now Cartwright makes his own directorial debut with [Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre](#). In doing so he revisits his first play.

Road depicts the events of a single night on an almost derelict street in an unidentified [Lancashire](#) town. Scullery, the play's master of ceremonies, guides the audience in and out of various incidents in this slice of Northern working-class life. Each of the inhabitant has a profound experience to relate: stories of survival in an industrial wasteland and betrayal by an uncaring government.

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There is nothing synthetic about Cartwright's Lancashire: his own background remains his strongest point of reference. "I don't consciously study it or anything," he says, refuting the suggestion that the play is a piece of [social anthropology](#). "I don't make little notes when I get on the bus and all that. It must be just what's inside, where I come from."

Nor is this strongly evocative portrayal of an urban community in [Northern England](#) an overt critique of the [Thatcher administration](#). "It was written in the 1980s but it survives because it's about human beings." The play instead embraces the poetry that Cartwright recognizes in the dialect and landscape of Lancashire. "It's a tradition of Lancashire bloody everything," he says, with just passion. "It's beautiful. The [old 60s films](#), [black-and-white terraces and cobbles](#). Ugly, and all. But there's something attractive about that landscape."

That said, *Road* does not indulge in pernicious nostalgia: a spurious romance that transforms former factory hellholes into sanitized working museums. Cartwright, then, is not in the business of peddling Lancashire stereotypes. "I don't mean that it's all going to be jolly, let's have a laugh and look at the Northern people eating chip butties," he asserts. "I hate that kind of theatre."

An atmosphere of intimidating disquiet pervades the play, a reminder of the horrors of the past, the squalor of the present and the hopelessness of the future. It is a rollercoaster ride of emotions, as Cartwright makes clear. "At times, it's going to be like '[hold onto your hat](#)', and, at other times, it's going to be uncomfortable, on the edge."

In essence, however, *Road* is a genuine attempt to create a Lancashire night out for a theatre audience. "These little communities, they're often a wee bit behind the times. The fashions are usually a good few years behind. So, you get more characters in these pubs and discos."

The Northern social venues that feature in Cartwright's world are the embodiment of an upbeat mood he is anxious to convey. This affirms the view that *Road* is overtly a celebration of human endurance. Indeed, Cartwright is particularly riled by the extent to which certain critics have labelled the play as grim. "If you come to see this play, it's a night out," he enthuses. It is certainly not his intention to deliver a bleak representation of a downtrodden working class. "The characters might be in the gutter. But, like the old saying, [they're looking at the stars and they enjoy the gutter](#)."

***Road* by Jim Cartwright runs at the Royal Court's Jerwood Theatre Downstairs until 9 September 2017. Tickets can be booked via this [link](#).**

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The Stage
25.07.17

THE STAGE
SINCE 1880

Best theatre shows: our critics' picks (July 25)



Michelle Fairley in rehearsal for Road. Photo: Jahan Persson

Natasha Tripney

Don't Miss

Road – Royal Court, London

Michelle 'Catelyn Stark' Fairley and Lemn Sissay head up the cast in a timely revival of Jim Cartwright's indictment of Thatcherism London's Royal Court. John Tiffany, now an Olivier winner for [Harry Potter and the Cursed Child](#), directs the production which opens on July 28.

Also worth seeing



Simon Phillips and cast of North by Northwest in rehearsals Photo: Nobby

Clark

Mosquitoes – National Theatre, London

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The magnificent Olivia Colman stars in *Mosquitoes*, the new play from Lucy Kirkwood, a tale of two sisters and the Large Hadron Collider. Following her delicately dystopian three-hander, [The Children](#), *Mosquitoes* is directed by Rufus Norris and opens in the Dorfman on July 25.

North by Northwest – Theatre Royal, Bath

Screen-to-stage adaptations can be pretty hit-or-miss. For every fizzy four-man take on *The 39 Steps* or Kneehigh's *Brief Encounter*, there are a lot of clunkers. First seen in Melbourne, Theatre Royal Bath's staging of Hitchcock's 1959 film *North by Northwest*, adapted by Carolyn Burns - the only woman writer they've let near the stage this season - features Jonathan Watton in the Cary Grant role, it opens on July 31.

Just to Get Married – Finborough Theatre, London

Playwright and suffragette Cicely Hamilton's play *Just to Get Married*, was last produced in 1918. The Finborough's revival is directed by Melissa Dunne and opens on July 28.

Festival of the week

Orange Tree Theatre Directors Festival

This year's show case of work by young directors at the Orange Tree takes the form of a festival of work directed by students from the inaugural year of the Orange Tree Theatre and St Mary's University's MA in Theatre Directing. Plays featured include Enda Walsh's *Misterman* and Kate Tempest's *Wasted* and it runs until July 29.

Mark Shenton

Don't Miss



Tim Ford at *The Dreaming* rehearsals. Photo: Pamela Raith

The Dreaming – Lichfield Garrick Theatre

Lichfield artistic director Tim Ford has a particular passion for Howard Goodall musicals; after a rousing production of [The Hired Man](#) last year, he now revives Goodall and Charles Hart's *The Dreaming*, patterned on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with a 70-strong community cast, running from July 31 to August 5.

Coming Clean – King's Head Theatre, London

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Kevin Elyot's debut play *Coming Clean* premiered at the Bush Theatre in 1982. Now it gets its first major London revival at the King's Head Theatre, directed by artistic director Adam Spreadbury-Maher, as the centrepiece of a Queer Theatre season. It opens on July 28.

Girl from the North Country – Old Vic, London

Conor McPherson writes and directs *Girl from the North Country*, in which the Bob Dylan songbook is woven into its story of hope, heartbreak and soul. The cast includes Shirley Henderson, Ciaran Hinds, Debbie Kurup, Jim Norton, Michael Shaeffer and Stanley Townsend. It opens on July 26.

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole – Menier Chocolate Factory, London

Jake Brunger and Pippa Cleary's musical [The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole](#), based on Sue Townsend's story premiered at Leicester's Curve in 2015. Now it comes to London, opening on July 26. The cast has Benjamin Lewis, Ilan Galkoff and Samuel Menhinick sharing the title role, joining an adult company that includes Dean Chisnall, Barry James, Kelly Price and Gay Soper.

Event of the week

Queers – Old Vic, London

A series of eight monologues, presented under the umbrella title *Queers*, is staged at the Old Vic on July 28 and 31, marking 50 years since the partial decriminalisation for homosexuality between men. Filmed earlier this year for BBC, the cast includes Ian Gelder, Russell Tovey, Sara Crowe and Mark Bonnar. Playwrights include Matthew Baldwin, Jon Bradfield, Jackie Clune and Mark Gatiss, the latter of whom co-directs with Max Webster and Joe Murphy.

COLLEGE

ROYAL

WhatsOnStage
Alex Wood
26.07.17

WHATSONSTAGE

5 minutes with Michelle Fairley: "Being on stage scares the sh*t out of me"

The actor talks to us about working on Jim Cartwright's seminal work about an unnamed Northern town, and its return to the Royal Court

Alex Wood • London • 26 Jul 2017



© Dan Wooller for WhatsOnStage

Directed by John Tiffany, *Road* was Jim Cartwright's first play, about a group of people who live on the same road in a working class area of Lancashire during Margaret Thatcher's government.

We sat down with star Michelle Fairley to get an insight into the production.

I was completely shocked that I was considered to be in the piece. I didn't see the original but I'm friendly with people in the production and I've worked at the Court. Everyone knows about *Road*. Everyone knows about its place within the history of theatre because it was a seminal play, it changed the way productions were done, especially at the Court with its sixty-year history. It gave voice to characters who didn't have voices before. These people were actively fighting, living their lives - meaty and full of life and pain and joy and sadness. It's so visceral - they bleed. The piece is fascinating and beautifully written. Things jump out at you every time you read it.

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The rehearsal process has been brilliant, we've had five weeks which has been fantastic, very physical - John Tiffany has brought in a movement director called Jonathan [Watkins], who used to be in the Royal Ballet. He let us experiment with different movements and get an energy flow within the piece as well; using us to push the piece forward - in the scene changes for example.

I love working with John. He has a fantastic trust with his actors. He allows you to experiment, use your own internal judgement system, he's always open to discussion, trying things. He creates a safe – though I don't mean cosy – nurturing environment where people feel like they can do anything. He has amazing taste and a great sense of humour as well.

The play still resonates massively today, particularly with what's going on in the country. There's a juxtaposition between what happened in the 1980s under Thatcher and what is happening now, after years and years of so-called Labour government, and now back to a Conservative government. Given what happened last year with the vote on the EU, particularly who voted and where that vote came from, as well as what's happening with Labour today with Corbyn, with Theresa May, it still resonates. So the play itself still has the power to shock you.

There's a lot of anger there. These characters, they're full of dignity even though their situations are not easy – they find a way to get through life, even if that's creating a new world for yourself or getting completely plastered. You can either block out the pain and the anger, or give way and express it. So it's totally about the characters that Jim has created, these are life-affirming, intelligent human beings. There was incredible wealth there, it may not necessarily be monetary wealth but it's other things – values, qualities within your own person.

It's the people who work at the Royal Court who keep me coming back. It's their taste in plays, and writers, and the political landscape – I've been fortunate enough to work in four productions and work there since the eighties. I've worked with directors like Peter Gill who have been here since the sixties. From Max [Stafford-Clark] through to Vicky [Featherstone] I've been very fortunate that I've been involved in the Court every decade.

It scares the shit out of me, to be involved with an amazing piece of theatre with a fantastic cast and wonderful director.

Road runs at the Royal Court until 9 September.

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ROYAL

Gareth's Culture and Travel Blog
26.07.17

GARETH'S CULTURE AND TRAVEL BLOG

Sharing my cultural and travel experiences

« [The Hired Man](#)

Road

July 26, 2017 by [garethjames](#)

I thought Jim Cartwright's 80's slice of working class life might have become a period piece, but despite it's foundations in Thatcher's Britain and the period clothes, props and references, it's themes are not in the slightest bit dated, and it's time may have well come again, along with the food banks! John Tiffany's fresh look proves that it was, and is, ground-breaking theatre.

It struck me last night how poetic it is, so how appropriate that our narrator is poet Lemn Sissay, who glues it all together brilliantly. He presides over a series of scenes which take place over one night in the houses of and on the unnamed road, in the unnamed northern town. We meet fourteen of the residents, going about their business, domestic chores, reflections and escapes. It has an extraordinary ability to switch from uproarious comedy to bleakness and sadness. A number of scenes take place in a glass box which rises from below the stage and these prove particularly voyeuristic. The piece really gets under your skin.

When I saw it 31 years ago, it was a promenade staging and though it was more immersive, the performances were less subtle and nuanced than they are here by a superb ensemble of eight actors playing the fourteen roles, with some of the best drunken scenes I've seen anywhere! Michelle Fairley creates three extraordinary larger-than-life characters. I'm not sure I'd have known Mike Noble played both the Skin-Lad and Eddie if I hadn't seen it in the programme, outstanding characterisations of roles that are poles apart. Mark Hadfield has two very different roles as well, both superbly handled. Liz White was a revelation in roles unlike any I've seen her in before. June Watson gives another pair of acting masterclasses; such a fine actress. Faye Marsay makes an auspicious stage debut in her two roles and Shane Zaza and Dan Parr excel in their solo turns.

John Tiffany has an ability to animate a play and tease terrific performances from his cast, and so it is here. Sometimes hilarious, somewhat bleak, but brilliant, timeless theatre.

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Curtain Call
Theo Bosenquet
27.07.17



NEWS & FEATURES

BLOG: JIM CARTWRIGHT LEADS 'QUIET REVOLUTION' ON CLASS

[BLOG](#) | 27.07.2017



On this morning's Radio 4 [Today](#) programme, playwright Jim Cartwright - whose debut play *Road* (pictured) is being revived at the Royal Court - spoke movingly about the issue of class in theatre.

Responding to his wife's invocation to be active rather than angry, in 2015 he founded a [drama studio](#) in Chorley to respond to the current shortage of working class actors entering the profession. Cartwright himself leads the sessions, which are aimed squarely at those from underprivileged backgrounds.

Darren Scott, who's 55 years old and from Salford, was an original member. His involvement got him an agent, and he recently landed a role in the new Mike Leigh film *Peterloo*. Not a bad career trajectory.

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But, as with [gender](#), the issue of class is not just about ticking boxes. In Cartwright's words "the working class thing is an attitude, it's a burning feeling inside. We're a movement, a quiet revolution."
'It's time for change in theatre' (Jim Cartwright)

Cartwright also fired a stark warning shot to the industry: "We're coming. And if you won't let us through the doors we're coming in over the walls, through the stalls... it's time for change in theatre."

He's right. I first started writing about this issue five years ago, when I wrote a blog for the [Guardian](#). Since then the issue has been getting steadily worse, to the point that a recent [survey](#) showed that only 16% of actors come from working class backgrounds. That's half the population as a whole.

And the blame doesn't necessarily lie entirely with theatre companies or drama schools. It's a reflection of a wider economic picture that is returning this country to Dickensian levels of economic division.

There's also something in the fact the profession itself has become far more attractive to the well-heeled. Acting used to be seen as a dirty, shameful occupation for the privileged - 'don't put your daughter on the stage Mrs Worthington', and all that. But that stigma has long gone and acting has never been a more popular career choice. The competition is brutal, with those at a financial advantage inevitably coming out on top.

This is not to place blame on those actors themselves. Nothing is achieved by knocking successful actors from privileged backgrounds. But clearly more needs to be done to level the playing field and replace the ladders of opportunity that are currently being eroded.

So good on Jim Cartwright for putting his money - and talent - where his mouth is. I'd love to see others follow his lead.

- Theo Bosanquet

Image: Mark Hadfield, Mike Noble, Faye Marsay, Lemn Sissay, Dan Parr and June Watson in Road at the Royal Court (© Johan Persson)

COLLEGE

Evening Standard
Holly Williams
27.07.17

John Tiffany on bringing Road back to the Royal Court and how he made West End magic with Harry Potter

[EVENING STANDARD ARTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH](#)  **HISCOX**
Director John Tiffany created a smash hit Harry Potter for the stage — now he's applying his magic touch to an Eighties play about tough times in a Northern town, he tells Holly Williams

- [HOLLY WILLIAMS](#)

- 3 hours ago



ROYAL

Stage magic: John Tiffany's revival of Jim Cartwright's 1986 play *Road* is in previews at the Royal Court now *Daniel Hambury/Stella Pictures*

He's the man who made the magic of Harry Potter come alive on stage: John Tiffany pulled off the near impossible trick of crafting a blockbuster show that pleased both obsessive fans and snooty critics alike. In doing so, he confirmed himself as one of the world's hottest directors — capable of stonking commercial successes that are still spellbindingly theatrical. [Harry Potter and the Cursed Child](#) at the Palace Theatre swept up at the [Evening Standard](#), Olivier and Critics' Circle awards, and is set to become a global phenomenon, opening on Broadway next year with other countries in the pipeline.

The stakes couldn't have been any higher but he was a clever bet: Tiffany had already scored hits with the National Theatre of Scotland's *Black Watch*, the musical *Once*, and a heart-stoppingly delicate take on Tennessee Williams's [The Glass Menagerie](#).

“When I think about it now, it feels a bit more vertiginous than it felt in the middle of it,” he says of tackling the most successful franchise of all time — albeit with [JK Rowling](#) very much onside and a great script from Jack Thorne. “But as soon as we started performing, it felt like ‘it's all right, people are going with this’.” It's a typically down-to-earth way of putting it from a Yorkshireman who seems unfazed by theatrical world domination. He could have his pick of projects now, surely, but his latest has no big-name stars or crazy budget. *Road* is a revival of Jim Cartwright's 1986 play, set over one wild night in a Lancashire town devastated by Thatcherism and unemployment. It's bleak. It's also stingingly funny, and has a visceral poetry that rages against the impoverishment of people's economic, social and spiritual lives. A long way from Hogwarts, then.

But *Road* is also something of a homecoming: it made a splash at the [Royal Court](#) 30 years ago but hasn't had a major London production since. And Tiffany has vivid memories of reading the play as a 16-year-old, after a drama teacher at his sixth-form college in Huddersfield gave it to him.

“It blew my mind,” he says. “I was obsessed with theatre and loving the work of [Caryl Churchill](#), Edward Bond, Howard Brenton and Howard Barker,

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people doing real formal experimentation. But Road was the first time I'd read a play written in a very true Northern dialect that seemed to have that excitement running through it."



Faye Marsay and Shane Zaza in Road (Johan Persson)

It was also bracing to read something that gave dignity to a Northern voice. "You grow up thinking you've got an accent great for comedy! But not necessarily intelligence or lyricism or poetry — and that's still the case. It blows my mind that you get Shakespeare where the 'low' comedy characters have got Northern or Welsh accents. Really? Are we still there?"

For Tiffany, who switched from studying biology to drama and classics while at Glasgow University, Road has the potency and power of a Greek tragedy. "The character of Valerie, at the end, is begging the gods, shouting about how unemployment has trashed her relationship. In some ways it's like Antigone screaming for burial rites for her brother."

Although set firmly in the Eighties — Tiffany beams when talking about soundtracking it with obscure gems by James, The Railway Children and Happy Mondays and promises a lot of big hairdos — Road's picture of neglected Northern communities is also timely. A similar anger, bubbling below the surface, has burst out in the past year, Tiffany suggests, seen in both the swing toward [Jeremy Corbyn](#)'s socialism and the vote for Brexit.

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The play was famously originally a promenade performance but Tiffany is putting it on the big downstairs stage; he wanted to treat it like “a classic piece of European theatre”. Plus, he adds, it wouldn’t feel right today to turn the Royal Court’s bar in super-rich Sloane Square into a faux working men’s club. It is a queasy thought, albeit one that after a short pause prompts a characteristically hearty laugh from Tiffany.

He is cheerfully, and cheeringly, committed to making theatre that is truly accessible. There’s a steeliness to his grin, for instance, when discussing ticket prices for the Broadway transfer of *Cursed Child*: “I don’t think that just because people will pay a certain amount for a ticket that it’s all right to charge it. It’s very important to us to keep it accessible. [American producers] don’t have the same sense of social responsibility, but we do. And we’re calling the shots.”

Then there was the decision to cast a black actress as Hermione, causing a furore when it was announced — and further fuss when Rakie Ayola took over from [Noma Dumezweni](#). “It was a political choice — well, not political so much as responsible,” says Tiffany. “[The show] was going to have the eyes of the world on it. There was no way I was going to have all three of those characters played by white actors.” He also confesses it took him a while to commit to *Cursed Child* because “I knew that if I f***ed up, I would really f*** up, not just for me and the people I worked with but for theatre. Not wanting to be grand, but 60 or 70 per cent of our audience are first-time theatregoers. We had to make people fall in love with theatre as well as tell the next part of the story.”

When I ask if there’s a shortage of working-class voices like Cartwright’s in theatre today, Tiffany suggests there are still a variety of ways in for writers — the real problem is impossible fees for drama schools and the expectation that people can work for free, meaning acting and directing are becoming a preserve of the rich. “I know for a fact that if I was leaving school now there’s no way I’d be a director. It’s doubtful I’d make the choice to go to university, my mum and dad certainly wouldn’t have been able to afford it.

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That makes me terrified — how many are we losing? There’s a theory that ‘talent will out’: it’s not true.”

There’s no stopping him today, however. Not long after *Road* opens, Tiffany begins rehearsals for the National Theatre’s big Christmas show — an adaptation of *Pinocchio*, using the Disney movie’s songs and plot spliced with elements of Carlo Collodi’s original stories. Dennis Kelly, who wrote *Matilda the Musical*, is penning the script, so it’s fair to say it’ll be another scorching hot ticket.

Typically, Tiffany’s approach is hardly the razzle-dazzle of your usual big-budget Disney juggernaut. “It’s really dark. Kids love that, though! Of all the Disney films it feels much more like a European Grimm tale,” he says. I presume that’s something you’re running with, I ask? Tiffany grins.

“Oh yeah! That’s why I wanted to do it here rather than over in America. It’s going to take a European theatrical sensibility to pull this off.” Turning a Disney movie into a dark piece of European theatre that’s still fun for all the family? Sounds like just the project for Tiffany’s magic touch.

Road is at the Royal Court Downstairs, SW1 until September 9; royalcourttheatre.com

COULDT

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WhatsOnStage
Ben Hewis
26.07.17

WHAT'S ON STAGE

PHOTOS

First look at *Road* at the Royal Court

Jim Cartwright's debut play is set in Lancashire during Margaret Thatcher's government

Ben Hewis • London • 26 Jul 2017

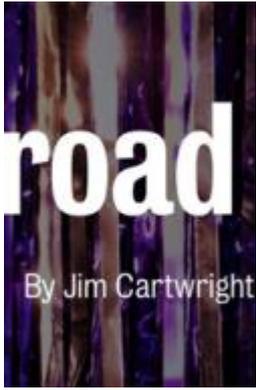


Faye Marsay (Louise/Clare), Liz White (Carol/Valerie) and Lemn Sissay (Scullery)
© Johan Persson

Jim Cartwright's *Road* opens at the Royal Court on Friday and WhatsOnStage have been given a first look at images of the cast in action.

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Directed by [John Tiffany](#), Cartwright's seminal play is about a group of people who live on the same road in a working class area of Lancashire during Margaret Thatcher's government.

The cast includes Michelle Fairley (*The Wild Duck*, Donmar), Mark Hadfield (*The Libertine*), Faye Marsay (*Black Mirror*) and Mike Noble (*Game*, Almeida).

They are joined by Shane Zaza, Liz White, June Watson, Dan Parr and Lemn Sissay.

Road runs at the Royal Court until 9 September.

COURT

ROYAL

BBC News
Ian Youngs
27.07.17

BBC Your account

NEWS

'Time for change': Encouraging working class actors to rise again

By Ian Youngs
Entertainment & arts reporter

🕒 27 July 2017 | Entertainment & Arts

f t b e Share



Jim Cartwright (centre) leading an exercise with one of his drama groups

From Dame Julie Walters to David Morrissey, many top showbusiness names have voiced concerns about a lack of working class actors. Now leading playwright Jim Cartwright is doing something to fix the problem.

There is a "quiet revolution" taking place in acting, Cartwright says. And it is happening in a fitness studio above a charity shop on Chorley High Street in Lancashire.

This is where Cartwright, whose plays include *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* and *Road*, holds three drama classes every Sunday. On Saturdays, he takes over a room in a Methodist church in Manchester.

He started the classes in 2015 after reading comments from **Dame Julie**, who said she would not be able to afford to become an actress if she was starting out again.

"It made me really cross because I'm from a working class background," he says.

COULDT

ROYAL



Image copyright GETTY

Image caption L to R: Tom Hiddleston (Eton), Eddie Redmayne (Eton), Benedict Cumberbatch (Harrow)

Reading articles about shrinking opportunities made him "like a bull with a sore head", he says. So his wife told him: "Don't get angry. Do something."

He took her advice and set up the drama studio with the aim of bringing through more working class talent, advertising his services in his local fish and chip shop.

"I got a little card saying 'drama studio' and stuck it on a chippy wall. And I waited. And they came, and they came, and they keep coming."

Two years later, he has five classes in the two locations and has set up a talent agency to represent the budding stars. There is also a youth group.



Image copyright IAN KAY Image

caption Jolene Rathmill has found it hard to progress in the acting profession

The adult class members range from people who have never set foot on stage to jobbing actors who are honing their skills. There are students, retired people, a few teachers, a former policeman, a fireplace salesman.

Jolene Rathmill, 38, from Oldham, works for financial advisers and runs confidence and self-esteem workshops in schools.

She says: "When I first started, Jim got me an agent and wrote something about me, saying he's worked with some of the top actresses in the world and that I have the potential to be that. He sees that in me. That's my ambition, 100%."

However, she thinks she is at a disadvantage because she hasn't been to a prestigious drama school.

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Image caption Cartwright's groups are rehearsing for their next showcase in Manchester

"I grew up on a council estate. We had chicken wire between our gardens and a tyre swinging in our back garden," she says.

"I feel that having not attended a professional, recognised drama school, initially you're right at the bottom of the hierarchy. There's a hierarchy of agents, and the top agents get the top castings, and further down the line if they want a real working class actor they might call people in.

"But it's very rare, so you're climbing, climbing, climbing" - she mimes climbing a ladder - "trying to get there. And it just doesn't happen."

Cartwright's efforts come as privately educated actors like Eddie Redmayne, Benedict Cumberbatch, Tom Hiddleston and Damian Lewis seem to have taken over the TV, film and theatre landscape.



Image caption Cartwright made his name writing Road, which was filmed for the BBC in 1987

Last year, **The Sutton Trust found** that 42% of the winners in three main Bafta award categories had gone to people from private schools, while Sky News recently calculated **that 45% of the BBC's best-paid stars** were also privately educated. Also in 2016, **researchers found that** 16% of actors came from working class backgrounds - half the level of the population as a whole - and that the British acting profession was "heavily skewed towards the privileged."

The Labour Party is now conducting **its own investigation** into opportunities for working class actors, with a report due to be published soon.

Cartwright has turned drama teacher after more than 30 years as **one of the most vital voices in British theatre**. His debut play Road is currently **back at the Royal Court** in London, where it launched his career in 1986.

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He has also acted in TV shows like The Village, From Darkness and Coronation Street.



Image caption Cartwright is an acclaimed

writer, actor, director - and now drama teacher

With the Cartwright Drama Studio, he hopes to replicate the "explosion of energy and talent" that came with the **Kitchen Sink movement** of the 1950s. That was fading by the 1980s, he says, when he noticed "the floppy fringe coming back".

He says: "I'd never say it's been an even playing field, but when I started out it was more even. But I've seen it change. I've seen it tilt."

His students come from all sections of society. Some would identify as working class, some wouldn't. But he believes the mindset is what sets his studio apart.

'We're a quiet revolution - and we're coming'

"The working class thing is an attitude. It's a burning, it's a feeling inside," Cartwright says. "That's what came in the '50s. It wasn't just that they were from a particular area or a particular economic strata.

"They carried with them a certain fire. That's what we're building in the classes. We're not just classes - we're a bit of a movement really and we're a quiet revolution.

"And we're coming. If you won't let us through the doors, we're coming over the walls and through the stalls. We're coming in. It's time. And anyone out there who feels the same as I do, join us, because it's time for change in theatre. It really is time for change.

"Not that there's not great work that goes on. There's fantastic work and fantastic people working in this business. But something's died that we're reviving."

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Cartwright brings casting directors and agents to see his students perform at regular showcases. Some have won small film and TV roles and are working on their own theatre shows and short films. There are no stars yet - but he is sure some have the talent to go all the way.

"Some of the people who come to these classes are just amazing, and it's criminal that they're not working in the highest levels of this industry," he says. The class members include **Darren Scott**, 55, who worked as an actor for seven years before the work dried up. So he has spent the past 20 years as a primary school teacher. For him, attending the Cartwright Drama Studio has rekindled his performing career.

"I was in the very first showcase that Jim directed, and through that I got an agent, and I had an audition with Mike Leigh for his new feature film. And after three recalls, I was lucky enough to be offered a part. That's a direct result of coming here and working with Jim."



At the age of 19, **Emma Heyes** has studied acting at college and is attending the classes in preparation for auditioning for drama school. In the meantime, she's working on the checkouts at Tesco.

She has already had enough acting experience to know her accent puts her at a disadvantage.

"I have to learn accents, otherwise I won't get work," she explains. "I think I've only ever done one play where I've used my actual accent, and I've done a lot of plays.

COULDT

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"I've been into the top drama schools in the UK and they look at you as the novelty northerner in the corner."



As part of the training, Cartwright tasks the group members with writing and performing monologues. He recommends one by 38-year-old **Scott Brerton**.

Brerton reads it and it is a bittersweet tale of trying to remember what happened on a big night out. It is exactly the sharp, funny, full-of-life voice that Cartwright is trying to encourage.

Brerton had not acted before he started coming to the classes six months ago. He has now been for his first audition and won his first role, performing in a three-night play in Liverpool last month.

"I don't think I would have been able to do it or have had the confidence to do it without coming here and having that weekly inspiration and driving motivation by Jim," he says.

It is early days for all concerned, and the "quiet revolution" may end with a whimper or a roar.

At any rate, Cartwright is on a mission to make it happen. In fact, he's throwing the kitchen sink at it.

The next Cartwright Drama Studio showcase is at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, on 31 July. Road runs at the Royal Court in London until 9 September.

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ROYAL

The Stage
Natasha Tripney
27.07.17



JOHAN PERSSON

Road

Michelle Fairley and Lemn Sissay (above) head up the cast in a revival of Jim Cartwright's classic play at London's Royal Court. John Tiffany, now an Olivier-winner for *Harry Potter* and *the Cursed Child*, directs the production, which opens on July 28.

Natasha Tripney

COURT

ROYAL

British Theatre Review
Paul T Davies
29.07.17



REVIEW: Road, Royal Court Theatre ☆☆☆☆

by [Paul T Davies](#) on 29th July 2017 in [Off West End](#), [Reviews0](#)

Road

The Royal Court

28 July 2017

4 Stars

[Book Now](#)

There are two things that age you, children and theatre. Both can make you feel old. I saw the original touring production of *Road*, now marking its 30th anniversary with a new production at the [Royal Court](#). It was staged promenade, I never knew theatre could be done like that, it blew my mind. Ian Dury played narrator Scullery, and he shook my hand and sang to one of my friends in the interval. Jane Horricks and cast weaved their way through us, and a senior audience member sat in the armchair on set, and the actors just performed around her. Unforgettable to me, then a student.

Director John Tiffany does away with promenade in this staging, the set thrusting out to the auditorium and revealing a sort of glass lift that some of the monologues and smaller scenes take place in. We are taken through an evening in a road up North, and time has dated some of the material, and some performances edge dangerously close to caricature. As Scullery, Lem Sissay appears as a stereotype of the Northern comic, and I felt he could have engaged with the audience even more. However, this is a fine ensemble and there are many highlights. These include the wonderful June Watson as Molly, getting ready for night out at the pub, Liz White haunting as battered wife Valerie, and Mark Hadfield's poignant Jerry, yearning for the past that he remembers through rose tinted glasses. Best of all is a hilarious and moving scene, with Michelle Farley superb as Helen, trying desperately to seduce a pissed up and vomiting soldier, she even uses chips, "on a plate", to tempt him, then realises how young and broken he is.

COULDT

ROYAL

Since the play was first staged there have been a whole raft of working class writers and art that reflect Cartwright's influence, including Lee Hall, (there is a nod to Billy Elliot when Scullery performs a ballet with a shopping trolley), Shameless, Gary Owen and a raft of Channel Four documentaries of benefit claimers. I wondered if the material should have been fully updated, but it remains fixed in a 1980s hinterland. Staging monologues and scenes in the glass box makes them look like museum pieces, and that doesn't help the dated feel.

But there was one thing I had forgotten. It was always there, I had just forgotten it. And that's how brilliant a writer Cartwright is. His script reached out over the years and slapped me about the face, a hymn to working class people and poverty. The final scene, in which four young people perform a unique ritual, is powerful and moving. Eddie, Brink, Carol and Louise, (Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Liz White and Faye Marsay-all excellent), get pissed and play *Try A Little Tenderness* by Otis Redding, and then scream out their frustrations, a cathartic release from their despair. It is one of the most brilliant scenes written for the British stage, and the climax, when they scream "Somehow a somehow a somehow- might escape", over and over tears your heart out. Except here, Tiffany adds a totally pointless Tai Chi movement sequence that involves the whole cast and totally undermines the power of the chant, softening the blow. The play needs to speak for itself, and too often here the direction and movement undermine the text. However if you're new to the play, catch Cartwright's masterpiece, and join me in yearning for a sequel.

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Radio Times
Simon O'Hagan
29.07.17



Road review: Protest play about the neglected working-class is as relevant as ever ★★★

The Royal Court has revived Jim Cartwright's influential play set in a northern town in the Thatcher years - and it still packs a punch

By Simon O'Hagan
Saturday 29 July 2017 at 9:18AM

In 1986 it was very much a Road less travelled. Jim Cartwright's drama of that year gave voice to the abandoned working-class in a way that few contemporary playwrights attempted, and certainly not in such daring form – a pageant of prose-poetry that encapsulated the north of England's anger and despair at what Thatcherism was doing to it.

More than 30 years on, does Road still have any mileage in it? John Tiffany's shouty, visceral, uncompromising revival at the Royal Court makes a powerful case but while we are recognisably back in 1986 – hairstyle-wise we're talking Toyah Wilcox and Sheena Easton – it goes beyond politics and into the realm of the human condition itself. Lost souls are everywhere you look.

To that extent Road is timeless, even as we know that real-life solutions to the issues confronting the play's characters were possible back in the 1980s, just as they are possible today. In the age of austerity and ongoing social inequality, the children of Road are very much with us. But politics – and society – continues to fail them, which is why returning to the play is amply justified.

Stylistically, the production leaps about. Naturalism one minute, absurdism the next. There are dance elements, and the action is punctuated with bursts of 80s music (and one highly significant 60s hit). Scenes that could have come straight out of Samuel Beckett vie with moments we recognise from TV dramas like Shameless, whose debt to Road was considerable. Chuck in powerful echoes of both Greek tragedy and Alan Bennett and it's quite a mix, occasionally a muddle.

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We're in an unnamed northern town – the characters' accents range from Scouse to Geordie – and the action unfolds over the course of one night. Lemn Sissay's Scullery narrates proceedings like a Greek chorus as the lives of the dozen or so characters collide. They drink, they fight, they get it on (or not), and they stare into the abyss.

It's a brutal environment in which great damage has been inflicted on people, and there are moments of gross humour that only desperation on this scale can give rise to. Something pretty disgusting happens during an attempted seduction in which one party is catatonic with booze. Don't make any assumptions about which party it is.

More a series of individual scenes than a coherent narrative – many played out inside a giant transparent cube that speaks of people facing glass walls as well as ceilings – the production is blessed with a fine ensemble cast of whom Faye Marsay, Liz White and Mike Noble would be my pick.

But Road is a "statement" play. We are given only glimpses of individual lives but its message comes at us with a vengeance.

COILPT

ROYAL

London Theatre
Will Longman
29.07.17



Review of Road at the Royal Court

Date:

Saturday, July 29, 2017

Review by:

[Will Longman](#)

Thirty years after it premiered at the [Royal Court](#), and about thirty years after it first landed in director John Tiffany's lap, Jim Cartwright's play [Road](#) paints a portrait of northern England at a time well before the term 'Powerhouse' was coined.

We're in the heart of Thatcher's Britain. Unemployment at record levels, but a time when someone could hold two or three jobs is a not-so distant memory. Fathers, rather than grandfathers, remember the war.

Jim Cartwright's play takes you on a booze-fuelled evening tour round the houses of a nameless Northern street. Lemn Sissay, as the peppy tour guide Scullery, introduces you to each of the characters on the street so they can tell you their story. There's an alcoholic mother and her larger-than-life daughter, always at each other's throats. A vicious skinhead who finds solace in religion. The drunk father bringing women home while his daughter sleeps upstairs. Behind each door lies a segment of this patchwork street.

Occasionally, their stories are told from a box that rises from below the stage. Every sound is amplified in this echo chamber as they unload their tales about why they are who they are today. Lee Curran's lighting brings out the best in Chloe Lamford's design, which also features a red brick backdrop and trio of streetlights on either side of the stage.

Tiffany's worked with movement director Jonathan Watkins to add some real delicate theatricality in the second half. A fine example being Sissay's waltz around the stage with a shopping trolley. These moments stick out, in particular the final scene: an ensemble dance piece that conveys their longing to be rid of their dead-end lives.

Set to a soundtrack of '80s tunes, the moving closing piece, set to the music of Manchester band Elbow, is a real special, touching moment.

I particularly enjoyed Mike Noble's passionate performance as Skin-Lad, the hooligan who finds Buddhism. Michelle Fairley, too, excels in a particular comic, but rather frank and uncomfortable scene that highlights how far our attitudes and views on sex and consent have really come.

This play is a little ball of anger from a snapshot in time. The neighbours are angry at the establishment, angry at each other, angry at themselves. But [Road](#) is also a love letter to this unique little part of the world.

[Road](#) is at the [Royal Court](#) until 9th September.

Top Ten London Stage Shows, August

CRUISE

ROYAL

Victoria Sadler

29.07.17

VICTORIA
SADLER

Posted by Victoria, on July 29, 2017

0

Would you believe it? Another month and [The Ferryman](#) and *Hamlet* don't make the cut again! I know, cruel, right? (Though, interestingly, there was a [thought-provoking article](#) this past month on concerns over the Irish stereotypes Jez Butterworth harnesses in his much-feted play). I would still recommend both of them wholeheartedly, though, and I suspect both will do pretty well come awards season. Worth noting, too, that *Hamlet* closes at the beginning of September too so we're in last-chance saloon, everybody! Nevertheless, it's a cracking list this month with shows I'd been rooting for (*Touch*, *Disco Pigs*, *Adrian Mole*) coming through, and also with the arrival of some pretty big guns in terms of the revival of *Follies* at the NT, the much-anticipated *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Ben Whishaw returning at the Almeida, and Bob Dylan's music being used in the new show at the Old Vic. Plenty of options then for those of us looking for a show to see in what is usually a pretty quiet month, theatre-wise!

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Apollo Theatre

We all know the play – Brick and Maggie join the gathering at a big Southern plantation to celebrate Big Daddy's birthday. But Brick's alcoholism is in full swing, and Maggie's passion and frustration is burning hotter than the sun. As all the secrets and lies that have been suffocating their marriage threaten to spill out, will their marriage survive the gathering? But it'll be interesting to see what this new revival of the Tennessee Williams's modern American masterpiece will bring. This Young Vic production comes with Sienna Miller as Maggie. Closes October 7th. Tickets from £10.

Follies, National Theatre

It's another revival that is the big draw at the National Theatre this season. This time, *Follies*, the Sondheim musical about faded showgirls and stars of a popular interwar revue who relive their moments in the sun at a reunion that also exposes their tangled love lives. It's the first time the show has ever been performed at the NT, and the production comes with complete with modern day legend Imelda Staunton so tickets are already limited! Opens August 22nd. Tickets from £15.

Against, Almeida Theatre

Ben Whishaw is back at the Almeida and, this time, he's in this new play from Christopher Shinn that casts him as a Silicon Valley billionaire who believes that God is speaking to him. And what does God tell him to do? To launch a rocket in to space and change the world. But he faces violent opposition to his ideas. This new play is directed by Ian Rickson, previously artistic director at the Royal Court Theatre, so it promises great things. Opens August 12th. Tickets from £10.

COULDT

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Queen Anne, Theatre Royal Haymarket

The RSC's critically acclaimed *Queen Anne* has transferred to London for a limited time only and it is well worth seeing. There's plenty of plotting, seduction and intrigue in this play set in the Royal Court in 1702. A sickly William III is on the throne and England is on the verge of war. Princess Anne is soon to become Queen, and her advisors vie for influence over the future monarch. But Sarah, the Duchess of Marlborough, is a close friend – a friend with whom Anne has an intensely personal relationship – and she is beginning to exert increasing pressure as she pursues her own designs on power. Closes September 30th. Tickets from £15.

Road, Royal Court Theatre

Jim Cartwright's seminal play returns to the Royal Court, where it opened back in 1986. It's an extraordinarily powerful piece of work on the lives of the people in a deprived, working class area of Lancashire during the government of Margaret Thatcher, a time of high unemployment in the north of England. Dark days are returning again (arguably, for many areas in the North, they never left) so this revival is pertinently timed. Closes September 9th. Tickets from £10.

Disco Pigs, Trafalgar Studios

Even twenty years on, this dark rites-of-passage play from Enda Walsh still has the power to disturb and unnerve. In it, Pig and Runt, two kids who've been joined at the hip since they were born in the same minute of the same day at the same hospital in Cork, are approaching their joint 17th birthdays. To this point, the pair have been inseparable, their lives completely entwined, so deeply connected their thoughts are practically telepathic. But sexual awakenings, emotional maturity and spiralling incidents of unspeakable violence start to pull apart the bonds that tie this pair together. Closes August 19th. Tickets from £15.

Mosquitoes, National Theatre

Olivia Colman and Olivia Williams play sisters in this new drama from *Chimerica* writer Lucy Kirkwood. One lives in Geneva, a scientist on the brink of colossal scientific breakthroughs as part of the Higgs-Boson project; the other lives in Luton and spends an awful lot of time on Google. But when tragedy throws them together, the chaos of the lives starts to mirror the very science behind the Large Hadron Collider. Tickets are sold out but a new batch are released each Friday as part of the NT's Friday Rush initiative. To September 28th. Tickets from £15.

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole: The Musical, Menier Chocolate Factory

If you're looking for an evening at the theatre of full-on joy then, well, you won't be able to go wrong with this one. This musical adaptation of the mighty Adrian Mole diaries by the much-missed Sue Townsend is full of fun and energy. The songs are witty, the performances are excellent, and it's a show that will undoubtedly lift your spirits. Many of us know the story of the misunderstood genius of Adrian Mole – the teenage boy struggling to get the recognition he deserves in a world of school bullies, arguing parents, and teenage lust – but here's hoping this musical brings a new legion of fans both to the character and to the books. Closes September 9th. Tickets from £35.

Girl from the North Country, Old Vic Theatre

It's quite something that Bob Dylan has given permission for his music to be used on stage in this new play by Conor McPherson set during the Great Depression. Not a Dylan musical mind, more a play with songs. It's

COULDT

ROYAL

Duluth, Minnesota in 1934 and we're set in a community living on a knife-edge huddle together in the local guesthouse. The owner, Nick, owes more money than he can ever repay, his wife Elizabeth is losing her mind and their daughter Marianne is carrying a child no-one will account for. And, when a preacher selling bibles and a boxer looking for a comeback show up in the middle of the night, things start to spiral beyond the point of no return... Closes October 7th. Tickets from £10.

Touch, Soho Theatre

Writer and director Vicky Jones doesn't just have directorial credits to the mighty *Fleabag* in her back-pocket, she also won the Verity Bargate award with *The One*, a dark play that examined an abusive relationship. And she's tackling tricky and uncomfortable issues again in *Touch*, her new filthy and funny new play that lays bare the realities of a modern thirty-something woman trying to make her way in a world of temp jobs and crappy bedsits, whilst also working out what works for her sexually through a series of flings and friendships. Closes August 26th. Tickets from £10.

COILPT

The Upcoming
Laura Foulger
30.07.17



Road at the Royal Court Theatre

CULTURETHEATRE

30TH JULY 2017

“Fucking long life, int’it.” So concur the residents of playwright Jim Cartwright’s eponymous road. A study in nihilism, each of its characters is focused on numbing their jarring reality with alcohol, violence and/or promiscuity. John Tiffany takes Cartwright’s idiosyncratic 1986 script and makes its dark humour shine. Made up of a series of vignettes, it introduces several groups of characters struggling to anaesthetise themselves against the poverty and stagnancy of their small town. There’s the man who drowns out his tide of sadness by watching *Bullseye* with the volume turned right up. “I get these feelings inside and they’re so sad I can hardly stand it.” The randy party girl who realises her drunken soldier conquest is merely a boy. The skinhead who lives for violence. The girls on a drunken pub crawl, hunting for a shag. The boy whose existential crisis prevents him from leaving his bed.

The lyrical dialogue is shot through with Stanley Unwin-esque nonsense (“Kenny the homo: we used to drink gin off each other’s fingers at the bar. Silly nincompoop”) and winsome couplets (“Be full of good cheer. If not, bad beer”). Chloe Lamford’s set fuses exposed brick and neon tubing, but the main event is a glass box that fills much of the stage and rises, descends and lights up to reveal characters inside. This allows scenes to change in a flash like television jump cuts, while positioning the people within like objects on display or trapped animals.

Michelle Fairley (*Game of Thrones*) puts on a belter of a performance in multiple roles, while Royal Court veteran June Watson charms as the sweetly bonkers Molly.

ROYAL

Without a definite narrative arch it's difficult to invest in the wretched characters. However, the second half settles down a little more, giving us time to get to know and engage more satisfactorily with some of them. And with this change of pace comes hope: in the form of the transcendental power of music. Scenes are punctuated by sounds of pure escapism: the soulfulness of Otis Redding's *Try a Little Tenderness*; the soaring drama of the *Swan Lake* theme; then finally a song from the future: Elbow's *Lippy Kids*. A forward gaze.

At a time when food banks are on the rise and a bloody difficult woman lurks at Number 10, the world of *Road* is merely a shoulder-padded version of our own current reality.

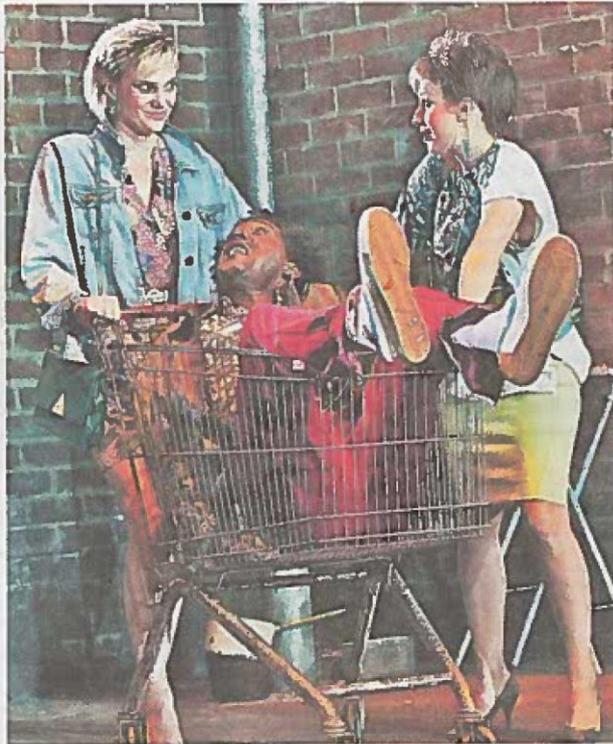


Laura Foulger

COILPT

ROYAL

The Times
Sam Marlowe
31.07.17



Grace amid the squalor: Liz White, Lemn Sissay and Faye Marsay

Take a trip down this road

It may be a 1980s period piece but Jim Cartwright's tale of working-class life is still strikingly relevant, says Sam Marlowe

Theatre
Road
Royal Court
Jerwood Theatre
★★★★☆

It is 30 years since Jim Cartwright's northern working-class odyssey first rampaged through the Royal Court in a landmark promenade production. Now a modern classic, it doesn't have the same startling force, but Cartwright's vivid language, with its ugly-beautiful poetry, its rage and compassion, still grabs you by the heart and throat and squeezes, hard. John Tiffany's revival acknowledges the play as an Eighties period piece,

while subtly pointing up its enduring relevance, and our own voyeuristic relationship to the misery, exuberance, degradation and defiance paraded before us. The fashions — all shoulder pads and sparkle — may look quaint, but the poverty and appalling inequality of opportunity haven't dated by so much as a day.

Cartwright's writing has a feverish intensity and Tiffany's production is at once dreamlike and hyperreal. In Chloe Lamford's stark design, streetlamps cast a sickly sodium glow over brickwork, and a glass cube, its panes streaked and filthy, rises out of the stage, acting as a window into domestic interiors, and a cage in which characters are imprisoned. Lemn Sissay, roaring, rasping, swigging rum, is Scullery, our guide, leading us from street corner to unhappy home, to pub, club and chippy. In between, there's pumping electro pop, and frantic movement by Jonathan Watkins: limbs slicing the air, or exultant pogoing.

There's grace amid the squalor. Scullery dances an absurdly lovely ballet to *Swan Lake* with a supermarket trolley, and gazes at the stars. Michelle Fairley transforms to play both Brenda, a cadaverous alcoholic, and Helen, leather-clad and love-hungry. The scene in which Helen is forced to abandon her seduction of a traumatised soldier after he pukes in his chips is not only grimly hilarious, but piercingly touching. Louise (Faye Marsay) and her tough friend Carol (Liz White), strutting in stilettos, pull two would-be flash lads in cheap suits, and share an affecting moment of transcendence when, woozy with red wine, they lose themselves in Otis Redding's *Try a Little Tenderness*. Elderly Molly (June Watson) sings and paints her face in her kitchen, while middle-aged Jerry (Mark Hadfield) tremulously covers his eyes against a raucous world in which he feels useless.

The journey is long, but Tiffany and Watkins spring a surprise in the closing moments, with a delicate, t'ai chi-like choreographed sequence full of fragile hope. It's the powerful, unexpectedly elegant end of a *Road* still well worth travelling.

Box office: 020 7565 5000, to Sept 9

COURT

ROYAL

Broadway World
Marianka Swain
31.07.17



BWW Review: ROAD, Royal Court

by [Marianka Swain](#) Jul. 31, 2017

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Thirty years on from its birth at the Royal Court, Jim Cartwright's northern, working-class battle cry returns in a revival from John Tiffany which, though initially stodgy, has an accumulative and undeniable force. 

The 1986 play follows the residents of a Lancastrian road for one night, winding its way through their poverty-stricken neighbourhood and peering into their homes. The original production was a famously immersive promenade affair, but - other than Lemn Sissay's Scullery occasionally addressing audience members - Tiffany's version is more bracingly theatrical.

The series of loosely linked vignettes are told in short scenes and monologues, some of which have the inescapable feel of a meaty acting exercise, but together they form a powerful tapestry of deprivation in Thatcherite Britain. Of course, the grim contemporary parallels are all too obvious: 30 years on, and the inequality chasm grows. "England's in pieces" indeed.

Despair runs through all these lives. Perhaps most vividly in those of teenagers Joey and Clare, who, jobless, hopeless and stripped of all opportunities, lie in bed starving themselves. As they slip into delirium, a piercing, accusatory wisdom emerges. "Life can't just be this, can it?"

Tiffany assembles a community of isolated individuals, of fractured connections and agony hidden away. Chloe Lamford's filthy glass box rises from the depths, a museum display case-like prison for the trapped and forgotten. Specimens Jerry and Molly both feels alienated from the present, but their shared loneliness doesn't bond them. Proximity does not equal relief.

The brazen counter to this crippling solitude is booze, sex, chips, singing, dancing, anything to feel, flee, regain control. Yet it's often illusory or temporary, an inadequate armour - just as several characters climb a ladder that leads nowhere.

It's a bleakness that could become numbing, but Cartwright's text is full of earthy poetry, mordant wit and remarkable moments. Of the latter, no one who sees it will be able to

COULPT

ROYAL

shake the memory of four lost souls, finding an extraordinary transcendence in Otis Redding's "Try A Little Tenderness".

Tiffany's production is particularly strong in its understanding of how music can be escape and illumination, from the playing of a gramophone to a giddy burst of Country and Western line dancing. Most evocative is Scullery, who finds an abandoned music box playing *Swan Lake*, twirling in a dreamlike pas de deux with his shopping trolley. It's grimily visceral, too, with a seriously gross-out post-vomit snog, sticky spilled drinks and a child's face streaked with blood. And there's competition for the *Adrian Mole musical* in the Eighties style department - eye-watering fashions and towering 'dos. The outstanding Michelle Fairley parades one of the latter, and is superb in her different guises: from a withered alcoholic harassing her daughter for money to the frisky Helen trying to build a sexual fantasy by pretending a soldier at the paralytic stage of drunkenness is merely enigmatic. It's a riotously funny scene that edges into searingly tragic.

Excellent, too are Mark Hadfield as Jerry, conjuring his happier past; Liz White as Valerie, waiting up for a husband spending their cash down the pub, and Carol, who taps into a rage at their circumstances she can't quite explain; June Watson as Molly, painting on her face as she loses sight of her late husband's; Shane Zaza and Faye Marsay (with Fairley, adding an incentive for *Game of Thrones* fans), tremulously facing the end; and Sissay as a charismatic but coyly calculating guide. Lee Curran's lighting is a combination of shifting gloom and queasy strip lighting, while Jonathan Watkins' movement grounds the piece and then contributes to a beautiful climax, as those gulfs - between young and old, male and female, neighbours blinkered by their hopelessness - are bridged for just one moment.

COULDT

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Culture Whisperer
21.07.17

CULTURE *Whisper* 
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Road, Royal Court review ★★★★★

21 JUL 17 – 09 SEP 17, 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

The return of seminal play by Jim Cartwright: *Road* is revived at the Royal Court, directed by John Tiffany

Jim Cartwright's celebrated and seminal play *Road* makes a timely and relevant homecoming to the Royal Court. Having premiered in 1986, *Road* is as cutting and perceptive about the state of the nation as it was thirty years ago. Directed by *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child's* John Tiffany and starring author Lemn Sissay and *Game of Throne's* Michelle Fairley, the show takes us to a dingy but lively working class street in Lancashire and illuminates the stories of its residents. Poignant, touching, and often bleak, *Road* remains a thoughtful and insightful piece about desperation, determination, and spirit.

Cartwright's play is often staged in promenade, so the audience follow Scullery, played by Sissay, down the road to meet the locals. Confined instead to the Royal Court stage, designer Chloe Lamford builds a stark and drab street, with stairs that descend to the audience and a glass square that acts as an indoor space, rising out of the stage.

Each scene explores different characters, the similar motifs are a search for sustenance, a desire to live fully, and a questioning of who or what has spoiled life. In a particularly horrific scene, Shane Zaza's Joey chooses stay in bed and starve, comparing his hunger to a religious experience. In another, the brilliant June Watson as Molly, an older woman on the street, puts on her face while talking to herself, having nowhere to go. Cartwright's characters are smart and ambitious, but in an environment which lends no opportunity to them, their energies and talents are wasted.

Michelle Fairley dazzles and offers some of the best comedic moments as Helen, a persistent woman who brings home a paralytically boozed soldier. Fairley shows Helen's desperation as

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both exhaustion and fierce resolve. Faye Marsay as Louise is also comedically brilliant. In the climactic scene, a life-affirming and haunting ritual set to Otis Redding's *Try a Little Tenderness*, she and Liz White as Carol brilliantly demonstrate their pent-up anger and frustration but also the vulnerability of wanting to hope, and wanting to dream.

The only disappointment is a half-hearted attempt at audience integration. *Road* calls for an intimate and dynamic experience between actor and audience, with Scullery as the mediator. But here at the Royal Court the roles remain static, with a few cursory call-outs to the audience.

Nevertheless, at its best *Road* is an invitation to look into others' lives without judgment, but still with a great deal of intimacy. Its relevance is almost unquestionable, and with strong performances and slick direction, *Road* is sharp and stirring theatre.

COURT

ROYAL

The Independent
Paul Taylor
31.07.17



INDEPENDENT

Road, Royal Court, London, review: Not as confrontational as the original

The Royal Court's revival of Jim Cartwright's protest play about the working class is as relevant as ever 30 years later

- [Paul Taylor](#)
- 4 hours ago
- [0 comments](#)



COURT

ROYAL

Faye Marsay as Clare and Shane Zaza as Joey in 'Road' at the Royal Court *Johan Persson*
It was dubbed the *Under Milk Wood* of urban dereliction when Jim Cartwright's *Road* sprang to startling and seminal life 30 years ago. Here was a guided tour of a street in a Lancashire town ravaged by Thatcherism, poverty and joblessness. The abandoned were given a voice – lyrical, gobby, surreal. The barriers between actors and audience were broken down by Simon Curtis's promenade production which had Ian Dury as Scullery, the scavenging master of ceremonies.

The Royal Court's revival now of one of its greatest hits is timely. This is a play that's in tune with the Austerity Britain of welfare cuts, food banks, Grenfell Tower, and chronic job insecurity. Wisely, director John Tiffany allows the parallels to speak for themselves in his non-promenade production that's set firmly in the era of Big Hair and shoulder pads (“Me shoulder pad's slipped.” “Pissing hell Louise, there's always summat wi' you.”). It's not, almost by definition, as confrontational as the original and the weakest aspect of the show is the weedy attempts at audience inter-action. Instead of being led on a nocturnal journey, we sit and watch a pageant of vignettes, our well-heeled voyeurism frankly acknowledged by the large glass box that rises and falls – a strip-lit prison with a hint of the display-case - at the centre of Chloe Lamford's bricked-up design.

“Are we protesting?” asks Clare who has taken to bed with Joey in a suicidal hunger-strike. (Faye Marsay and Shane Zaza are perfection in the parts.) The plight of the people in *Road* seems either to have pushed them beyond politics to a more existential despair or to a frenzy for obliterating pain through drink and sex. In Tiffany's production, which is beautifully acted by a multi-tasking ensemble, the free-wheeling lyricism (“Why is the world so tough? It's like walking through meat in high-heels”) and the raucously rude leap into pungent life. Mark Hadfield is superb as a lonely old man, threadbare but punctilious, who can remember a time when there were so many jobs, it was possible to flit through three in two days: “I can't see how that time could turn into this time”. Liz White gives sharp poignancy to

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Valerie, who describes herself as a “bony rat” forced to “sniffle out” money because her husband boozes the giro money down the pub. She knows it's not his fault that there's no work and she hates herself for hating him as he wanders round “like a big, wounded animal”. And Michelle Fairley is hilarious and desolating as Helen who tries to prop up and seduce an insensibly drunk young squaddie while pretending that he's seducing her (“Oh, I am sorry. I've kneeled in my chips”).

There's a wonderful sequence where Lemn Sissay's Scullery performs a whizzing, rapturous pas de deux with a supermarket trolley to the strains of *Swan Lake*. This longing to be free from a dead-end existence is even more affectingly conveyed in the final scene where a double-dating foursome speed-drink and then listen in silence to the whole of Otis Redding's *Try A Little Tenderness*. Hearing this record stuns them from their previous fractious inanities and they endeavour rise to above their lives in a group mime of would-be escape, performed here to the music of Elbow and gradually incorporating all the company. *A Road* well worth taking.

COILPT

ROYAL

WhatsOnStage
Matt Trueman
31.07.17

WHAT'S ON STAGE

Review: *Road* (Royal Court)

Jim Cartwright's 1986 play is revived by John Tiffany in the place it originally opened

Matt Trueman • London, West End • 31 Jul 2017

WOS Rating: 4 stars

Reader Reviews: [Be the first to review this show](#)



1 / 15

The Royal Court doesn't often revisit its past. As a new writing theatre, it lives in the present. Reviving [Jim Cartwright's](#) *Road*, which premiered here in 1986, is not just a six-gun salute to one of its own. It is a political act – a way of reflecting Britain back at itself and its past. Too little, you realise, has changed. For all its vintage trappings – big eighties hair and big eighties tunes – Cartwright's run-down industrial town looks horribly familiar. So much for the Northern Powerhouse.

Road leads us through a typical Lancastrian town on a typical Saturday night in 1986, Margaret Thatcher's Britain. It sweeps from dusk until dawn; a whole town drinking its worries away for a short while. Young men and women step out in search of a sup and a

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ROYAL

shag. Alcoholics scabble a few quid for a can. Chippies hawk their wares come closing time: chips, chips and more chips. Scullery, a charismatic shambles, who may or may not be homeless, is our guide: [Lemn Sissay](#) plays him with a glint in his eye and a quart of rum in his hand. The road comes to noisy life in [John Tiffany](#)'s revival.

It has a quieter side too though. Others stay at home, stewing over their lot, and [Chloe Lamford](#)'s design delivers them onstage in a glass box – part prison, part display case – that rises up through the floor. Liz White plays a mother waiting up all night for an absent husband; Mark Hadfield, a middle-aged man pining for a gentler past. It's a tale of two towns, really: best of times, worst of times. The brash public face, dressed up to the nines, masks a different mood underneath: desolate, angry and very often alone. The vulnerable go unseen. They don't leave the house.

Road reflects the hardships of Britain's industrial decline, but it's much more than a 'grim up north' play. Tiffany and Lamford tease out the play's patterns and motifs. *Road* reflects a massive crisis of masculinity: soldiers drink themselves semi-conscious, skinheads rage and rampage, while women – almost all of them – seek someone to hold them, often to little avail. It splits between young and old, too, as if Britain were both reinventing and forgetting itself at the same time.

First time around, *Road* was staged in promenade. [Jane Horrocks](#) scrawled graffiti on the Royal Court's front steps. The theatre's bouji bar was rebuilt as a traditional pub complete with dartboard and glitter ribbons. Ian Dury's Scullery led audiences into the lives and living rooms of Cartwright's Lancastrians. We were invited in. We witnessed a way of life. "You don't watch *Road*," one critic wrote at the time, "You live in it."

That would be preposterous today – nothing less than poverty tourism – and, in returning *Road* to the stage, Tiffany restores its theatricality. Rather than people, we see characters; scenes, instead of slices of life. Some even seem like Samuel Beckett shorts: [June Watson](#)'s dementia sufferer dolls herself up at her kitchen table; Shane Zaza's Joey, unemployed at 26, takes to bed to starve himself to death, babbling as hunger turns to delirium. "Fucking long life, innit?" becomes a constant refrain.

Language, in particular, comes to the fore: a robust, instinctive poetry runs throughout *Road*. Sissay's Scullery dances a soaring pas-de-deux with a shopping trolley to *Swan Lake* – a wordless act of imagination that reflects the loneliness and materialism latent in Thatcherism. The final scene, too, justifies the revival all by itself, as four twentysomethings stick on Otis Redding and launch into flowing, uncensored beat poems full of hopes and dreams, fears and furies.

That's what you take away – particularly at a moment when today's playwrights have struggled to put austerity onstage, wrestling with the ethics and aesthetics of poverty. Cartwright empowers through eloquence and Tiffany raises people up and gives them a platform. For today's dramatists, *Road* offers a road map. It's far more than a trip down memory lane.

Road runs at the Royal Court until 9 September.

COULDT

The Arts Desk
Matt Wolf
31.07.17



Road, Royal Court review - poetry amidst the pain

John Tiffany leads Jim Cartwright's debut play towards the sublime
by [Matt Wolf](#)

Monday, 31 July 2017

Who'd have guessed that the London theatre scene at present would be so devoted to the numinous? Hard on the heels of *Girl from the North Country*, which locates moments of transcendence in hard-scrabble Depression-era lives, along comes John Tiffany's deeply tender revival of Jim Cartwright's vaunted 1986 play *Road*, which tempers its landscape of pain with an abundance of poetry.

As it happens, one has to wait till after the interval to feel the gathering force of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* director Tiffany's approach here. But come the climactic scene in which a mismatched Lancashire quartet of would-be lovers find release in Otis Redding, and you've got as viscerally affecting an experience as anyone could wish. That sequence, in turn, is capped by an extended (and wordless) dance-theatre illustration of the communal as its own best antidote to life's abrasions: a state of grace that gives the lie to those who think of *Road* merely as a report from the [Thatcher-era](#) frontline of the gritty and the grim.

I was around for this play's premiere in the [Royal Court Theatre](#) Upstairs all those years ago, which led to a further life on the Court mainstage; at that point the since-deceased Ian Dury joined the cast as Scullery, our rough-and-ready tour guide to the unfolding patchwork quilt of dispossession and deprivation. But performed promenade-style so that the actors and the audience folded in upon one another. the play didn't seem as shot through with romanticism as it does this time around. From the soaring tones of Judy Garland (a crucial figure, of course, in Cartwright's later play and film about the freakishly gifted Little Voice) onwards, this is a portrait of existence lived on the margins that nonetheless knows its musical theatre.

That's to say, Cartwright offers up drunkenness aplenty, not to mention fumbled sexual encounters guaranteed to make one squirm: *Game of Thrones* alumna Michelle Fairley) fields the most extreme of those with gusto. (Her hair is a scenic effect in itself.)

But for all the bluntly articulated despair ("why is the world so tough?" is a representative rhetorical question), these people nonetheless exist a song lyric away from salvation. Lemn Sissay's large-eyed, cajoling Scullery functions as *Road's* very own Emcee, presiding over an unnamed street that talks one moment of "England in pieces" and quotes "I Got Rhythm" the next. Passing references elsewhere to "a can-can", and a cribbed lyric from *Annie Get Your Gun*,

ROYAL

make one wonder what might happen were this clearly expressive assemblage to form their own am-dram society. [Swan Lake](#) gets a workout, as well, Tchaikovsky accompanied this time out by Scullery twirling a shopping trolley with unbridled abandon.

The first half has a surprisingly presentational feel, amplified by a striking design from Chloe Lamford that encloses numerous scenes within a begrimed cube that rises up through the stage floor. In contrast with steps that lead from the stage into the audience so that Scullery can scuttle amongst playgoers at will, the scenic conceit (deliberately, one assumes) emphasises solitude and isolation, so that the final coming together via movement – these disparate souls a community at last – achieves a redoubled force. Elbow's "Lippy Kids", a song clearly unavailable to Cartwright way back when, ramps up the pathos, its talk of golden days a modern-day complement to that place "over the rainbow" that cascades through the auditorium at the start. The parade of personages allows for multiple set pieces which Tiffany's cast bat out of the park, whether one is admiring Mark Hadfield's Alan Bennett-esque portrait of alone-ness or the ever-welcome Shane Zaza pondering "death with a big D" as he shifts this way and that in bed. (Cartwright wrote his own play called *Bed* in 1994.) The redoubtable June Watson juggles multiple roles, at no point more startlingly than when she trills "alley oop" while powdering her face.

Indeed, in contrast to so many Court signature texts, *Road* in this reckoning suggests a way forward from the depths of despondency, however little things may have changed in our austerity-plagued land today. Just watch as those bodies at the end form and re-form, this lippy, drink-sodden set of individuals newly reassembled as one. From mining corridors of blight and hopelessness that owe more than a passing nod to [Beckett](#), the production's lasting proviso would appear to be the need to connect. These characters aren't the only ones, I imagine, who would drink to that.

COULDT

ROYAL

New York Times
Ben Bradley
01.08.17

Photo



From left, Faye Marsay, Liz White and Lemn Sissay in Jim Cartwright's "Road." CreditJohan Persson

Another 20th-century mirror of 21st-century anxieties can be found at the [Royal Court Theater](#), the fabled incubator of diseased-England dramas like John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger." It is now the host to the first major London revival of the landmark working-class drama "Road," Jim Cartwright's mosaic portrait of being unemployed and unmoored in Margaret Thatcher's Britain in the mid-1980s.

When it opened at the Royal Court in its first incarnation in 1986, "Road" startled theatergoers with its fragmented, poetic language – which gave lyrical voice to a disenfranchised population – and its immersive staging by Simon Curtis. Audience members were asked to walk along a re-creation of the play's title thoroughfare, to visit different residences and watering holes during the course of one typical, sodden night.

For its new version, directed by the mighty John Tiffany (whose credits include the Broadway-bound ["Harry Potter and the Cursed Child"](#)), "Road" retreats to the traditional proscenium stage. This inevitably creates a greater gap between the audience and the play's volubly disaffected inhabitants, who in the 1986 "Road" were known to directly engage those who dared to gawp at them.

Chloe Lamford's set features a clear-walled cube that rises into view to reveal characters at home as they prepare for a night on the town. The effect is not only of isolation and confinement but also, at least initially, of a detached distance between them and us, now and then. Such impressions were presumably not the intention of Mr. Tiffany, who has said of the play, "It felt as though it was written from a place where things couldn't get any worse, but they have. The rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer."

COURT

ROYAL

It's the anger and resignation within the poverty depicted here that particularly resonate in these days of government austerity and welfare cuts. We meet a young man who has recently lost his job (a harrowed Shane Zaza) who refuses to leave his bed. There he envisions a future that includes "the last job on earth." His girlfriend (Faye Marsay) joins him beneath the sheets and asks, "Are we protesting?" His response: "I don't know."

This latter-day "Road" can feel self-conscious in its lyrical speech and in the choreographed movement overseen by Jonathan Watkins. Some scenes, though, memorably convey the desperation of its down-and-out hedonists.

These include a vendor of chips (or French fries) displaying a sample that goes limp in his hands, and a dapper, gray-haired man who irons his tie and remembers a past when "we didn't complain." A middle-age, boozed-up woman ardently (and hilariously) tries to have sex with an unresponsive, stone-drunk soldier.

In the final sequence, two young men and the women they have picked up at a bar competitively chug cheap wine and then listen with eyes shut to Otis Redding's recording of ["Try a Little Tenderness."](#) They go on to specify what they hope for out of life, in breathlessly delivered monologues. But in their hypnotized silence as Redding wails, we truly feel what's lacking in their existences, tenderness included.

COILPT

ROYAL

Kensington Chelsea and Westminster Today
01.08.17



Magazine, Consumer

Yellow News...

Client: Royal Court Company Yellow News
Source: Kensington Chelsea & Westminster Today
Date: 01/08/2017

Keyword: Road
Page: 51
Reach: 25000
Size: 448
Value: 539.86



Road
Royal Court Theatre
Running Time: 150 minutes
including interval
Playing until September 9th

When Jim Carwright's *Road* a biting social portrait of an unnamed Londonian community devastated by unemployment and frustration was first staged in the Royal Court Theatre back in 1986 there were three million people unemployed. While current unemployment quivers at 1.49 million, it doesn't take a comedian facile to draw some parallels between the play's situation faced by the ragged protagonists who scrape by on the quayside's unmarked *flats* (named because someone stole half the street sign) and the thousands of de-motivated poor who have fallen through the cracks created by austerity policies and the ugly underbelly of globalisation.

The original production was a powerhouse performance featuring Blackhead's lead singer Ian Dury as *Road's* junkyard Park figure Soutley who lead the audience physically down the road of the title and was, by all accounts, a scintillating production. Director John Tiffany (who recently directed the almost absurdly successful *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child*) has opted for a more traditional approach and the results might not be quite so special, but Carwright's star and paces were jagged torch and Tiffany and a talented cast have managed to weave their own an audience's throat.

Framed in being placed over the course of a single night (with a couple of exceptions like a couple's presumably

day-long suicide by hunger strike, a shattering set-piece which closes the first half) *Road* comes through the hours with focused efficiency. Carwright is more minimal in dark than most that darkness for its own sake and (mirrors the aforementioned) the vignettes that make up the play have a grotesque comic energy to them, as the various characters desperately scramble to shovel and casual sex in an attempt to beat back the brutal reality of daily life. Considering Carbert's succession from rich to independently unlikable rich over the three odd years since the play's debut, a certain inescapable atmosphere of being on a poverty safari runs through the well-worn material a feeling that is accentuated by a series of vignettes and monologues that take place in a glass box which rises from the floor (the stage is otherwise unadorned, just bare brick walls and the faded street sign which gives the play its name) which feels uncomfortably close to a fish tank or even a cage. These vignettes include some of the best scenes in the play such as Michelle Fairley's (who takes multiple roles and is great in all of them) fabled seduction of a cynosurally dazed soldier or a whitehead's pain on the joys of sex. A US-based Gregg also does "the old shovelling" and the minimal staging of the box helps bring the jagged edges of Carwright's commentary into razor sharpness.

With all this in mind, it's Soutley who proves one of the play's few disappointments as his direct address to the audience, presumably ironic and necessary when staged post-credit rolls, comes across as barren and forced to a seated audience. Other than that though, while the production fully commits to its original setting (theater park and all its anger and anger feels right at home in the age of austerity. While it's tempting to gumble about shuffling old plays and concerns rather than writing new ones, the burning anger at the heart of *Road's* only just as relevant as ever to us.

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COUPLET

Financial Times
Ian Shuttleworth
01.08.17

Play's power is in its people

THEATRE

Road

Royal Court (Jerwood Downstairs), London

Ian Shuttleworth

It is easy to tell yourself at various moments that Jim Cartwright's first play has dated in the 30-odd years since it premiered in the Royal Court's Upstairs space. Easy to say, but impossible to believe for any length of time. Now, as at the high-water-mark of Thatcherism, northern English communities such as the fictitious Lancashire one Cartwright portrays are blasted by industrial decline and governmental disdain alike, leaving folk to scrape a meagre economic and, more to the point, psychological subsistence as best they can.

Road is not an overtly political play: it shows its characters in low-budget frolics on a Friday or Saturday night or unable to find the inner resources even for such a fleeting escape. Its strength, its bleak beauty, is that it concerns itself with people rather than issues. It never mentions politics, never points fingers. But it knows, and so do we.

Perhaps the most significant change in the intervening period is that we're now more keenly conscious of that region's contributions to musical culture. Director John Tiffany smartly underpins a sense of time and place by punctuating matters with 1980s tracks by bands from Manchester and environs, such as New Order and James. In one bizarre moment most of the cast cut loose to the more brutalist strains of The Fall's "Hit The North". Tiffany sets the action, though, on a largely bare stage, occupied at most by the occasional chair, except when a large glass-sided cage rises to show characters more confined than the revellers.

The Royal Court's original runs cast known extravagant performers in the role of Scullery, the scally MC of the night's action: first Edward Tudor-Pole

(better known at the time as Eddie Tenpole, frontman of rock band Tenpole Tudor), then, when the play moved downstairs to the theatre's main space, the legendary Ian Dury. For this revival Tiffany has cast poet, playwright and performer Lemn Sissay. There's a little too much of the carnival barker about Sissay's Scullery for my taste; he doesn't complement the often heartbreaking despair in the scenes themselves, but sometimes threatens to cheapen it. However, this may well be more a matter of the character than the performer.

The cast includes a number of proven reliables (in the best sense): we see Michelle Fairley trying to pretend to both a drunken squaddie and to herself that she's up for some action; Mark Hadfield showing his estimable comic skills and, for once, his equal ability to get serious and poignant; June Watson trying desperately to take refuge in ageing memories; Shane Zaza bedbound with crushing depression. To be honest, part of me wanted *Road* to be less effective now, but I wouldn't wish one lot of its grim indictment away.

To September 9, royalcourttheatre.com

OPERA

Silver Birch

Garsington Opera, Wormsley, UK

Richard Fairman

"What is an opera?" asked the presenter from the stage. A very young hand went up. "An opera has flowery singing," came the reply. It raised a laugh, but it was not such a bad answer at a time when opera as an art form has been spreading its wings in all kinds of directions.

Community opera is one offshoot that is very much on the rise. Glyndebourne has had an active educational outreach programme for some years and it is good to see the younger country house opera



outfits — not a term Garsington Opera likes — also committing resources.

Silver Birch, here getting its premiere, was a Garsington Opera commission, with music by Roxanna Panufnik and libretto by Jessica Duchon. An essential component of community opera is to provide roles for as many people as possible and *Silver Birch* does not hold back: 50 or so primary schoolchildren, 30 in the youth company, 60 in the "adult and military community" company, not to mention extras and dancers. Throw in some pyramids and they could put on *Aida*.

The story tells of Jack, who dreams of

becoming a soldier, goes to fight overseas, and returns traumatised. The outer sections, rooted in massed choruses of locals at home, are par for the course in community opera.

The middle panel, crackling in the heat of the war zone, gives *Silver Birch* a tougher, more original centre-piece. Panufnik, echoing Britten's example in this genre, digs down on some hard, rhythmic percussion writing. The battle scene, fired up with dancing, made a tremendous ensemble number in Karen Gillingham's production.

Sam Furness was well cast as Jack. Victoria Simmonds and Darren Jeffery offered a solid presence as his mum and dad, though the portrayal of family troubles felt a touch condescending. It was a good idea to invoke the ghost of Siegfried Sassoon, but Bradley Travis was left without a lot to do.

For Panufnik, this very professional piece of work should be a useful stepping stone to something bigger. For its cohorts of community singers and dancers, well drilled by conductor Douglas Boyd, this was a real achievement in itself.

garsingtonopera.org

Bleak beauty: from left, Faye Marsay, Liz White and Lemn Sissay in 'Road'. Below left: Sam Furness and Victoria Simmonds in 'Silver Birch'

Johan Persson
John Swelling



ROYAL

The Guardian
Michael Billington
01.08.17

Raucous look back at a divided Britain still hits home

Theatre

Road

Royal Court, London

★★★★

Jim Cartwright's play was first staged by Simon Curtis in 1986 as a promenade production that took the audience on a nocturnal journey through the cobbled streets of an imagined Lancashire town. Even if John Tiffany's revival doesn't make the same visceral impact, it does rich justice to a play that pins down the raucous despair and ebullient hopelessness of a community scarred by unemployment, where people do their best to live for the moment.

Under the guidance of the thieving Scullery (Lemn Sissay) we watch the road's youngsters scratching a few quid together to go out for a night of booze and sex. But much of the play's power rests on a series of bleak vignettes, now staged, in Chloe Lamford's design, in a glass box rising from the ground like a strip-lit prison. The most painful shows the bed-bound Joey and Clare, who says that "every day's like swimming in ache", starving themselves to death in an unromantic suicide pact. We also get a poignant glimpse of the married Valerie, who is full of exasperated sympathy for a jobless husband who spends the weekly giro on drink but roams about the house like a bewildered animal.

Cartwright doesn't go in for political analysis. What he does is record, with honesty, the consequences of living in an economically run-down society.

What makes his portrait all the more moving is the periodic recollection of times past. A lonely old man recalls an era when there were plentiful jobs, holidays in the Isle of Man or Blackpool



Lemn Sissay and June Watson in Road

and "we all felt special but safe at the same time". Even the young seem aware there must be a world elsewhere: a drunken double-date between two guys and girls turns into a form of spiritual liberation under the influence of Otis Redding's Try a Little Tenderness.

Tiffany's production highlights the play's poetic lyricism in several ways: Scullery does a pas de deux with a shopping trolley to the sounds of Swan Lake, and the whole cast engage in a climactic ritual that hints at the human potential for happiness.

There are striking performances by Michelle Fairley, sadly hilarious in a scene where she vainly seeks to seduce a drunken soldier, and from Mark Hadfield and June Watson as solitary oldsters, and from Shane Zaza and Faye Marsay as the death-haunted lovers.

Cartwright's play emerged when three million people were unemployed. What is tragic is that it seems just as relevant in today's depressed, divided Britain.

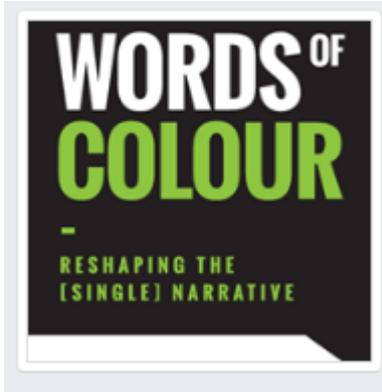
Michael Billington

Until 9 September. Box office: 020-7565 5000.

COURT

ROYAL

Words of Colour
Cherise Lopes-Bakes
03.08.17



Review of Road

Play: Road

Theatre: [The Royal Court Theatre](#) Downstairs

Playwright: Jim Cartwright

Director: John Tiffany

Review by Cherise Lopes-Baker

The Royal Court's revival of Jim Cartwright's *Road* after 30 years is particularly timely in an era of government cuts and the North/South divide.

Set during Thatcher's reign in the 1980s, on an unnamed street in Lancashire, *Road* is a play about unemployment, poverty and aimless residents full of lost potential, trying to escape through black humour, alcohol and sex.

The bleak landscape of the *Road* is introduced and narrated by Scullery (poet [Lemn Sissay](#)). With charismatic and drunken aplomb, Scullery invites the audience into intimate vignettes of the *Road* residents' unflinching, gritty reality.

Chloe Lamford's innovative stage design exhibits the characters within the confines of an elevating glass box. harshly lit like a prison cage. Denuded of employment, safety and purpose, the characters deliver blistering existential soliloquies, expressed with passionate abandon. From a skinhead discovering Dharma to a young couple's starving themselves to death in an unromantic suicide mission, the characters are desperately seeking fulfilment before, or through death.

Vignettes are interspersed with raucous drunken antics and cheesy 80s danceathons as residents go out on the lash. Perhaps the most poignant interlude is the graceful waltz between Scullery and an empty shopping cart to the dramatic crescendos of *Swan Lake*.

[Game of Thrones](#) star Michelle Fairley leads a strong ensemble cast who play multiple roles. Her enthusiastic portrayal of Helen, a seductress to an inebriated soldier, broke the audience barrier and provoked both laughter and pity for her repentant character.

June Watson and Mark Hadfield give stellar performances as secluded elders harkening back to the past, but paralysed by neuroses and dementia in turn. Faye Marsay, Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Liz White and rising star Shane Zaza play their parts with ebullient energy.

Give or take a few leg warmers, this play is Shakespearean in nature, with its existential monologues and lyrical tragedy. Under John Tiffany's excellent direction, the characters' darkest realities, and even stronger spirits, are explored with gravitas and reckless abandon.

The denouement of these characters' spiritual crises is one of hope through desperation: "If I keep shouting, somehow I might escape."

COULDT

ROYAL

A must see.

Road runs at Royal Court Theatre Downstairs from 21 July to 9 September 2017.

To book, visit: <https://royalcourttheatre.com/whats-on/road/>

COURT

Mail on Sunday
Patrick Marmion
06.08.17

MailOnline

You'll need a strong stomach and broad mind to enjoy Road but its big-hearted salute to a decaying Bolton is worth it, writes PATRICK MARMION

By PATRICK MARMION FOR THE DAILY MAIL

PUBLISHED: 02:03, 4 August 2017 | UPDATED: 02:04, 4 August 2017



 [View comments](#)

Road (Royal Court Theatre, London)

Verdict: Bawdy lament

Rating: ★★★★★

You still need a strong stomach and a broad mind in order to enjoy Jim Cartwright's 31-year-old bawdy lament for his native Bolton of the 1980s. But if you are in possession of both these things — and have the patience to give its rambling form the benefit of a doubt — it remains a big-hearted salute to a decaying city, as it follows a number of its wayward denizens on a chaotic, drunken night out. There is no story, as such: just a vivid Chaucerian romp that, character for character, matches the disreputable Viz cartoon magazine that emerged about the same time.



Road remains a big-hearted salute to a decaying Bolton in the 1980s, writes Patrick Marmion. Pictured above, Liz White (Carol/Valerie), Lemn Sissay (Scullery) and Faye Marsay (Louise/Clare) in Road

ROYAL



There is no story, as such: just a vivid Chaucerian romp that, character for character, matches the disreputable Viz cartoon magazine that emerged about the same time, Marmion writes. Pictured above, Faye Marsay (Louise/Clare) and Shane Zaza (Joey) CREDIT: Johan Persson in Road

The dialogue, full of Lancastrian vernacular, put me in the mind of the poetry of Dylan Thomas's Under Milk Wood.

So it's appropriate that John Tiffany's swaggering production, bolstered with Eighties pop music, is compered by street poet Lemn Sissay, who hails from down the road in Manchester.

Road takes the form of a string of vignettes, with actors dipping in and out multiple roles.

We have the vituperative mother-and-daughter double act of Michelle Fairley (the 'rough as houses' mum) and Faye Marsay (her man-eating child).

Then, in one of the play's funniest, most revolting and, yes, saddest scenes, Fairley plays a desperate middle-aged woman trying to seduce a hammered young squaddie.



The dialogue, full of Lancastrian vernacular, put me in the mind of the poetry of Dylan Thomas's Under Milk Wood, writes Marmion

COULDT

ROYAL



It's appropriate that John Tiffany's swaggering production, bolstered with Eighties pop music, is compered by street poet Lemn Sissay, who hails from down the road in Manchester, writes Marmioin. A broad seam of despair runs through the piece. Shane Zaza does a mesmerising turn as a young man in the grip of a colourful depression that stops him getting out of bed.

While some characters parade under streetlights on a red brick road, others are presented, like specimens, in a huge glass cabinet that emerges from the bowels of the stage.

There's Mark Hadfield's older gent, yearning for the decorum of the 1950s. And June Watson's batty old lady, who bursts into song after necking half a bottle of rum.

That glass display box in Chloe Lamford's design also gives Tiffany's production the feeling of a museum piece.

And while the Royal Court is right to focus on producing new plays, it is good to give an airing to older exhibits, especially when they have as much terrific vitality as this one.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-4759514/Road-big-hearted-salute-decaying-Bolton-review.html#ixzz4pG1wjW7m>

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COURT

ROYAL

Sunday Times Culture

David Jays

06.08.17



THEATRE

Theatre review: Road

Jim Cartwright's 1980s play takes us on a journey from hope to despair — and is still depressingly relevant

David Jays



Off their trolley: Fay Marsay, Liz White and Lemn Sissay
JOHAN PERSSON

f you're ever in the area, call again." Lemn Sissay's beaming narrator brings **Road** to a close with this open invitation — but British theatre has rarely come calling to a debut play that promised to blow the shoulder pads off plush 1980s drama. We never call, we never write, and the brawling Lancashire life that Jim Cartwright showcased has been neglected. Three decades after its Royal Court premiere, the play returns.

Cartwright followed it up a few years later with what has become his most popular piece — *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*, an ugly-duckling fairy tale with ballads from the diva songbook. But it was *Road* that made his name and set his register — bobby-dazzling language, clacking caricature that suddenly rips into reality, the ignored becoming unignorable.

Road, which road? Can't say, as the street sign stuck high on the wall has been snapped off. Sissay, a poet with a performer's panache, is Scullery, our buttonholing guide (in the first production, it was Ian Dury). We arrive in early evening, as everyone primps, preens, checks their pockets for beer money. It's a raucous opening.

First act: pre-pub. Second act: post-pub. First act: hope. Second act: regret. At this point, everyone's stotious, staggering so much you feel the stage itself is reeling. Even oblivion and a snog with a stranger aren't reliable pleasures. Michelle Fairley, outstanding in several roles, brings home a soldier boy, bogglingly drunk. She's undeterred, even when he vomits over the chips. "Let's just wipe your chops off," she coos. He's pale as a mortuary slab, she's all shiny surfaces. When the fun recedes, the sadness seeps in.

COULDT

ROYAL

Things move quickly in John Tiffany's kinetic production — inestimably aided by Jonathan Watkins's movement direction. A showoff text gets full-body moves to match. There's a characterful brick back wall — you'll also see a lot of red brick outside the theatre, round Sloane Square, though the genteel Chelsea mansion blocks would clutch their pearls at being considered kin to this rickety, run-down street.

The big gesture in Chloe Lamford's design is a glass box that periodically rises from the stage to reveal a room on the Road. It's striking but troubling, pointing up fears that we're goggling at poverty porn — working-class characters caged for our pleasure in a vitrine. Most piercing is the ballad of Joey and Clare, displayed in bed slowly starving themselves to death. She's lost her neat office job; he can't find anything. Is this political protest or bewilderment? Shane Zaza (there's no gentler actor) and Faye Marsay (a boss stage debut from the Game of Thrones star) nudge the scene from sulky comedy to fragile despair.

Cartwright's was a bold new voice, but what hits now is his fierce nostalgia. "Can we not have before again?" one character laments. "Can we not?" In the first half, heartbreak honours go to June Watson's titivating pensioner, still getting busy with the slap and powder, and Mark Hadfield's unhappy gent, forswearing the Brylcreem of his gadding youth. They're all memory. The evening opens with Somewhere Over the Rainbow; Sissay then pilfers a music box that plays the tragic theme from Swan Lake, and later duets with a shopping trolley to the same melody, spinning it off its casters. The soundtrack to the evening is not so much Now That's What I Call Music, more old songs with a powerful yen for another world.

Thirty years on, where would the road have gone? Farnworth, Cartwright's Lancashire home town, is in a district where nearly 60% voted to leave the EU. From smart central London, then as now, it may seem a foreign country. We hear a snatch of a quiz show (Jim Bowen's Bullseye, oldies) where the contestants have actual manual-labour jobs. The women, skeetering between dazzling and dowdy, offer fashion wince-giggles with their white boots, fringing and ruching, and hair teased until it cries. Dispossession, sadly, doesn't date.

Tiffany's production takes its time to squeeze your heart, but then it squeezes hard. Two lasses have gone back with two well-tailored lads. One bloke moves in for a kiss and Liz White recoils: "What's this? Manoeuvres?" Marsay, as her friend, squirms under bad-bra pressure and shakes the wine from her shoe.

Everyone's slightly foxed, but the night looks set to fizzle out until the lads play their precious single, pinned high on the back wall like an unorthodox icon. They all glug red wine, then listen to Try a Little Tenderness. Otis Redding's raw-throated yelp ramps up. Ribcages pump, then they tip out their hearts: "England's in pieces — scuffed out"; "I'm full of something nasty tonight". The quartet begin an arrestingly careful sequence, slowly joined by the whole cast — hands moving through heavy air in a t'ai chi of yearning for something more.

Road

Royal Court, London SW1 ★★★★★

COULDT

The Observer
 Susannah Clapp
 06.08.17

Kicking and dreaming

A forgotten Edwardian drama hits home, and John Tiffany delivers a bravura revival of Jim Cartwright's *Road*

Susannah Clapp

@susannahclapp



Just to Get Married
 Finborough, London SW10; until 19 Aug

Road
 Royal Court, London SW1; until 9 Sept

History on stage can be an electric jolt. Not a reimagining, but a voice speaking directly from the past. Cicely Hamilton was a pioneering feminist. She wrote novels, plays and the words to Ethel Smyth's *The March of the Women*, the suffrage hymn that Smyth conducted with a toothbrush from behind prison bars. Hamilton died in 1952, but her themes belong to an earlier era. Or do they?

Melissa Dunne's production of *Just to Get Married* (1911) – the first London staging of Hamilton's play for nearly a hundred years – is an Edwardian time capsule. Oh, Mr Porter! and Yes! We Have No Bananas played as an overture. A dear little design by Katharine Davies Herbst: dinky piano and framed butterflies (how a generation liked to trap and lay pretty creatures). Some – “Great snakes!” – jolly useful slang.

And pain. In 1911, an impoverished 29-year-old woman must hook a husband: to stop being a burden to her relatives, and to gain status. Recent Rada graduate Philippa Quinn and Jonny McPherson play together delicately as the anguished girl and awkward fellow: he infatuated, she

desperate. She reels him unlovingly in: when he clasps a locket around her neck it looks like a noose. Then comes what her cousin calls “a bit of a staggerer”. Realising that in lying about her feelings to a decent chap she has behaved like “an utter toad”, she drops her fiancé on the eve of the wedding. And sees how completely she is disabled as an adult. She can't earn her living; the only skill she has is putting up her hair. Her jilt is the best thing she's ever done – “and I will regret it for the rest of my life”.

The not-to-be-revealed happy ending could be seen as a sentimental cop-out. I see it more as a paradox. Dependence can also be trust. There is some stiltedness, but intensity burns through the speeches. It is the same fire and anxiety that runs through Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*.

The tiny Finborough specialises in recovering forgotten dramas. Three years after *Just to Get Married* was first staged, Hamilton and Brittain both served as nurses in the first world war. You might think that this play is worth hearing because it is so totally of its period, an ossified epoch about to be blasted apart by war; a view from the other side of Passchendaele. But it has another value. Who would say in 2017 that women no longer feel degraded by the money they fail not so much to earn as to get?

Jim Cartwright's *Road* hasn't had to wait so long to be revived. When first staged at the Royal Court in 1986 it was by all accounts a revelation. In a promenade performance (rare then), it roared against Thatcherism – for disregarding the working class, the north of England, the unemployed. It did so with gobbiness, vomiting, meditative interludes and rhapsodic surges.

Now John Tiffany gives the play a bravura staging. The audience stay



'Fire and anxiety': Jonny McPherson and Philippa Quinn in *Just to Get Married*. Below: Liz White, Lemn Sissay and Faye Marsay in *Road*. Tristram Kenton

in their seats, but some episodes spill down a flight of steps towards the stalls. Others are contained within a glass box. Tiffany's bold way with a far-reaching theme is matched by his vaudeville spirit. And his feel for the raging outcast. I am thinking not of *Harry Potter* and *the Cursed Child* but of *Black Watch* and *Let the Right One*

In. There are few directors better at showing harshness lapped by lyricism.

That combination is Cartwright's particular strength. It is apparent in his best-known play, *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*. It is apparent here too. Intermittently. The opening scenes, punchy and gaudy, are strenuous demos of resilience in the face of deprivation.

Everyone in a down-at-heel Lancashire road is preparing to go on the razzle. A girl in a fluorescent bra irons her glad rags; her raddled mother cadges money. In the part of the brilliantly named Scullery – originally played by Ian Dury – Lemn Sissay introduces the action. He is hectic and edgy, like an old pro whipping up an end-of-pier audience.

This sometimes looks like a 30-year-old play trying to prove its “relevance”. But when it slips into melancholy reflection it triumphs. June Watson is marvellous as an elderly woman making herself up (as she sketches in her eyebrows she realises it's lucky she is good at drawing) – though it's notable that even at the Royal Court audiences suppose an old woman paying attention to herself must be a joke. Mark Hadfield is extraordinarily subtle as he looks back, in a finely written speech (this attracts no laughter), to the days when love was in the air – and he wore a beret. He cups his hand on his cheek as if that hat had been his truest friend. And there is, in the final scene, a most wonderful switch from a raucous night out to intimate soul-searching. When music gives despair expression and hope wings.



ROYAL

Attitude

Matthew Hyde

08.08.17

attitude

ROAD AT LONDON'S ROYAL COURT THEATRE – REVIEW

A timely revival of a classic play still packs a mighty punch.



Jim Cartwright's seminal play gets a timely revival at the Royal Court where it first premiered over thirty years ago. Its meaty scenes make it a favourite for drama school productions and its monologues frequent the audition circuit. It's therefore exciting to see it back where it began with such a talented cast under the direction of John Tiffany.

Over the course of a Friday night we follow the residents of an unnamed road in a Lancashire town at the height of Thatcher. Unemployment, repression and poverty rule. Lashings of booze and grubby sex is the coping mechanism of choice. It's grim, at times gruelling, sad and of course the modern day parallels are obvious. These people are the forgotten, the overlooked, the ignored and the irony of watching their suffering for entertainment from the safety and privilege of my Royal Court seat isn't wasted.

However, something is a bit off. Despite the modern day parallels, the then and the now don't successfully meet. Watching the squalor and clawing desperation feels voyeuristic and unpleasant – Liz White's brilliantly acted yet brutal monologue as Valerie is a case in point.

Most striking is the script – profanities that would make a sailor blush go side by side with a lyricism and imagery that is both beautiful and surreal. Cartwright gives his characters a turn of phrase which transcends their seedy surroundings suggesting something more hopeful.

COULDT

ROYAL



The cast throw everything they have at the production, even a little too much. The play is a series of separate vignettes hosted by Scullery (Lemn Sissay) our resident MC for the evening. Sissay gives him plenty of colour and a penetrating stare but the attempts at audience interaction fall flat. However, his dance with a shopping trolley to the sounds of Swan Lake is a highlight. Shane Zaza as the chronically depressed Joey embarking on a hunger strike is very affecting. Michelle Fairley gives a hilarious yet tragic turn as Helen whose attempts at seducing a wasted soldier is as funny as it is heart breaking.

There is much to admire in this bold revival both in acting and direction. However, the treatment of all that depression, rage and desperation seem to repel rather than draw you in.

Rating: 3/5

Road runs at the Royal Court until 9 September. Call the box office on 020 7565 5000.

For more great deals on tickets and shows, visit tickets.attitude.co.uk.

Words by Matthew Hyde

COURT

Time Out
Andrzej Lukowski
08.08.17

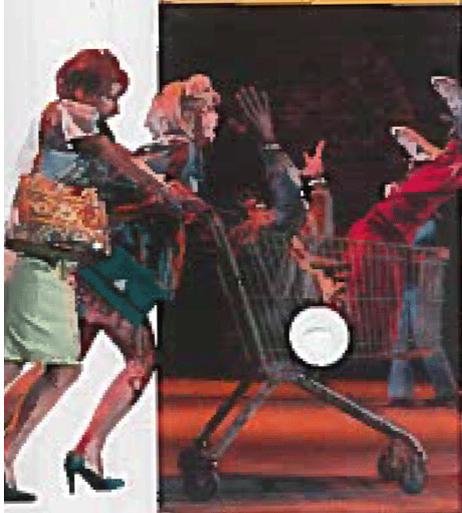
Road



WHAT IS IT...
Super-director John Tiffany revives this working-class classic.

WHY GO...
To get angry at the age of austerity.

→ Royal Court.
⊖ Sloane Square.
Until Sep 9. £12-£45.



NEW-WRITING MECCA THE Royal Court hardly ever revives its old plays – so it's always worth paying attention when it does. Jim Cartwright's 'Road' is one of the touchstone plays of the '80s, a sprawling, vibrant, funny, tragic tribute to working-class (night)life that sprang out of the then-27-year-old's imagination fully formed, in one of the all-time-great Court debuts.

After his 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child', super-director John Tiffany shows that success hasn't sent him soft. He wades in with a tough, sinewy production, full of the rude vitality and devastating loneliness of Cartwright's words.

The titular thoroughfare runs through the centre of a non-specific northern town. The accents are Lancastrian, but anybody who grew up outside of Knightsbridge should see something familiar in this sort of place: deprived and damaged but gripped by a frenzy of life on a Saturday night, not all of it savoury. The young Cartwright's great gift was to articulate not just the blowsy, boozy banter, but the damage that it masked in Thatcher's north.

Perhaps it's not been revived in London for so long because it has a different context here compared to Bolton. But this could be your hometown, today. It's a reminder of all the places like this, and that it's our loss if we forget them. 'Road' runs through all of us. ■ Andrzej Lukowski

ROYAL

TOFF

10.08.17



Toff

I didn't see the original production but the present **ROAD** at the Royal Court theatre (until 9 September. Box office: 020 7565 5000) is terrific. In a series of short scenes - mainly monologues or dialogues we see people who live in a Northern street preparing for, then going out for a night of drinking and jollity. It is the time of Thatcher in power so much unemployment and little money to spend. Scullery (a lively ball of fun played by Lemn Sissay) is our guide as we meet the young girls in their finery, mothers with little or no money to spend and layabout lads. Most of the actors play multiple roles and they are all spot on in the delivery of their various characters. I particularly liked Michelle Fairley as Helen coping with a soldier who is so drunk that she had to just pull him around with no response from the man.

The play uses 80s music as illustration. Written by Jim Cartwright and directed by John Tiffany, the play is full of moments which remain with one long after leaving the theatre. One lyrical scene has Scullery dancing around the stage with a shopping trolley to the music of Swan Lake And there is a beautiful final song where the whole cast move to a song which shows them wanting a new kind of life.

COURT

ROYAL

Love London Love Culture
10.08.17

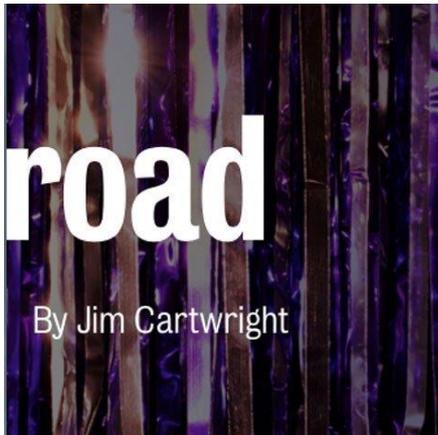


LOVE LONDON LOVE CULTURE

Review Round Up: Road, Royal Court Theatre

© AUGUST 4, 2017 DRAMA, NEWS, REVIEW ROUND UP, THEATRE JIM CARTWRIGHT, JOHN TIFFANY, ROYAL COURT THEATRE

John Tiffany directs Jim Cartwright's play about inhabitants of an unnamed northern road in Eighties Britain. Here's what critics have been saying about it so far:



"I feel like England's forcing the brain out me head."

A Road, a wild night, a drunken tour guide, a journey to the gutter and the stars and back.

"Why's the world so tough? It's like walking through meat in high heels."

Jim Cartwright's seminal play gives expression to the inhabitants of an unnamed northern road in Eighties Britain.

[The Guardian](#): **** "Tiffany's production highlights the play's poetic lyricism."

[WhatsOnStage](#): **** "Cartwright empowers through eloquence and Tiffany raises people up and gives them a platform. For today's dramatists, *Road* offers a road map. It's far more than a trip down memory lane."

[The Independent](#): **** "A *Road* well worth taking."

[The Stage](#): *** "Tiffany is unable to successfully reroute Cartwright's anti-Thatcher ire towards the obvious contemporary parallels with modern British life even though that must have been, in part, the point of reviving the play in the first place. It ends up feeling like a period piece."

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[The Telegraph](#): **** “It’s a hard, occasionally transcendent evening and also, surely, a gauntlet to modern playwrights.”

[Culture Whisper](#): **** “Its relevance is almost unquestionable, and with strong performances and slick direction, *Road* is sharp and stirring theatre.”

[The FT](#): **** ” part of me wanted *Road* to be less effective now, but I wouldn’t wish one iota of its grim indictment away.”

[Everything Theatre](#): ***** “Plays always have to try that much harder to hold the attention, but on this occasion *Road* deserves nothing less than the full Monty.”

[Exeunt Magazine](#): “Tiffany’s production is purgatorial, caught between grounding itself in the past as a well-observed period piece but also half attempting to draw some sort of allegory with the current climate of austerity. Without an anchor, *Road* drifts by, losing so much along the way.”

[Radio Times](#): *** “Road is a “statement” play. We are given only glimpses of individual lives but its message comes at us with a vengeance.”

[London Theatre.co.uk](#): **** “This play is a little ball of anger from a snapshot in time.”

[The Reviews Hub](#): *** 1/2 “There is a lot to like about this piece but, at two and a half hours, it does start to drag, the urgency slowly falls away.”

[Time Out.com](#): **** “John Tiffany shows that success hasn’t sent him soft. He wades in with a tough, sinewy production, full of the rude vitality, rough poetry and devastating loneliness of Cartwright’s wild writing.”

[British Theatre.com](#): **** ” The play needs to speak for itself, and too often here the direction and movement undermine the text. However if you’re new to the play, catch Cartwright’s masterpiece, and join me in yearning for a sequel.”

[The Upcoming](#): **** “At a time when food banks are on the rise and a bloody difficult woman lurks at Number 10, the world of *Road* is merely a shoulder-padded version of our own current reality.”

[Theatre Bubble](#): **** “Tiffany’s love for Cartwright’s piece and the nature of its veracity are evident, but it’s Chloe Lamford’s design that steals much of the show.”

[The Times](#): **** “It may be a 1980s period piece, but Jim Cartwright’s tale of working-class life is still strikingly relevant.”

[Broadway World](#): **** “Tiffany’s production is particularly strong in its understanding of how music can be escape and illumination”

[British Theatre Guide](#): “John Tiffany clearly loves the work and its message, which he illuminates with much physical humour, improving the quality of what would anyway have been a politically charged but highly entertaining night out.”

[Express](#): *** “A brilliant cast illuminate the short, sharp scenes and even mine humour from the darkness.”

COULDT

ROYAL

Islington Tribune
Lucy Popescu
10.08.17

Islington Tribune

Review: Road, at Royal Court Downstairs

Timely revival of seminal play set in Thatcherite era has much that resonates with today's Austerity Britain

10 August, 2017 — By [Lucy Popescu](#)

JIM Cartwright's seminal play about the disenfranchised working class living in Thatcherite Britain in an unnamed Lancashire town has lost none of its power. Loneliness and poverty are the play's pervasive themes.

First produced at the Royal Court in 1986, the reasons for *Road's* revival are clear in John Tiffany's imaginative production – there is much that resonates with Austerity and post-Brexit Britain.

Lemn Sissay, as the wily Scullery, is a charismatic narrator who leads us down his local street to meet the various residents. Cartwright combines just the right measure of anarchic humour with more thoughtful scenes, and the cast rise to the occasion.

Many of the characters numb the frustration of their lonely existence with binge-drinking and casual sex. One of the most memorable scenes in the play is when a tanked up, middle-aged woman (Michelle Fairley) attempts to seduce a soldier, much younger than herself, who is so drunk he is sick in his chips.

Road evidently helped pave the way for the in-yer-face theatre of the 1990s and TV shows like *Shameless*. It's great to see a large cast outside the West End and this is a joyful and timely revival.

UNTIL SEPTEMBER 9
020 7565 5000

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TNT Magazine
Louise Knigsley
10.08.17



Theatre Review: ROAD

10th Aug 2017 11:52am | By [Louise Knigsley](#)

It's over thirty years since Scullery and his shopping trolley burst onto the Royal Court's smaller upstairs space in 1986 in an award-winning promenade production of Jim Cartwright's first play, an angry, bleakly humorous and deeply felt portrayal of a drunken night on the town in a deprived working class area of Lancashire.

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child director John Tiffany has chosen a more conventional approach – instead of the audience following the characters from house to house along the street, a Perspex box rises intermittently from the main stage within which we see Mark Hadfield's sad, dapper old-timer remembering how things used to be and Michelle Fairley's tarty older woman desperately trying to seduce an almost comatose soldier who spews all over his takeaway. Like most of the cast in this ensemble piece, they play more than one character - Fairley, this time in dingy grey, tries to cadge money from her daughter to buy more booze, and Hadfield is hilarious drunkenly displaying his best country and western moves. Meanwhile Scullery dances to the music of *Swan Lake*, the tightly gripped supermarket trolley his swooping partner.

The younger generation are also out on the lash – looking for temporary escape from boring lives without a future in Maggie Thatcher's Britain. Two men in suits share their technique for finding temporary oblivion with their sceptical pick-ups – ritually downing red wine before turning up the volume of Otis Redding's *Try A Little Tenderness*. But Shane Zaza's Joey has given up all hope, taken to his bed and, joined by girlfriend Clare, embarked on a hunger-strike that will end in tragedy.

On an almost bare stage, Tiffany keeps it all very much in period – shoulder pads and all – but, three decades on, the impoverished lives of this unnamed Road still resonate.

Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, SW1W 8AS

Tube: Sloane Square

royalcourttheatre.com

Until 9th September 2017

£12.00 - £45.00

Read more: [Theatre Review: Road - TNT Magazine](#)

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The Stage
Georgia Snow
10.08.17

THE STAGE
SINCE 1880

'I won't leave theatre for film' – Harry Potter director John Tiffany



Harry Potter and the Cursed Child director John Tiffany. Photo: Manuel Harlan

News by Georgia Snow - Aug 10, 2017

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child director John Tiffany has said he will not quit theatre for film despite there being an assumption that it is a director's "duty" to do screen work.

In an interview with The Stage, Tiffany said he had no plans to follow in the footsteps of directors such as Sam Mendes and Stephen Daldry who began film careers after working in theatre.

"I flirted with it. I did a couple of short films when I was in Scotland. But I suppose about five years ago I decided to just enjoy films as an audience member and not get involved," he said.

Tiffany's recent stage work has included the West End productions of [The Glass Menagerie](#) and [Harry Potter and the Cursed Child](#), as well as [Road](#) at the Royal Court in London and the forthcoming National Theatre production of Pinocchio.

He said there was a pressure within the industry for theatre directors to transfer their work to screen.

"It comes up a lot, people seem to think it's almost your duty or something: a lot of directors are insecure about the fact they haven't made one yet, done the same as Nick Hytner and Sam Mendes and Stephen Daldry.

"I think maybe it's seen as more glamorous, but I'm not sure: getting up at 2am and spending the day in waterproof clothing. I don't know how films get made and I think I'll leave it to other people."

[Read the full interview with John Tiffany](#)

The Stage
Andrzej Lukowski
10.08.17

John Tiffany: 'New plays are where my heart is'



John Tiffany. Photo: Tony Rinaldo

- [Features](#)
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by [Andrzej Lukowski](#) - Aug 10, 2017

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Harry Potter and the Cursed Child director John Tiffany has returned to the Royal Court with a play about a working-class town torn apart by Thatcherism. He tells [Andrzej Lukowski](#) about the politics that informs his work and why he won't be swapping the stage for screen directing any time soon

Born into a working-class Yorkshire family in 1971, John Tiffany could lay claim to being the most successful theatre director in the world at this moment. Not because he has the greatest number of hits to his name (though give him time) or the highest profile. It is because he's the mastermind behind arguably the most successful British play of all time: [Harry Potter and the Cursed Child](#).

He and his regular team of collaborators – foremost his movement director and college friend Stephen Hoggett – have an ability to realise worlds on stage that are wholly, emotionally convincing and connect them to a wide audience.

In the past it has allowed him to make a global success of challenging work, notably Gregory Burke's visceral Iraq War play [Black Watch](#), which established the National Theatre of Scotland as a major force in 2006. And since this vision has been brought to bear on commercial productions, the results have been out-and-out blockbusters.

Whimsical folk musical [Once](#) won eight Tony Awards – including best director for Tiffany – and ran on Broadway for three years. Disney came knocking, and a musical of Pinocchio is finally hitting the National Theatre over Christmas.

Then, of course, there's the little matter of the two-part *Cursed Child* playing at London's Palace Theatre since June 2016. It became the most sought-after ticket in UK theatre history after it went on sale, [shifting the first batch of 175,000 in just eight hours](#).

Any director might have had a hit with JK Rowling's wizard, but perhaps no other could have brought the grit, heart and magic to bear that led to critics embracing it as a five-star triumph as well as inspiring adoration from the fans.

By all rights, this success should have made him unbearable, but in person he is genuinely affable; a sunny figure with a wardrobe of retina-searing bright shirts who has conspicuously failed to drink the Kool Aid. The tag 'nicest man in theatre' sounds naff, but he is probably the most consistently cheerful person I have met in the industry.

Meeting Vicky Featherstone

We are sitting in the bar of the Royal Court, where Tiffany remains an associate director. He was brought on board by his good friend and colleague Vicky Featherstone, now the theatre's artistic director, whom he first met at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in the early 1990s – "I

ROYAL

met her on the last day of my placement and we just hit it off and ended up working together that summer and haven't stopped, really," he says.

Indeed, after working with Featherstone at Paines Plough and the National Theatre of Scotland, it was no surprise when she brought Tiffany to Sloane Square with her.

He is now a big deal with a hectic schedule that means he needs "four people who make my life possible": the assistant directors who keep Harry Potter running smoothly while he pursues other projects. Their help has allowed him – between recasting *Cursed Child* and the first rehearsals for *Pinocchio* – to schedule the revival for Jim Cartwright's seminal *Road* at London's Royal Court.

A raging, exhilarating, poetic depiction of a depressed Lancastrian town partying like its life depended on it, *Road* hasn't been revived in London since it premiered *Upstairs* at the Court in 1986. Its iconic promenade staging transferred *Downstairs* the following year.

"It had a massive influence on me just in terms of developing a passion for the theatre in the 1980s," he says. "But reading it again, I was really shocked by two things: one, it felt as though it was written from the point of view that people couldn't get any poorer, that this was as bad as it's going to get – and we've managed to succeed in making those communities poorer.

"The second thing is the absolute beauty and poetry of the writing, which you don't normally get in northern realism, in gritty plays about lives like these. It felt almost Shakespearean, those gorgeous speeches. I thought, 'I'd love to get in a room with some actors and start exploring the language.'"

John Tiffany's directing career

1 of 5



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Once at London's Phoenix Theatre (2013). Photo: Tristram Kenton



Hope at London's Royal Court (2014). Photo: Tristram Kenton

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The Twits at London's Royal Court (2015). Photo: Tristram Kenton



Road at London's Royal Court (2017)

Politics and theatre

It has been six years since the new-writing-focused Royal Court revived a play, and though Road isn't forcing out any new writing in order to accommodate it – the show runs through the theatre's traditionally dark summer – the decision to bring it back is clearly a pointed and political one. And Tiffany is clearly a politicised director.

COURT

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His most recent play at the Royal Court was a near-agitprop take on Roald Dahl's [The Twits](#) and before that was [Hope](#), a downcast Jack Thorne play that mournfully raked through the embers of New Labour.

Road absolutely fits with that trajectory of political work, and Tiffany's tough, sparse production – which dispenses with the promenade staging – is not the work of a man who has gone soft with success.

He talks about his politics with a bluntness that is rare in the industry. “There is hope at the end of this play,” he says. “We started rehearsals the Monday after the election. It was amazing after the awful things that had happened in 2016 to think that 40% of the people who voted were voting very clearly for socialism.”

Tiffany continues, “I've had my problems with Jeremy Corbyn, but I respect the fact he's really stuck to his guns and said: ‘No, you'll come to me’. And the same people who've voted to leave Europe have voted for him, which is amazing. It's changed. People want change.”

Q&A: John Tiffany

What was your first non-theatre job?

Delivering milk when I was 13.

What was your first professional directing job?

The Sunset Ship, a devised piece about Turner's The Fighting Temeraire for the Young Vic in 1995.

Who was your biggest influence?

Robert Lepage and Vicky Featherstone.

What's your best advice for auditions?

Be able to articulate why you connect to the play.

If you hadn't been a director, what would you have been?

A marine biologist – there's still time.

The director's views can largely be attributed to his roots. He came of age in 1980s Yorkshire, and grew up seeing first hand the damage that the policies of Margaret Thatcher's government did to communities in the north.

“I had a lovely time growing up,” Tiffany says. “But I was very aware of the miners' strike going on, friends' families collapsing and people being unemployed.”

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His working-class parents pushed him to do A levels and go to university “in that aspirational way” but the young Tiffany was well aware the country was “not well”, especially at the time of the Falklands War.

“I felt very uneasy about all that,” he says. “I didn’t really understand it: the Belgrano, whether or not it was in the exclusion zone. And Thatcher, she was becoming a madder and madder person whenever she spoke. She must have known what was happening was avoidable.”

Is any of this reflected in his work? Unmistakably. Tiffany consistently returns to lower-key, issue-driven plays – he pushed for the revival of *Road*, and was the driving force behind *Hope*. He has spoken out frequently about the decline in social mobility over the last three decades, convinced that if he were growing up today, the route to becoming a stage director would simply not exist for him.

A House of Lords commission visited the Royal Court recently. He says: “I was able to say to them really clearly that if I were leaving school now then *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* as it is wouldn’t exist. And that show is going to make this country a huge amount of money.”

Is using the economic argument to justify art the start of a slippery slope? Ever the pragmatist, Tiffany says: “It’s the only way some people will listen. It’s the truth and certain people just can’t ignore it.”

Accessibility to tickets is clearly high on his agenda. Less than a year before [Cursed Child’s Broadway transfer](#), Tiffany has already gone on record as saying that the tickets – a licence to print money on the Great White Way – will be as affordable as is possible.

It seems to be a deal-breaker for Tiffany that the show is produced by Sonia Friedman Productions, which staged it in the UK. He says: “Sometimes on Broadway you don’t know who the investors are and you end up making a million dollars for somebody awful. But I feel really trusting of them.”

He is also not afraid to make bold casting decisions, including the casting of black actor Noma Dumezweni as Hermione Granger in *Cursed Child*. She has subsequently been replaced by Rakie Ayola, who is also black. The move angered the alt-right but proved a masterstroke. Dumezweni won an Olivier award for the role and [the conversation it sparked](#) has largely been empowering and constructive.

Tiffany’s next project – though one that has been in development for years – is *Pinocchio*. Surely it’s not possible to draw a particularly direct line from *Road* to a lavish Disney musical? “Or is it?” he jokes. “It’s going to be *Pinocchio* with stonewashed jeans and Doc Martens.”

He continues, “It isn’t, of course, but it has been lovely and important to do a project like *Road* in the middle of *Harry Potter* and *Pinocchio*.”

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Moving on to Disney and the National

The director had been talking to Disney for some time about working with them. “Pinocchio was the one really. But they’re very guarded about those early films. The theory is that from The Little Mermaid onwards they’re much more based on the template of Broadway musicals, whereas those first films are odd: they don’t follow any template at all.” He adds that the creative team will not write any new songs: “We’ve stuck to our guns there.”

Tiffany says: “The National seemed like the most obvious place to do it. I thought we should premiere it this side of the pond as it uses so many European theatre techniques.”

Despite his reputation, Tiffany has never directed a conventional musical before – the folksy *Once* was determinedly lo-fi, with all instruments played by the cast. He seems delighted at the prospect of working with an orchestra – another first – but confesses to not being a big musical theatre person.

“West Side Story is one of the greatest theatrical experiences I’ve had,” he says. “And Hamilton is incredible. But I’m not an aficionado at all. Despite the fact it must look like I’m doing all Harry Potter, Pinocchio-type stuff, new plays are where my heart is.”



Harry Potter (Jamie Glover), Ginny Potter (Emma Lowndes), Albus Potter (Theo Ancient).
Photo: Charlie Gray

Speaking of Potter, does he mind that The Stage recently went in and [re-reviewed it with the new cast](#), even though members of the press were not formally invited?

“Not at all,” he laughs. “The problem is that there aren’t many tickets available, so you could invite a few critics but where do you stop? It was lovely for the actors – they’re the level

that's used to being reviewed. And it's gorgeous they've all committed themselves to this for a year. I mean, it's not the worst-paid job in theatre, but it's not Al Pacino wages. They're doing it because they want to."

To paraphrase Pinocchio's Disney stablemate *The Jungle Book*, Tiffany has reached the top; will he have to stop and look beyond the theatre to the world of films?

"I flirted with it," he says, "I did a couple of short films when I was in Scotland. But I suppose about five years ago I decided to just enjoy films as an audience member and not to get involved.

"It comes up a lot. People seem to think it's almost your duty or something. Many directors are insecure about the fact they haven't made one yet – done the same as Nick Hytner and Sam Mendes and Stephen Daldry. Maybe it's seen as more glamorous, but I'm not sure: getting up at 2am and spending the day in waterproof clothing. I don't know how films get made and I think I'll leave it to other people."

Tiffany once told me that the older he gets "the more I realise you don't need to have a tough time", a credo that seems to run exactly counter to the usual idea of a great artist. But it is an approach that has brought him huge success.

Tiffany does not pretend to have personally revolutionised theatre ethics and admits work has got in the way of his intended aim to give younger working-class directors a leg up. Yet he is an extraordinary force who brings heart to blockbusters and commercial clout to kitchen-sink dramas, and he does it all with a rare integrity. If he is the future of our commercial theatre then we can all be very proud.

[Road runs at London's Royal Court until September 9.](#)

CV: John Tiffany

Born: 1971, Marsden, West Yorkshire

Training: Classics and drama, University of Glasgow

Landmark productions: *Black Watch*, National Theatre of Scotland (2006) and Barbican, London (2008); *Once*, Off-Broadway (2011), Broadway (2012), Gaiety Theatre, Dublin and Phoenix Theatre, London (2013); *The Glass Menagerie*, Broadway (2013), Edinburgh (2016), Duke of York's Theatre (2017); *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Palace Theatre (2016)

Awards: Olivier awards for best director for *Black Watch* (2009) and *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2017); Tony award for best direction of a musical for *Once* (2012) Agent: Mel Kenyon

The Londonist
Neil Dowden
14.08.17

 LONDONIST

Theatre review: Road voices frustration of dead-end lives



Jim Cartwright's iconic *Road* was an implicit condemnation of unemployment and social inequality under Thatcherism in its portrait of working-class residents in a northern town who are desperate to escape their cul-de-sac existence. Thirty years on, this sketchy play lacks the same radical impact, but still fizzles with raucous comic energy mixed with flights of tender street poetry. Director John Tiffany retains the eighties setting in terms of fashion and music, drawing committed performances from the ensemble cast who take us on a boozy night out that lurches from side-splitting to gut-wrenching. *Road*, Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, SW1W 8AS. £12–45, **until 9 September** [Monday–Saturday] ★★★☆☆ **Neil Dowden**

14th August 2017

Culture By Night
14.08.17

Culture by night



Review: Road

There is an assumption that *Road* by Jim Cartwright would feel outdated. Its plot is so geographically and temporally specific that a play about the North East's experience of the Thatcherite years could have gone the way of *Look Back in Anger* and feel irrelevant to a modern audience. Under John Tiffany's direction, *Road* feels terrifyingly present, and still as necessary after over thirty years since its debut.

"Life can't just be this".

But it just might be. What the audience is made painfully aware of is how little society has progressed. We are still a directionless youth hoping to find excitement at the end of a bottle or joint, without the comfort of memory to keep us going. Just like in the play, we hope that life can get better, but we have no proof that it can be. And what separates us from the generations before (and the generation before the youth of the 1980s) is that they retain memories of growing up with promise. They have experienced the 'peace and love' 60s and the rave culture of the 90s. Where Cartwright's text flourishes now is in this distinction. And in this distinction, we are made horrifically aware that life has not become better; in fact, it may be getting worse.

Rather than houses, Chloe Lamford's design guides us through spaces that are presented to us via a one-way mirrored box against a backdrop of bricks to give a dilapidated impression. Even the street sign has been broken in half to leave only the word 'road' (a beautifully clever touch). Characters that traverse the space appear like vague travellers, not knowing where they are going and not really caring as long as they can feel that buzz, that excitement that tells them their lives have purpose.

ROYAL

What effectively maps out this narrative are the casts surprisingly gestural performance, where words and phrases are complimented with physical action. Eddie's (Mike Noble) monologue stands out as one such example. His physicality is so specific and clear, that you can ascertain what is being talked about without the spoken text. And this keeps **Road's** monologues alive and engaging. They contain an energy that makes both listening and watching equally as important. This is used with varying degrees of intensity throughout, depending on what each monologue requires from the performer.

Road makes for crucial viewing. And not just because it is blindingly relevant. It is also at points a stunning lesson in theatre craft. There are moments where the productions scenography is melded to well with the text that it almost feels embodied. There really isn't anymore to be said. Grab yourself a ticket.

Director: John Tiffany

Writer: Jim Cartwright

Design: Chloe Lamford; Lee Curran (lighting); Gareth Fry (sound)

Cast: Michelle Fairley; Mark Hadfield; Faye Marsay; Mike Noble; Dan Parr; Lemn Sissay; June Watson; Liz White; Shane Zaza

Road plays the Royal Court Theatre until 9 September 2017. For more information or to book tickets, please visit the [website](#).

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The Guardian
16.08.17
Michael Billington

Summer arts preview 2017

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by [Michael Billington](#)

Road



Jim Cartwright's Road returns to the Royal Court. Photograph: Jon Super for the Guardian



Jim Cartwright's play was one of the key works of the Thatcherite 80s, in that it took us on a guided tour of a deprived Lancashire town: the sadness and squalor were offset by the ebullience of Ian Dury's music and [Max Stafford-Clark's](#) production. John Tiffany, who masterminded the [Harry Potter stage production](#), is now at the helm with a strong cast including Michelle Fairley, Liz White and June Watson. It will be fascinating to see how he

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recaptures the spirit of a play in which economic decline and boozy endurance go hand in hand.

• 21 July-9 September, [Royal Court, London](#); 020-7565 5000.

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Numb Bum Blog
18.08.17



Road – Right Up My Street!



The poster for this production caught my eye – 9 people leaning against a wall (as the above picture shows!) – so I booked my ticket and went to see the show.

Playing at The Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square, *Road* by Jim Cartwright (in fact the first play he wrote and played in 1986) is a black comedy which is billed as giving 'expression to the inhabitants of an unnamed northern road in Eighties Britain.' when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister. Running for 2 hours and 30 minutes with a 15 minute interval. Directed by John Tiffany, this is actually a 30 years revival since it first opened here in '86. It sounded relevant for today too. I actually booked the day before and got a real bargain of D6 in the circle.

I arrived early and collected my ticket from a delightful lady at the box office who gave me a lovely poster which actually had the full cast list on (for the review). I made my way to the bar.

The Royal Court Theatre is next door to Sloan Square underground (district and circle lines) so really easy to get to and find. I had not been for many years and was greatly impressed with the venue. There is a kitchen and bar which offers a small selection of meals from light sides to larger plates. I can recommend the Sweet Potato and Chorizo fries (actually a side dish, small but yummy!) and goes well with the obligatory G&T.

I got a table to soak up the atmosphere and and waited for the house to open.

House opened and I made my way to the auditorium. The circle level is actually on the same level as the entrance and easily got too. The circle is has five rows and row D is one from the back row. On all rows 12/13 would be centre and D6 has a great view of the stage. The seats are leather and well padded and almost Chesterfield like (so very comfy). The slips wither side of row A also look comfortable although they have a side on view. The auditorium has an industrial feel with brown leather seats and a red metal tiered ceiling.

The set is open with stairs leading from the stage. On stage there is a small trolley set with a record player on the top shelf and magazines on the bottom. At the rear slightly stage right from centre is a fabric arm-chair with a jacket laid over the back. A ladder rests at rear right. The back wall is a brick

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wall with bricks used to form window frames. In the centre of the stage is a large square in the floor. This Square in the floor is lit to form the house where some of the scenes take place such as the Bullseye scene or ironing scene. It also raises out of the floor to form a clear cube where other scenes take place like Molly's (June Watson) kitchen or Skin Lad's (Mike Noble) room. A great use of the set. A set of three street lamps run along stage right and left. At rear stage right is a part of a wall where characters rest against. Scene changes are carried out swiftly by the cast and 'in time' with the exits or cross stages. It works well and has the real feel of the road which it is supposed to be.

Lights dim slightly and a spot light highlights the record player as it plays 'somewhere Over The Rainbow' as Scullery (Lemn Sissay) enters.

All the cast are excellent and play each of their characters well with some having multiple characters. As there are a variety of cast and characters, you find yourself identifying with one or more of them – such as the ladies behind who I overheard saying 'she's so like my grandmother' referring to Molly (June Watson).

Michelle Fairley (playing Helen, Marion and Brenda) is excellent and portrays all the characters well. As Brenda, Carol's mum (Liz White), she is excellent at portraying a caring mum who is out of work and doing all she can to raise the children but dependent on the child too for money. She excels as the drunk lady Helen who is seducing a young soldier (Mike Noble) where you get empathy for the character and also feel her pain and shock at what she is actually doing! I loved this scene between the two of them as it is very relatable to for many audience members and has some humorous moments in such as when she clears up the sick, wipes his mouth and cleans inside the moth then kisses him! Brilliant.

Mark Hadfield (playing Jerry and Brian) plays both characters well. As Brian, the 'can't leave the past behind' man you get to feel that there is something that's bugging him which he hasn't put behind him. Appearing in the cube, cleaning his shoes to go out, you almost feel sad for him before he speaks by his presence. I love his dancing scene too. As Jerry he plays a great drunk who is trying to seduce a lady. There are some great comedy moments and an opportunity for him to show his talent for this genre too. He also plays Manfred, a chip shop owner, in a great small comedy scene where the adding of a slight twitch to the character made for a great portrayal! As Eddie's (Mike Noble)dad he is great at just watching the TV and not reacting to his surroundings. Brilliant.

Faye Marsay (playing Louise and Clare) plays both roles brilliantly bringing a different touch to each character. A great strong voice and a difference in character acting ensure that you are aware of each elements and how the characters are. As Louise the friend of Carol (Liz White) we see a great bond with the two and how she is almost led by her friend which culminates in a great scene with Eddie (Mike Noble) , Brink (Dan Parr) and Carol (Liz White). Excellent.

Mike Noble (playing Eddie and Skin-Lad) as Eddie he plays a loyal friend of Brink (Dan Parr) and in the scene with them together you can feel the 'fitting in' he is doing and was done when yuppies existed. A strong voice and great mannerisms ensure that his character comes to life. As Skin-Lad we get to see an example of the pent-up anger that existed in the 80's (and does today!) of the youth. A brilliant monologue is delivered well and clearly so you really feel his passion and anger. A brilliant role. He also plays a soldier who is seduced whilst drunk and the being sick scene got many an 'err' from the audience in an excellent uncredited scene!

Dan Parr (playing Brink) is an excellent example of the 80's youth that was created as an almost yuppie character with his best friend Eddie (Mike Noble). It is played really well as a confident lad who has an 'act' but when this is challenged he resorts to his former self and becomes more natural.

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A strong voice means that you can hear him and when he lunges at the girls you feel his passion mixed with desperation. As the 'youth on the wall', he brings comedy to the role and makes a great statement of how people live.

Lemn Sissay (playing Scullery) almost the story narrator bringing in the characters and scenes as needed. He has a great accent and powerful voice which is used well. He interacts with the audience well as he 'invites' us to join the road in the opening scene. I liked the way that he is sometimes present on stage but not actually in the action such as when he is sat on the steps after introducing a character or laid on the 'roof' of the 'cube' after a scene, this humanised the play by bringing the audience into the action as if it were happening now and not being played out in front of you.

June Watson (playing Molly) is fantastic as the elder resident who we first meet appearing in her kitchen the 'cube' (which raises out of the floor) and is getting ready to head out. We warm to the elder lady instantly as she puts on her lipstick and powder but this soon turns to a sour note when she clearly is remembering somebody and false sad. I loved the almost dottiness which is brought to this character as it enhanced the age of the character and makes the audience warm to her even more. I also loved the scene where she is disco dancing to an 80's beat – brilliant.

Liz White (playing Carol and Valerie) plays both roles well. As Carol we see an independent young girl who is trying to grow up and away from the road and from the apparent assumptions that people make to her being a blonde (as she states). First meeting her in an excellent scene with her mum, Brenda (Michelle Fairley), we see how she is trying to be different and supporting her mother. In a later scene with Eddie (Mike Noble), Brink (Dan Parr) and Louise (Faye Marsay) we feel her desperation to be different and not simply a blonde. Brilliant.

Shane Zaza (playing Joey) is excellent as the depressed and self bed ridden character. In his opening scene whilst he is cleaning an engine part in the room, we get the feeling that all is not well. By the time "Joey's Story" is told and he is bed, without eating or leaving you really feel his pain at the worries he carries and why this is preventing him from heading out. When he is joined by Faye Marsay we get to see a small lift in the mood which quickly turns around and when its lights out, you feel his pain more! Brilliant.

Overall the play is well produced and performed excellently with the set changes and character swapping occurring so smoothly they are actually part of the play. Each of the actors give their all and this brings the black comedy to life. Although written many years ago the themes and isolation, false dreams and hopes are still very relevant today!

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Theatre News
Alex White
18.08.17



The Royal Court's revival of John Cartwright's, *Road* - an Under Milk Wood-esque, somnambulant, and seminal play from the late 1980s is dark and timely. Though not as engaging as the original promenade production, the desperation of a community struggling with unemployment remains relevant and the lyricism of the language is fully explored by director, John Tiffany.

Road is at simplest about a group of northern working class people who weave in and out of each other's lives, over the course of a night, getting progressively drunker. Director John Tiffany, of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* fame, elected that the original promenade set-up would have been inelegant when staged in the Sloane Square setting of the Royal Court bar, posing as a Working Men's Club. As a result the scenes, which felt like happenings you might just have stumbled upon, all took place under the illustrious proscenium arch. Without the interaction of a promenade show, the episodic, mixed monologue and scenic format, at times felt confusing.

That said, cast were exceptionally strong and many of these episodes were deeply engaging. Shane Zaza's Joey, depressed in bed, and Michelle Fairley's performance as she desperate attempts to seduce a drunken soldier, were powerful moments. A promenade production would have allowed for more of that intimacy and a chance to get closer to the action. The scenes are often introduced and narrated by Lemn Sissay as Scullery. However without a physical journey to lead the audience on, his interactions felt oddly pantomimic and jarred with the boxed-in scenes that we encountered.

The parallels between Thatcher's Britain and today are evident. But at a time when we need to be taken closer to the plights of poverty, race and gender discrimination, this Royal Court revival literally distances us rather than drawing us in. What a damn shame.



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Plays To See
Max Wilkson
18.08.17



Road

Max Wilkinson 18th August 2017

Drama
Written by Jim Cartwright
Directed by John Tiffany
Cast: Michelle Fairley, Mark Hadfield, Faye Marsay, Mike Noble, Dan Parr, Lemn Sissay, June Watson, Liz White, Shane Zaza
Royal Court, London
Until 9 September 2017
Review by Max Wilkinson
16 August 2017

4.0
Reviewer's Rating
★★★★★

First performed at the Royal Court in 1986, John Tiffany's excellent revival does everything to elevate the poetry and pathos of Cartwright's original text. It would be false to say that the play hits with the same potency, but Tiffany's unwavering dedication, as well as some brilliant performances, distil the text as an excellent testament to a job-less and drenched Britain, crippled by the Thatcher era.

Scullery (played brilliantly by *Lemn Sissay*) the holy saint of an unnamed Lancashire town, guides us through a wild night of drinking, watching silently from alleys and roof-tops as we hear each resident's story. Often monologues displayed in the Court's glass box stage, like flies trapped in a glass, each character is indeed dying a slow death, suffocating and desperate to find an exit. They either accept captivity and stasis: an abusive husband, modern life that is so ugly compared with the past, or they find small mercies in the form of drink, the Dalai Lama and bare expressions of the soul, exemplified in the plays cathartic climax to the tune of Otis Redding's 'Try a little Tenderness'.

If Act 1 ends in defeat, a suicide pact in a bed, Act 2 picks us up beautifully as the locals spill out of the clubs in search of burgers and sex. A stark example of Cartwright's haunting comedy, is when an older woman, again played wonderfully by *Michelle Fairley*, tries to seduce a soldier. After puking on her chips, he proceeds to pass out her floor while she tries to undress him. The hilarious seduction is cut short as she realises the soldier 'is nothing more than a boy' and as she quietly covers him in a blanket. We are reminded of news reels of body bags from the Falklands War. Without the usual moral brow-beating often seen in modern social commentaries, *Road* invites us to witness laughter

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and desperation, pain and existence that simply is, without the need to resolve the impossible injustices of modern life.

John Tiffany's revival could be criticised for not moving forward. Important anthems of the 80's, (New Order, Soft Cell) have become today's Kiss FM hits, and similarly Cartwright's characters and his sentiments too familiar after the films of Shane Meadows and Simon Beaufoy. But by staying true to Simon Curtis's original production Tiffany has made the right choice, an honest testament to an important period in our history and, although different in form, resonant of today's landscape of austerity. Political parallels are not drawn but instead we ask ourselves: how do we depict struggling societies in the theatre these days? And do we do it enough?

COILPT

Glass
Heather Doughty
23.08.17

glass

Glass reviews Road at the Royal Court, London

Heather Doughty

August 23, 2017

Culture, Don't Miss: Theatre, Feature

“Why’s the world so tough? It’s like walking through meat in high heels.”

IT’S been 31 years since [Jim Cartwright](#)’s seminal play, [Road](#), was first staged by Simon Curtis as a promenade production, inviting audience members to take a walk down a beaten cobbled street of a fictional eighties Lancashire town. Through incredibly poetic and often unsettling language, Cartwright gives voice and expression to the inhabitants of said road and allows their individual stories to be heard.



Dan Parr (Brink) and Michelle Fairley (Helen, Marion, Brenda) Road at the Royal Court.
Photograph: Johan Persson.

ROYAL

Years later, this play is still as poignant and relevant as ever, as London still reels from the traumatic events of Grenfell Tower, people continue to rely on food banks and many of those still face job cuts upon job cuts. [John Tiffany](#) whose past credits include [Harry Potter and the Cursed Child](#) and [Once](#), brings outstanding direction and shrewd intuition to this revival. From the minute the production begins, you are transported into this downtrodden, angry world by characters packed so full of life and vivacity, they could almost jump out and smack you in the face with their shoulder pads and beer cans.



Faye Marsay (Louise, Clare) and Shane Zaza (Joey) in Road at the Royal Court.- Photograph: Johan Persson.

Road follows the lives of various characters and switches between heart wrenching monologues and truly hilarious ensemble scenes. Some characters never meet, whilst others are interwoven intrinsically into each other's narratives. Guiding the audience through this muddled group, is Scullery, played perfectly by [Lemn Sissay](#). Scullery is the only character who really stops up being total voyeurs, as he addresses the audience and sets up scenes and characters in a charming, bumbling manner. We watch as the drunks come and go and learn more about the struggles of the Thatcher era for poverty stricken Northern towns, in a time of high unemployment.



Faye Marsay (Louise,Clare), Liz White (Carol,Valerie) and Lemn Sissay (Scullery).
Photograph: Johan Persson.

Tiffany wisely decides to keep this revival set in the time it was written, with garish costumes, questionably big hair styles and epic music, spanning [Otis Redding](#)'s Try a Little Tenderness, all the way through to [Elbow](#)'s chilling song Lippy Kids, which include the famous lyrics, 'Build a rocket boys.' The chilling chords of this song suit the final scene so beautifully, in an unsettling climatic moment which incorporates the entire company.

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Mike Noble (Eddie, Skin-Lad). Photograph: Johan Persson.

[Chloe Lamford](#)'s design is simple but extremely powerful, the most interesting and painful being the scene between bed bound Joey ([Shane Zaza](#)) and Clare ([Faye Marsay](#)). The bed is sat totally upright so we get the impression we are looking directly down on the couple as Clare tries to understand why Joey won't move from this spot: 'Are we protesting?' she asks full of naivety and intrigue.

This is by far one of the most difficult scenes to watch, as the couple unromantically attempt to starve themselves to death in a disturbing suicide pact. You cannot tear your eyes away from Zaza and Marsay during their exchange, Marsay's vulnerability and girlishness juxtaposed splendidly against Zaza's determination and frustration with the world.

Other notable performances include [Michelle Fairley](#), playing the desperate sex starved Helen, who brings a rather inebriated mute soldier back to her residence in an attempt to get him to seduce her; unsurprisingly to no avail. Fairley balances this uncomfortable yet for the most part, very comic scene so wonderfully as her character stings of loneliness and an incredible need to be loved. Once she realises she has pushed things too far and sees the soldier as just 'like a little boy,' and strokes his face, she is beside herself with remorse and anguish. Fairley masterfully documents this rollercoaster of emotions in this painful scene as it turns from farce to despair.



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Michelle Fairley (Helen, Marion, Brenda) and Mark Hadfield (Jerry, Brian).
Photograph: Johan Persson.

Though not as harassing and confrontational as the original, John Tiffany's *Road* still certainly packs a punch and does justice to the lyrical genius that is Jim Cartwright. Moments of high drama, deep sadness and true hilarity all collide wonderfully in this epic revival. Well worth a watch, if only to be sadly reminded of the disheartened, divided nation we still live in, yet one that still has promise for hope and freedom in the future.

by Heather Doughty

Photography by [Johan Persson](#)

Road is at the Royal Court, London until September 9, 2017
[Royal Court Theatre](#), Sloane Square, London, SW1W 8AS|
Box office: 020 7565 5000
@royalcourt

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New Statesman
01.09.17

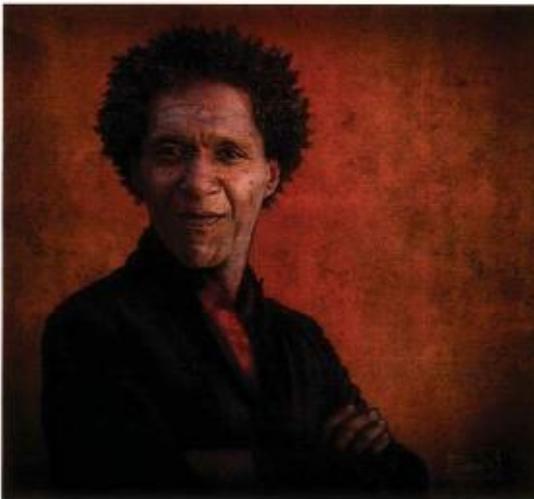


Magazine, Consumer

Yellow News...

Client: Royal Court Company Yellow News
Source: New Statesman
Date: 01/09/2017

Keyword: Royal Court Company
Page: 62
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Size: 474
Value: 1900.74



THE NS Q&A

“We need anger and empathy. As I grow older, I must step up” Lemn Sissay, poet

Lemn Sissay MBE is an award-winning poet, playwright, actor and broadcaster. Born to an Ethiopian mother in Lancashire in 1967, he described his upbringing in children's homes and foster care in his play "Something Dark".

What's your earliest memory?

Holding my arms out in a pram, wanting to be picked up. Whenever we were playing sport in school and I fell to the ground, I always thought: there'd be ropes to lift me up. I was falling through to the memory of wanting that to happen as a baby.

Who are your heroes?

Macavity the Mystery Cat. Everybody blames him when things go bad or go missing or there's a problem. But I think

Macavity just happened to be there and was strong enough to take the blame. And Libbeth Salandae from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. She was fostered and she fought for justice on her own terms. I find her anger incredibly beautiful.

What would be your Mastermind specialist subject?

Caribbean poets - they were the people who prepared the ground for my career.

What politician, past or present, do you look up to?

Diana Albert. I'm really proud of her, and it's good to know that one of the first black MPs was a woman. What she does on the ground in Hackney is quite incredible. She's going to grow into a grand old age and

be talked about for many years when many politicians will have been forgotten.

In which time and place, other than your own, would you like to live?

Addis Ababa in the late 1960s. The jazz musicians used to play for Haile Selassie in the day-time but at night they would play in the clubs. Ethiopian Airlines was at its best, and life, for certain people, was good. It was the bridge between old Africa and new, and Addis was cooking on gas.

What TV show could you not live without?

I'm afraid it's *Family Guy*, which is just a whole street of wrong.

What's your theme tune?

The Scots Dragoon Guards playing "Amazing Grace". I was fostered by a part Scottish family and I first heard it in my childhood. But when I went to give a keynote address in Addis Ababa, on a baking hot day, to a host of dignitaries, the ambassador said: "Oh we've got a surprise for you." And two Scots Dragoon Guards walked onto the grass and played, perfectly, "Amazing Grace" with bagpipes.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

It was from a film-maker at the Workers' Film Association at Old Trafford in Manchester in the mid-1980s: "Take it easy but take it all." It took a lifetime to realise how difficult but how necessary that is.

What's currently bugging you?

Truthfully, it's that I don't know if I'm doing the right thing in response to stuff that's happening on our streets. Near where I live in Hackney there was a march for a young black man who died at the hands of the police. And I should have been in some way connected to that event. I think, as I grow older, I must step up. Because that's what we need now: compassion and empathy and anger.

When were you happiest?

Now is always the best time to be happy. Happiness as a memory is a little bit lost.

Are we all doomed?

I don't think so. I'm not religious, but I have faith in my fellow humans.

"Gold from the Stone: New and Selected Poems" is published in paperback by Canongate. Lemn Sissay is performing in "Road" at the Royal Court, London SW1, until 9 September and "Something Dark" is on tour from 15 September

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ROYAL

Alex Sierz
07.09.17

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ROAD, ROYAL COURT

Thursday 7th September 2017



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CLICK IMAGE TO ENLARGE

Some legendary plays are a disappointment when you see them again — they don't live up to the hype, or to your memories of seeing them for the first time. Jim Cartwright's *Road* is not, I repeat not, one of those letdowns. It remains as fresh, as powerful and as beautiful as its reputation says it is. It buzzes with energy and reaches deep inside you. It is funny, and at the same time so, so sad. It's a masterpiece. So it's great to see the Royal Court reviving a modern classic from its

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ROYAL

own past. *Road* was first staged here, in the studio space, in March 1986, before moving down onto the main stage in June that year, and then returning, with punk rocker Ian Drury in the role of the narrator Scullery, in January 1987. Now this revival by the wonderful John Tiffany features broadcaster and poet Lemn Sissay as Scullery.

Set on a nameless road in a small Lancashire town on one hot night of bingeing, fighting, sexing and vomiting, the play presents a panorama of Northern working-class life in an era of mass unemployment, although, it has to be said, because it is poverty that is the key condition the piece hasn't aged one bit since the mid-1980s. Cartwright uses the drink-loving petty thief Scullery to introduce his cast of characters, which include Joey and Clare, a young pair who starve themselves, Carol and her nagging mother Brenda, old Jerry, who longs for the past, Molly, a pensioner with Alzheimer's, and Valerie, who despairs of her unemployed husband.

We watch as some of the characters prepare to go out, then visit the local pubs, then come home drunk. In one heartrending scene, Helen brings a squaddie home with her, but he is too drunk to speak, or to have sex. Similarly, when Brian brings Marion home with him, his clumsy seduction is interrupted first by the fact that she wants something to eat, and then by the appearance of his 12-year-old daughter (here played by the same actor who plays the OAP Molly). Then there's Brink and Eddie, young men with a passion not just for women, but for soul music too. In another monologue, a young skinhead talks about violence. But equally strong are the quiet scenes which show characters marooned at home. Most famously, Joey and Clare slowly starve themselves out of a despair almost too deep for words.

Starting with a blast of Judy Garland's 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow', which gives the show just the right feel of a certain kind of piquant nostalgia, Cartwright's text is a punchy account of working-class experience, with its putdowns, its swearing and its catch phrases, but his writing also gleams with bright shards of poetry. Joey says, "The world's a fat toilet", while Carol complains, "Poverty wants me. He's in my hair and clothes. He comes dust on me knickers" and her friend Louise says that the world is so tough "It's like walking through meat in high heels." The rhythms of the speech are realistic, but — like every great playwright — Cartwright has supercharged the content.

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What's both stunning, and in the end moving, is that this 1980s state-of-the-north play is still so relevant. Tiffany has cut the Professor character, whose "anthropological" study of unemployment dates things a bit, and the result is as fresh and febrile as any new play. What comes across most strongly is the dehumanizing effects of poverty, and the social alienation of the road's inhabitants. This is not a lame piece of journalism, but an impassioned and totally empathetic account of poor people, of how it feels to be at the bottom of the heap. The evening throbs with the resentments, the fantasies and the sheer anger of the urban poor. In the era of Brexit, this is alive with relevance.

On the one hand, there are the people whose desperation is close to boiling point, who are angry and near to the edge. On the other, there are those so impoverished that they have faded back into themselves, with only the consolations of nostalgia to keep them company. The old ones look back, not in anger but in grief, while even the youngish Valerie cries out: "Can we not have before again?" All of them drink not to get high, or for pleasure, but to achieve the solace of oblivion. Not to have to think any more. At one point, Clare asks Joey about their bid to starve themselves: "Are we protesting?" They are, in their own way, but this is not a play about collective struggle. It's a vision of isolated human beings searching for connection, for meaning, for answers. And it ends, with a little help from pop music, on a glorious note of supreme transcendence.

Tiffany's production, designed by Chloe Lamford, features a glass cube, which rises from the ground and suggests a claustrophobic room, in which the characters are trapped in what seems like a grubby goldfish bowl. He also adds some neat touches, mainly moments of balletic movement in the scene changes, and some delicious fragments: a young woman kicks off her heels and does a brief exercise in ball control with a battered football, Scullery dances with a supermarket trolley to the stentorian chords of *Swan Lake*. But, above all, it is Tiffany's version of the climax, with Otis Redding's 'Try a Little Tenderness', followed by a beautifully choreographed sequence, that stays in the memory. Brilliant. It's simply magic.

And Tiffany's cast are excellent. Sissay's imposing Scullery swaggers smoothly and takes the audience by the hand, while Dan Parr (Brink), Mike Noble (Eddie), Liz White (Carol) and Faye Marsay (Louise) make the last scene really sparkle. Mark Hadfield and June Watson give the two older characters a convincing sense of

COULDT

ROYAL

solitude and depth, while Noble's Skin-Lad monologue is mesmerizing. Shane Zaza and Marsay bring a gentle seriousness to the death-seeking lovers, while Michelle Fairley, who plays three women, is particularly memorable in her scene with the drunken soldier. This is a haunting, compelling and thrilling revival of a Royal Court classic.

© Aleks Sierz

- *Road* is at the Royal Court until 9 September.

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Audience Comments

 **Phil Cairns**
@philcairms [Follow](#)

@royalcourt #Road #JimCartwright Authentic. Emotive.
Fantastic. Go see.

10:30 PM - Jul 21, 2017

1 1 6 [i](#)

 **EBONI**
@ebonidixon [Follow](#)

Just seen the first preview of #Road at @royalcourt. F*cking
INCREDIBLE. Go. See. Now.

10:48 PM - Jul 21, 2017

4 7 53 [i](#)

 **Anna-Karolina**
@ankari [Follow](#)

Just been to see the first preview of #Road @royalcourt. That
play does something to my heart every time. Also Gareth Fry's
sound design 🥰

12:03 AM - Jul 22, 2017

2 6 23 [i](#)

COILPT

ROYAL

 **Ros Terry**
@RosTerry78 [Follow](#)

I watched #Road tonight @royalcourt -it's poetic, powerful & political-the loneliness hits you in the gut & the words hit you in the heart

12:49 AM - Jul 22, 2017

   6 

 **John Horner**
@johnnyhorner [Follow](#)

#Road @royalcourt on Friday evening was mad, memorable and ultimately very moving. Best wishes for a successful run to everyone involved!

3:20 AM - Jul 22, 2017

  1  2 

 **Selina Helliwell**
@TwistedEmerald [Follow](#)

#Road @royalcourt is just as hard-hitting as ever (if not more so) & the cast are phenomenal! @Elbow's 'Lippy Kids' at the close was genius.

10:20 AM - Jul 22, 2017

  1  3 

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ROYAL

 **Arabella Warner** [@BollyWarner](#) [Follow](#)

#road @royalcourt Brilliant acting amazing imaginative staging wonderful sound design. Sad that it's themes still so relevant today. Go see

1:13 PM - Jul 22, 2017

   3 

 **Phoebe Hames** [@phoebe_hames](#) [Follow](#)

Stonking cast and the most spellbinding dance ever performed between man and trolley in #Road @royalcourt

11:56 PM - Jul 22, 2017

  1  7 

 **amy beth hayes** [@Amybhayes](#) [Follow](#)

#Road @royalcourt is superb. #tryalittle tenderness 🤯 A moment of truly transcendental theatre. Still thinking about it. 🍷🍷

10:52 AM - Jul 24, 2017 · Ealing, London

  2  12 

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ROYAL



Tim Crowther

@TimCr0wther

Follow

#Road is coming round me later @royalcourt and John Tiffany is showing me around and introducing me to the locals - too exciting!!

5:57 PM - Jul 24, 2017

2 2



Kate Sketchley

@KateSketchley

Follow

#Road @royalcourt was unexpected, challenging, sharp, and beautiful. The characters have just as much to tell us about 2017 as they did 1986

11:04 PM - Jul 24, 2017

3 15



Tom Oakley

@Oakley_Tom

Follow

Utterly flawless, #Road @royalcourt perfectly highlights timeless tones of the beautifully bleak.

A+ 'drafted novel' gift, @AasiyaShah7 👍

11:57 PM - Jul 24, 2017

1 2



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ROYAL

 **Kemi-bo**
@kemi_bo [Follow](#)

Astonishing stage debut from @FayeMarsay in #Road @royalcourt brilliant performances throughout. Powerful. Relevant. Real.

10:06 AM - Jul 25, 2017

   7 

 **The Thelmas**
@TheThelmas [Follow](#)

"England's an old twat in the sea" - never has a 30+ yr old line sounded so freshly minted. #JimCartwright's #Road @royalcourt's ❤️👏

10:10 PM - Jul 25, 2017

   4 

 **danielle**
@danielle__xox [Follow](#)

#Road at @royalcourt was beautiful. Full of depth, weight and humanity. Such a thought provoking play yet so much fun, loved it

10:17 PM - Jul 25, 2017

  1  4 

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Joshua Scuse

@joshscuse

Follow

#Road @royalcourt filled me with existential dread at the idea that life, simply, goes on. Excellent and particularly poignant 2nd act

11:35 PM - Jul 25, 2017

1 3



Buffy Price

@BuffyPrice

Follow

Still digesting the brilliant and heart-breakingly relevant production of #Road @royalcourt. I may be staring into space for some time

9:40 AM - Jul 27, 2017

1



Frazer Hadfield

@frazerhadfield

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#road at @royalcourt feels like it was written yesterday. What does that say about the state of the place. Jim Cartwright is something else.

10:40 PM - Jul 27, 2017

1 3 14



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 **Peter Hobday**
@PeterHobday [Follow](#)

Had a blast being taken down t' #road @royalcourt - was super. Transformative performances.

12:09 AM - Jul 29, 2017 · Islington, London

  1  10 

 **Ash**
@AshleyByam [Follow](#)

Simple tweet.
Book your tickets for #Road @royalcourt.
It is a beautifully captivating, funny and heart wrenching production .So relevant

11:05 AM - Jul 29, 2017

  2  7 

 **Roy Alexander Weise**
@RAWeiseArtist [Follow](#)

#ROAD @royalcourt is bold, beautiful, funny, incredibly harrowing. Haven't felt like that in a very long time.

2:03 PM - Jul 29, 2017

 2  2  25 

COURT

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 **Michaela**
@MichaelaDeAz [Follow](#)

A beautifully done and incredibly relevant and poignant production of #Road at @royalcourt

10:20 PM - Jul 29, 2017

  3  8 

 **Nick Smith**
@SmithyWrites [Follow](#)

#Road was an almost spiritual experience. Exactly what the @royalcourt is for. Beautiful.

11:29 PM - Jul 29, 2017

  1  7 

 **Kerry Andrews**
@poplamp2 [Follow](#)

#Road @royalcourt is tremendous. Saw it on Friday night. Still relevant. Best drunk acting ever. The closing scene is beyond beautiful.

8:32 PM - Jul 30, 2017

  3  16 

COURT

ROYAL

 **Amy Balmforth**
@AmyBalmforth [Follow](#)

A play with raw and true soul! If you can go and see [#Road @royalcourt](#) for some stunning performances!

10:32 PM - Jul 31, 2017

1 2 9

 **Nicholas Quirke**
@NicholasQuirke [Follow](#)

[#Road @royalcourt](#) "England's in pieces"! Yes it fucking is. Prophetic writing unbelievably, heartbreakingly relevant today.

2:44 PM - Aug 1, 2017 · Brighton, England

3 12

 **Matt Harrison**
@MHmattharrison [Follow](#)

[#road @royalcourt](#) is breaking my heart and putting fire in my soul! stunning! [#intervaltweet](#)

8:51 PM - Aug 1, 2017

1 14

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ROYAL



Molly Wheaton

@mollymwheaton

 Follow

#johntiffany does it again-- #road at @royalcourt is achingly and unflinchingly intense #johnpleasehireme

10:09 PM - Aug 1, 2017

   5



Sarah Moss

@sarahmoss_and

 Follow

#Road @royalcourt is magic. Perfect polaroids of pain and hope exquisitely realised. I have lots to say about it, go see it & we can talk!

10:41 PM - Aug 1, 2017

  3  6



Alice Lavender

@alicevlavender

 Follow

The performances I saw in #Road @royalcourt last night were some of the best I have ever seen. A masterclass.

5:03 PM - Aug 2, 2017

  3  9



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ROYAL

 **Rebecca Eve** [@Bec_Eve](#) [Follow](#)

Had a wonderful trip down [#Road](#) last night [@royalcourt](#) -Full of nostalgia & love for this great play that's lost none of its original punch

3:17 PM - Aug 12, 2017

 **Jack Thorne** [@jackthorne](#) [Follow](#)

[#Road](#) at the [@royalcourt](#) is a war cry of defiance from those that were forgotten & remain forgotten. A tender portrait of our damage.

12:14 PM - Aug 11, 2017

 2  16  87 

 **Emma Rendell** [@emmarendell_](#) [Follow](#)

What a phenomenal piece of theatre. Absolutely reeling after seeing [#Road](#) [@royalcourt](#)

10:13 PM - Aug 10, 2017

  3  14 

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 **Amelia Noble**
@millienoble22 [Follow](#)

#Road @royalcourt is inspiring/depressingly relevant, staging is pure perfection, & outstanding performances by @FayeMarsay and @lemnsissay

10:10 PM - Aug 10, 2017

 **Roxana Haines**
@RoxanaHaines [Follow](#)

Thought that #Road @royalcourt was fantastic. Gritty and moving with a trolley duet. All my favourite things.

11:58 AM - Aug 14, 2017

  2  9 

 **Luke W. Hereford**
@LukeWHereford [Follow](#)

#Road @royalcourt is hardy and relentless. I mean, we all know the play is a masterpiece, and this version is just something else #blownaway

10:21 PM - Aug 14, 2017

   5 

COILPT

ROYAL



Amelia Annowska

@annowska

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Road at @royalcourt was everything I love in a piece of theatre. Bloody love Jim Cartwright. What energy.

10:14 PM - Aug 23, 2017

5



Edward Seckerson

@seckerson

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Jim Cartwright's ROAD @royalcourt The poetry of deprivation, the poetry of hopelessness. The road to nowhere. So funny, so sad.

10:13 PM - Aug 23, 2017 · Kensington, London

1 1 5



Richard Madden

@_richardmadden

Follow

Loved 'Road' @royalcourt last night, amazing cast and brilliant production on all fronts. Electric!

12:42 PM - Aug 24, 2017 · London, England

26 101 884



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