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WILLY RUSSELL

PLAYS: 2

BLOOD BROTHERS · OUR DAY OUT – THE MUSICAL · SHIRLEY VALENTINE · JOHN, PAUL, GEORGE, RINGO . . . AND BERT

BLOOMSBURY

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Blood Brothers; Our Day Out – The Musical; Shirley Valentine; John, Paul, George, Ringo . . . and Bert

'Willy Russell is a dramatist of exceptional warmth and humanity.' *Evening Standard*

Blood Brothers: 'Undoubtedly the most exciting thing to have happened to the English musical theatre in years.' Sheridan Morley, in *Punch*

Our Day Out – The Musical: 'The skill and zest of the show . . . derive from its success in following the adult argument through while preserving all the fun of a story for and mainly played by children . . . I have rarely seen a show that combined such warmth and such bleakness.' Irving Wardle, in *The Times*

Shirley Valentine: 'A simple and brilliant idea . . . the profound and perennial point of the comedy is the problem we seem to have contemplating the idea of a woman alone – in a pub, on a beach, in a restaurant. This is what Shirley learns to combat as she unravels her own sexual and social identity.' *Financial Times*

John, Paul, George, Ringo . . . and Bert: 'The complement of mood and music is perfect, ironic, unsentimentally accurate . . . *John, Paul, George, Ringo . . . and Bert*, the adventurous biographical play about the Beatles at Liverpool's Everyman Theatre, bursts with incisive moments . . . It is a fine piece of work . . . And can Mr Russell write dialogue!' *The Sunday Times*

Willy Russell was born in Whiston, near Liverpool. Leaving school at fifteen, he worked variously as a ladies' hairdresser, warehouseman and girder cleaner until, at the age of twenty one, he returned to education. It was while training to become a teacher that he wrote his first plays for both stage and television. Playground, Keep Your Eyes Down and Sam O'Shanker were premiered at St Katherine's College in 1972. Under the collective title Blind Scouse these were presented later the same year at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, where they were seen by playwright John McGrath and led to Russell writing *When the Reds*, adapted from an original script by Alan Plater, for the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool (1973). Subsequently he has written *John Paul George Ringo . . . and Bert* (Everyman and Lyric, London, 1974; winner of the *Evening Standard* and London Theatre Critics' Awards for Best Musical), *Breezeblock Park* (Everyman, 1975; Mermaid and Whitehall, London, 1977), *One for the Road* (Contact Theatre, Manchester, 1976; Lyric, London, 1987), *Stags and Hens* (Everyman, 1978; Young Vic, 1983; revised and presented as *Stags and Hens – The Remix*, Royal Court, Liverpool, 2008), *Educating Rita* (RSC Warehouse and Piccadilly, London, 1980, winner of SWET Best Comedy Award), *Blood Brothers* (play version, Merseyside Young People's Theatre Company, 1981), *Blood Brothers* (musical version, Liverpool Playhouse and Lyric, London, 1983; Albery and Phoenix, London, 1988; Music Box, New York, 1993), *Our Day Out* (play version, Everyman and Young Vic, 1983; musical version, Royal Court, Liverpool, 2009), *Shirley Valentine* (Everyman, 1986; Vaudeville, London, 1988, winner of Olivier Award for Best Comedy; Booth Theatre, New York, 1989).

For television he has written *King of the Castle* (BBC, 1973), *Break-In* (BBC, 1974), *Death of a Young Young Man* (BBC, 1974), *Our Day Out* (BBC, 1976), *Lies* (BBC, 1978), *The Daughters of Albion* (ITV, 1979), *Politics and Terror* (ITV, 1980), *The Boy with the Transistor Radio* (ITV, 1980), the *One Summer* series (Channel 4, 1983), *Terraces* (BBC, 1993). Feature films and screenplays include *Educating Rita* (winner of *Evening Standard* Award for Best Screenplay, 1983), *Shirley Valentine* (1989),

Dancin' Thru the Dark (1990), *Blood Brothers* (with Alan Parker, 2006). As a composer Russell has written for the TV series *Connie* and the feature film *Mr Love*, as well as for his own films, *Shirley Valentine* and *Dancin' Thru the Dark*. He wrote music and lyrics for *Blood Brothers* and (with Bob Eaton and Chris Mellor) music and lyrics for *Our Day Out*. With the poets Adrian Henri, Brian Patten and Roger McGough, he wrote and performed *Words on the Run* (1995–97), and with playwright Tim Firth he wrote and performed *In Other Words* (2004) and *The Singing Playwrights* (2004). In 2003 he wrote and recorded the CD *Hoovering the Moon*. His novel *The Wrong Boy* was published by Doubleday in 2000.

By the same author and also available from
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Willy Russell Plays: 1
(Breezeblock Park, Our Day Out, Stags and Hens, Educating Rita)

Blood Brothers*†
Educating Rita*
Our Day Out
Shirley Valentine & One for the Road
Stags And Hens

* available as a Methuen Drama Student Edition with commentary and notes
† available as a GCSE Student Edition with commentary and notes tailored for GCSE curricula

Willy Russell
Plays: 2

Blood Brothers

Our Day Out – The Musical

Shirley Valentine

John, Paul, George, Ringo . . . and Bert

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
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Contents

Chronology

1947	Born in Whiston, near Liverpool.
1962	Left school to become a ladies' hairdresser.
1969	Returned to education as a mature student.
1972	*Blind Scouse* premièred at the Edinburgh Festival.
	Tam Lin (for children) produced in Liverpool.
1973	*When the Reds*, an adaptation of Alan Plater's play *The Tigers Are Coming* – OK*?*, produced in Liverpool.
	King of the Castle shown on BBC1.
1974	*John Paul George Ringo . . . and Bert* premièred at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool, transferred to the Lyric Theatre, London; wins the *Evening Standard*'s and London Theatre Critics' Award for Best Musical.
	Break-In shown on BBC1.
1975	*Breezeblock Park* premièred at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool, transferred to the Mermaid Theatre, London (1977) and then to the Whitehall Theatre.
	Death of a Young Young Man shown on BBC2.
1976	*One for the Road* premièred (as *Painted Veg and Parkinson*) at the Contact Theatre, Manchester.
1977	*Our Day Out* shown on BBC1.
1978	*The Daughters of Albion* shown on ITV.
	Stags and Hens, originally a student piece for Manchester Polytechnic, opens at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool.
	Politics and Terror shown on television.
1979	*Lies* shown on BBC1.
1980	*Educating Rita* commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company; wins London's SWET Award for Best Comedy.
	The Boy with the Transistor Radio commissioned and shown by ITV.
1983	Film of *Educating Rita*, directed by Lewis Gilbert, starring Michael Caine and Julie Walters; screenplay by Willy Russell nominated for an Academy Award.

Blood Brothers (for which Willy Russell also wrote the music) premièred in Liverpool and transferred to Lyric Theatre, London.
Our Day Out (revised for the stage) produced at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool, and subsequently the Young Vic Theatre, London.
Awarded an Honorary MA by the Open University.
One Summer shown on Channel 4.

1984 *Stags and Hens* produced at the Young Vic, London.

1986 *Shirley Valentine* first produced at the Everyman Theatre, Liverpool.

1987 *One for the Road* produced at the Lyric Theatre, London.

1988 New West End production of *Blood Brothers*.
Shirley Valentine produced at the Vaudeville Theatre, London.

1989 *Shirley Valentine* nominated for the Tony Award and Drama Desk Award for Best Play and wins the Olivier Award for Best Comedy of the Year.

1990 Screenplay of *Dancing Thru' the Dark*, based on *Stags and Hens*.
Screenplay of *Shirley Valentine*; film directed by Lewis Gilbert, starring Pauline Collins.
Awarded a D.Litt. by Liverpool University.

1993 *Terraces*, in series Scene Drama, shown on BBC1.
Blood Brothers opens on Broadway.

1995 Willy Russell is made a Fellow of Liverpool John Moores University.
Words on the Run, an evening of prose, poetry, song and music, curated with poets Adrian Henri, Brian Patten, Roger McGough and musician Andy Roberts, premieres ahead of a tour of Great Britain.

1996 *Our Day Out* opens at Belgrade Theatre Coventry in a revised stage version.

1997 *Terraces* is broadcast by BBC Schools Television.

1998 Begins work on two novels, one of which would later become *The Wrong Boy*.

2000 *The Wrong Boy* is published by Doubleday to positive reviews and is subsequently translated into fifteen languages.

2001 *Willy Russell and Friends*, an event also featuring Paul McCartney and Adrian Mitchell, is staged at the Everyman Theatre.

2003 *Hoovering the Moon*, an album of fourteen original songs is recorded.
For One Night Only, an evening of comedy, readings and song featuring Willy Russell and Alan Bleasdale, is staged at the Liverpool Playhouse.

2004 *Hoovering the Moon* CD released.
The Singing Playwrights, created in association with Tim Firth, premieres at the Edinburgh Festival.
Willy is made a Companion of Honour at Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts, receiving his award from Sir Paul McCartney.

2007 With Sir Alan Parker, writes the screenplay for the feature-length movie of *Blood Brothers*.

2008 *Stags and Hens: The Remix*, a reworking of the 1978 play, is staged at the Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool, during the city's year as European Capital of Culture.

2009 A new version of *Our Day Out: The Musical* is staged at the Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool, in a production directed by Bob Eaton.

2010 The Menier Chocolate Factory revives *Educating Rita* and *Shirley Valentine*; both productions subsequently transfer to Trafalgar Studios.
The 2009 production of *Our Day Out: The Musical* is revived at the Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool.

2012 *Dancin' Thru the Dark* is released on DVD.

2013 Willy Russell's personal archive is donated to Liverpool John Moores University.

2014 A neon artwork sign, 'Words', commissioned by BBC Radio 4 Front Row, is unveiled in Salford.

2015 The Liverpool Playhouse revival of *Educating Rita* starring Leanne Best and Con O'Neill is the first of many

significant productions staged in Britain and abroad on the 35th anniversary of the play's premier.
Willy Russell: Behind the Scenes, an exhibition of materials from the Russell archive housed at Liverpool John Moores University, opens at the Kirkby Gallery.

Introduction

Since their original creation, these plays have had to survive many knocks and much buffeting to make their way in the world. Along with the knocks, they have had to weather well-intentioned 'interpretations', ranging from the bizarre to the bonkers to the downright demented. Very occasionally the works have been the subject of what can only be termed theatrical butchery. Although the law of copyright seeks to protect the author and his play, there are still those who are quite prepared to test just how much elasticity there is in that rule of copyright – hence, the Korean production of *Blood Brothers* in which the action was 'reconceived', re-set in the 1950s and given a military setting against the backdrop of the Korean war. Closer to home, was the German production of *Blood Brothers* in which the inspired producers elected simply to abandon my score and lyrics and to fill the gaps instead with tracks by The Rolling Stones! The first of my plays to be translated and performed abroad was *John, Paul, George, Ringo . . . and Bert* or as it had somehow become by the time it had opened in Mexico, *John, Paul, George and Ringo*. Having been deemed superfluous by the producer, Bert and his side of the narrative was simply dumped and dropped from the Mexican proceedings!

Thankfully, even this kind of cavalier mangling and casual vandalism did not cause any lasting damage and, I'm delighted to say, the plays/musicals continue to be widely produced.

Nevertheless, these works are undoubtedly the product of the age in which they were written, an age in which, for example, it was still possible (and many even thought it likely) that the men who had once been The Beatles would eventually put their differences behind them, regroup and astound us even further with the breathtaking audacity of their combined genius.

In days such as those, days when songs were distributed in the form of vinyl discs, books were not yet electronic, telephones were still bolted to walls, when setting down lines such as these involved ink, ribbon and the bash and clatter of metal typewriter keys, when lattes and pilates were a gobbledygook yet to be foisted, Apple was just a record label, tablets were things you took for ailments and a

bank was a place where you put your money to keep it safe, in those days, the world of theatre into which I was fortunate enough to step was, for a young writer, a very different world than it is today.

Let us not be golden-ageist here and fall prey to the soft sentimental clutch and warm hug of nostalgia in which the nowadays are a celebrity-plagued, dumbed-down, morally bankrupt, X-Factored hell while the past becomes a soft-focus pioneering, shawl-wearing, all-caring sugar-swapping, neighbour-helping lost Eden. The different age of which I write also had its fair share of social horrors – slum housing (both old and new), the stigma of illegitimacy, routine racism, sexism, homophobia, production-line monotony, spiralling inflation, cultural imperialism, economic decline . . . the Osmonds!

In the mid-1970s the area of Liverpool known as the Dingle was probably still best known for being the birthplace and home to Richard Starkey – one of the many Starkeys who came from the Dingle but the only one to metamorphose into Ringo Starr, the only drummer with whom Paul McCartney, John Lennon and George Harrison were able to forge any kind of lasting musical relationship.

By the 1980s, with riots on the streets of Merseyside and memories of Ringo beginning to fade, the Dingle and its well-defined neighbouring areas of Warwick Street, Wellie Road, Granby, Lodge Lane and Upper Parly became collectively known as Toxteth.

Myth has it that, dispatched to film the kick-off in the streets, a hapless southern TV reporter, knowing nothing of the true local topography, took his cue from the official road sign, referring in his bulletin that night and identifying the scene of the riots as being Toxteth. Other broadcasters and newspapers followed suit, dubbing the Liverpool unrest the 'Toxteth Riots' and thereby establishing a place name that up to that time, locals had rarely, if ever, used but subsequently have never been able to shake off.

In 1973, when the Dingle was still the Dingle, I was a young teacher at the newly formed Shorefields School. At the stroke of a pen, someone in Whitehall had decreed that four very disparate schools, spread over three very tribally separate sites should coalesce into one single comprehensive school. Thus, Dingle Vale Boys

(amongst whose alumni was one Richard Starkey) joined Dingle Vale Girls, Tocky Tech and Wellington Road to become the singular Shorefields Comprehensive.

Someone at Whitehall must have been having a laugh; that same year a similar stroke of a pen had instigated ROSLA, the raising of the school leaving age whereby children who had been led to believe that they would be free to quit school on attaining the age of fifteen, would now have to endure their education until reaching the age of sixteen.

Unsurprisingly, this led to a significant number of kids being somewhat pissed off – especially those who had already deemed it a pointless waste of time to be forced to attend school at all, yet alone to have to stay on until virtual adulthood!

For reasons that were never explained I, a mere probationary teacher, was given responsibility for a number of the classes in which these disgruntled victims of the system were expected to do little more than kill the extra time they'd been given. I had some sympathy with the plight of these unfortunate ROSLA souls. Having myself been a reluctant, rebellious, truculent and often truanting pupil, I recognized the deadening mix of frustration and apathy that now greeted me daily as a teacher, while I was expected to teach a humanities curriculum and somehow engage and stimulate these reluctant minds with distant geographies, ancient histories and all kinds of global phenomena that would, even had I been graced with the gifts of David Attenborough, still have been met with glazed-eyed, gob-gaping disinterest.

In the staff room I tried to raise with the more senior staff, who bore the responsibility for designing and instituting this curriculum, how best we were supposed to ignite the vital spark of interest in these kids if what we were starting out with was so culturally remote; might it not be a better idea, I ventured, if we were to begin with *their* lives, *their* culture, sparking interest and engagement via the specificity of *their* lives and then broadening out, opening up to the rest of the world, to wider history? I was brusquely reminded that as a probationary teacher my job was to teach what I was told to teach and to stick to the curriculum which had been assembled by minds much more experienced, attuned and qualified than mine.

And I tried. I went back to one of my classes and, as the curriculum prescribed, told everyone to open their books and pay attention to the passage dealing with the staple diet of the Bora Indian of the Amazon Basin. And then, faced with the prospect of another double period of passive hostility and a shared sense of just having to doggedly crawl against the clock and get through it all, I closed the book, sat down at my desk, put my feet up, stared out towards the window and in the same voice, with the same accent and words that the kids used amongst themselves, I started to speak the story of Billy and Icky . . .

'*Two little fifteen year old scals from the Dingle who hadn't been near no school for three months now la an' they weren't gonna go neither cos school was just like shit an' who'd wanna waste his time with the dickheads divs an homos? But then Billy said, "We've gotta go back in – today!" Icky looked up, disgusted, "What?" Billy nodded, "If we wanna go to Sugarloaf Mountain, we'll have to go in". Icky laughed, "Sugarloaf what?" Billy frowned. There are some things you don't laugh about. He turned and fixed Icky with his gaze, daring him to risk laughing again as he repeated, "Sugarloaf Mountain." Icky just nodded this time, pretending he knew what Billy was talking about. Icky did a lot of that with Billy. "Oh. Okay then", was all that Icky said*'.

I carried on in a similar vein, busking most of it but encouraged, even inspired by the level of attention and concentration on the faces of kids whose usual mask of surly resentment had fallen away, replaced now by a rapt and eager alertness as they soaked up Billy and Icky's antics and mounting dilemma. Even though I was making up the tale on the hoof I instinctively knew that I was now responsible both to the kids in the tale and the kids to whom the tale was being told. I knew I had to treat these lives seriously. The same instinct understood that seriousness of purpose is no reason to close the door on comic possibility and I exploited to the full both the intentional and unintentional comic strain in the character of Icky, a willing performing Fool to Billy's sombre feral Lear. The kids in the class loved it. And oh how I loved it that they loved it and was thrilled as they laughed joyously and fretted openly for the fate of the characters in this story that came directly from their world, from them – flawed and even doomed

they may be but these all too recognizable characters were, for them, heroes.

We never got back to the curriculum. I serialized the story of Billy and Icky for all my ROSLA classes, some of which had now swelled to include notorious serial truants who, like the characters in the story, hadn't been inside school for months but had now been persuaded back by their mates' re-telling passages of this saga of Billy and Icky. I later learnt that some of the kids selectively creeping back to the classes weren't even on the Shorefields register!

Despite the kids' enthusiasm for these storytelling sessions I found myself starting to question what I was up to, agonizing as to whether what I was really doing was denying them education and, instead, merely entertaining them. It was to be some years yet before I was to learn that there is nothing 'mere' about entertainment and that the tendency to apply that pejorative prefix is largely the preserve of those who are singularly incapable of ever entertaining anything or anyone.

Concluding that on balance and despite my own misgivings, the storytelling sessions were at least ones in which the ROSLA classes were engaged, I carried on with the tale of the two Dingle scallies forced to flee the city and to try and live in the alien environment of wildest Wales where the parenting that each of them has been denied is belatedly given to them. That Kidder, their potestial saviour is ultimately revealed to be the one type of human being that Billy and Icky most profess to hate – a male homosexual – is one of those twists of storytelling fate that never failed to shock and stun those classroom listeners every bit as much as it stunned the story's central pair. Kidder? They'd come to love Kidder . . . and now he was a . . . he was . . . was . . . a . . .

Watching these kids, many of whom undoubtedly shared with Billy and Icky this deep, ingrained, knee-jerk prejudice, listening to them in the classroom, wrestling with the dilemma that the story had now thrown them, seeing them try to square their previous benign, loving and admiring view of Kidder with what they now had to think of him, I started to get the beginning of a sense that if this was what 'merely' entertaining the kids meant, then perhaps

we weren't doing too bad after all. Years after I'd left teaching it was not uncommon for me to be confronted in a pub or street or restaurant by some strapping and sometimes fearsome looking thirty-something who would turn out to be one of the ex-kids from those ROSLA classes, addressing me still as 'Sir' and eagerly recalling those classes which featured the exploits of Billy and Icky. No ex-pupil ever stopped me to recall and remember the dietary preference of the Bora Indian of the Amazon basin.

Each term the ROSLA kids became less and less as each of their birthdays finally rolled around, freeing them from further schooling and allowing them to go out into the world, get a job, make some money. This could still be done in this different age, when the factories and the foundries and the car plants and the docks still had some life left in them along with capacity to absorb fresh-from-school youngsters whose only qualification, a willingness to work, was the only one required.

I still had other classes to teach, younger classes made up of kids who seemed to see the purpose of school and education and who would happily get on with their work while I sat at my desk quietly getting on with marking.

Or not. Because as well as being a teacher I was on my way to becoming a writer. And in the old Dingle Vale Boys building, at the teacher's desk in a classroom where former pupil Richard Starkey had also sat, I was busy writing, apparently marking pupils' work but in truth, quickly scribbling, trying to set down, before the bell, the latest scene in the work I'd been commissioned to write for the Liverpool Everyman Theatre.

I'd already had the great good fortune of seeing some work professionally produced – a half hour play for the BBC, an adaptation of an Alan Plater play for the Everyman and a one-act pub show for Vanload, the Everyman's five-piece guerilla group of actors charged with the splendidly well-intentioned but potentially life-shortening mission of taking theatre out of the theatre and presenting it instead in some of the toughest, roughest, Merseyside pubs and clubs in which hardened and dedicated drinkers had miraculously managed to survive, flourish and happily live their

lives thus far without any concern whatsoever for the complete lack of theatre in those lives.

Having paid my own community-commitment dues with the play I'd written for Vanload, I'd now been asked by the Everyman's director (and brilliant de facto producer), Alan Dossor, to write a new, full-length musical play, scheduled for a four-week run at the Everyman. In terms of the theatrical then and now could there be a more revealing half sentence than those last few lines? A young, semi-experienced, part-time writer/full-time teacher was being offered a four-week run of a new play at one of Britain's principle regional theatres.

Such was the theatrical landscape at that time that this situation was not unique to Liverpool or the Everyman. Throughout Britain theatres were, to a greater or lesser extent, embracing the notion that including new plays in the repertoire did not necessarily create mass audience-desertion and certain death at the box office. Indeed, some of those theatres had already begun to discover that by presenting new plays they were beginning to attract a wider, younger, non-traditional theatregoing audience without significantly alienating their existing loyal patrons. The opportunity and possibility that had come about for me in Liverpool was being replicated up and down the country with writers being commissioned and produced in Devon and Scotland, the North East, in Hull and Stoke and Nottingham and Leeds, in Wales and Leicester, Scarborough, Sheffield, Lancaster, Manchester, in just about every British large town and city, all of this happening and, in large part made possible, because theatre was the beneficiary of a much more benign political attitude towards the arts in general.

The Arts Council of the time was happy to invest faith and finance and to put it as directly as possible into the hands of those who practised rather than the hands of those later appointed (it seemed) to create layer upon layer of mediation, bureaucracy and administration between the funders and the funded. In this now long-gone age there was, simply, an atmosphere of greater trust, of collaboration even. And a marked result of this was that theatres and directors were at much greater liberty to take the kind of risk that the Everyman and Alan Dossor took when they commissioned a part-

time, barely-proven playwright to write a show about the four most famous sons of Merseyside.

Today's aspirant young playwright might reasonably assume that given the paucity of the theatrical dues I'd paid up to that time this as yet to be written new work of mine would be premiering in the theatre's studio where, as is so often the practice today, the young playwright could have the opportunity of seeing his or her work tried out and tested in a safer smaller space than the main stage. But in the very different theatrical landscape of which I write, the Liverpool Everyman and indeed, almost every comparable theatre in the country could make no distinction between 'main' and 'studio' because there was, simply, gloriously, terrifyingly, just 'the stage' – the one big, gaping stage where nothing can be hidden, no bets hedged, no quarter given, where faults and flaws are instantly and ruthlessly exposed for the sham and the fudge, the fatal over-reaching or failure of nerve that they undoubtedly are. On the page, in the rehearsal room, in the bijou intimacy of the studio theatre the small deceits, fledgling errors of the playwright and his play can be overlooked, go undetected, be generously disguised by the wisdom, skill and talent of his or her collaborators. So too, in the confines of a studio space, can this work be generously indulged by an audience that in its very compactness and intimacy seems always to become a much more benign, tolerant and forgiving beast than it would ever be when watching the same work played out in the unforgiving auditorium upstairs.

When Alan Dossor gave me the responsibility for what would be on the Everyman stage between May and June 1974 he offered no safety net, not for me, not for himself. There was no literary department at the theatre, no dramaturge, literary manager or script editor. There was no process in which I had to consult, pitch, be mentored, developed, group-critiqued, supported, mediated, nurtured; between the man whose task was to write the play and the man whose task was to direct it there was nothing. Although the creation and presentation of new work was at the core of the Everyman's operation, it would be many years still before the business of coming up with new plays would become the 'new writing' fetish of today in which, with no doubt the very best of intentions, layer upon layer of advice

and help has been wedged between the one who writes the play and the one who stages it.

In the days when I was still half-teacher, half-playwright my longing, my dream was that I would somehow find a way to become not just a semi-dramatist but a fully fledged, full-time playwright. I didn't hate teaching. Rather than see it as some restrictive yoke, I appreciated that my teacher's salary paid the bills and for a young married man with his first child on the way there was no way that I could give that up and expect our small family to be entirely dependent upon the unpredictable, intermittent rewards that had thus far flowed from my pen. I continued to teach with, I thought, good grace and humour. To anyone who cared to look more deeply, however, it must have been obvious that my heart was not involved in the way it should be if you're going to be the kind of teacher that the kids at Shorefields deserved. Mrs King was one such teacher. One who cared to look more deeply. And one day in the staff room, she looked at me and said:

'*You're not enjoying it any more are you?*'
'*What?*' I countered, defensive.
'*Teaching*', she smiled.

Dorothy King and her Progress Class was something of an institution at Shorefields. Many of Dorothy's fellow staff openly attested to the belief that she should be *in* an institution! Progress Class was the euphemistic gossamer draped across the shoulders of what had formerly been known as the remedial unit, providing classes and individual tuition to kids who, for whatever reason, were having difficulty keeping up in those regular classes where the Bora Indian, on their diet of maize, continued to flourish. Along with those who needed to catch up on, say, lessons missed because of illness, the Progress Class became the repository for every don't-know-what-to-do-with kid in the school, those who today would be identified as dyslexic, hyperactive, dyspraxic, attention-deficient etc. Mrs King welcomed them all without distinction; disturbed, dyslexic, delinquent, it didn't matter, she just saw kids who needed a certain kind of mothering calm and gave them that in spades. In return the kids would do anything for her. Having heard her talking

to a fellow member of staff one spring morning, lamenting how no one had thought to bring in flowers to brighten up the classroom a group of the kids, out at lunchtime, found themselves in nearby Princes Park. And seeing the display of spring flowers newly planted by the council ground staff, all of whom had now gone off to lunch. . . .

When Mrs King got back from her own lunch and opened the Progress Class door she was met with a clutch of proud and smiling faces barely visible beyond the mounds of lilies, pansies, snapdragon and gladioli that now festooned the classroom.

The day that she confronted me in the staff room and persuaded me to acknowledge that I wasn't overjoyed to be doing the kind of teaching I was, Dorothy King suggested that I go and work in her department. Having heard of the work I'd done with the ROSLA kids she rightly believed that I'd be a much more effective teacher and find far more reward if I worked in the less curriculum-controlled world of the Progress Class. I accepted and within days was working alongside a woman guided not by an educational orthodoxy or rigid philosophy but by the innate goodness that dictated that every child no matter how difficult or damaged was worthy of her care and attention.

She was also, it must be said, one tube stop short of barking – a fact that only seemed to endear her more to the kids in her charge, all of whom probably recognized in her apparent eccentricity, the kind of whizz-bang, stoned nuttiness that is so often the state of childhood and which Dorothy King, despite her years, still seemed to possess.

Sometimes this was manifested in sudden and wild enthusiasms that resulted in sketchily planned and barely organized events – one such being the Progress Class day out. The events of that day inspired what would eventually become the film and then stage play *Our Day Out* (the latest version included here in the form of *Our Day Out: The Musical*). In the fictional version I chose to portray the trip as involving just one school coach but on the actual day, Mrs King had commissioned three double-decker buses, destined to transport and deposit almost two hundred excited inner city Liverpool kids on the unsuspecting coastal towns of North Wales. It was no surprise when the school's top brass hastily deputed one of

their number to join the trip in the hope that his presence might curb some of the potential excess and anarchy that might be unleashed in the absence of such a counterbalance. The putting together of these two archetypal opposing forces meant that for an alert, fledgling playwright the day itself offered up the arc of a story that was just begging to be made into a play.

It was while I was still working in the Progress Class that *John Paul George Ringo . . . and Bert* opened at the Everyman. My ambition for the play had been that it would find an audience and be deemed to have been worthy of its place in that season's programme. It mattered to me that the work would also be considered worthy of the stunning talent that was brought to the production by the extraordinary group of young actors and musicians that was then the permanent company.

Amongst that company there was, to my ears anyway, never any talk of things such as the West End, transfers or awards; such talk would undoubtedly have been regarded then as some kind of betrayal of the radical, politically challenging, theatrically subversive ethos that the theatre embodied. Nobody involved in the production approached the opening night with thoughts beyond the four-week run on Hope Street. If we thought about the future at all, I suppose the actors looked to the start of the next season's work, beginning in September under the directorship of Jonathan Pryce, who was taking over while Alan Dossor spent a year with the BBC learning to develop and make films. Barbara Dickson, Terry Canning and Bobby Ash, the show's musicians, were no doubt thinking of resuming their regular club gigs, one-night stands and recording. As I got into a taxi the night of the show's opening, I was thinking less about the night itself and whether the now very overdue woman sat beside me would make it to the end of the show without going into labour. Having just narrowly been turned down by the BBC for a Fellowship which would have secured me the full-time writer status I so craved, perhaps I was also thinking that like it or not, I'd just have to plough on and continue in the dual role of half-teacher/half-playwright for the foreseeable future.

Then the house lights began to fade, the stage lights came up, the straggle of musicians who'd been busking Beatles songs outside the

theatre now made their way along the aisles, clambered up and took their places onstage as the band; a single spot picked out George Costigan as Bert, the evening's narrator, and Bernard Hill, Trevor Eve, Philip Joseph and Anthony Sher walked on as John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. Nothing was ever quite the same again.

Willy Russell
December 2015

Blood Brothers

Blood Brothers was first performed at the Liverpool Playhouse on 8 January, 1983, with the following cast:

Mrs Johnstone (*Mother*)	Barbara Dickson
Mickey	George Costigan
Eddie	Andrew C. Wadsworth
Sammy	Peter Christian
Linda	Amanda York
Mrs Lyons	Wendy Murray
Mr Lyons	Alan Leith
Narrator	Andrew Schofield
Chorus	Hazel Ellerby
	Eithne Brown
	David Edge

Directed by Chris Bond
Designed by Andy Greenfield
Musical Director Peter Filleul
(Presented by arrangement with Bob Swash)

Blood Brothers was subsequently presented by Bob Swash, by arrangement with Liverpool Playhouse, at the Lyric Theatre, London, on 11 April 1983, with the following cast:

Mrs Johnstone (*Mother*)	Barbara Dickson
Mickey	George Costigan
Eddie	Andrew C. Wadsworth
Sammy	Peter Christian
Linda	Kate Fitzgerald
Mrs Lyons	Wendy Murray
Mr Lyons	Alan Leith
Narrator	Andrew Schofield
Chorus	Hazel Ellerby
	David Edge
	Ian Burns
	Oliver Beamish

Directed by Chris Bond and Danny Hiller
Designed by Andy Greenfield
Musical Director Richard Spanswick

The setting for *Blood Brothers* is an open stage, with the different settings and time spans being indicated by lighting changes, with the minimum of properties and furniture. The whole play should flow along easily and smoothly, with no cumbersome scene changes. Two areas are semi-permanent – the Lyons' house and the Johnstone house. We see the interior of the Lyons' comfortable home but usually only the exterior front door of the Johnstone house, with the 'interior' scenes taking place outside the door. The area between the two houses acts as communal ground for street scenes, park scenes, etc.

Act One

The Overture comes to a close.

Mrs Johnstone (*singing*) Tell me it's not true, Say it's just a story.

The **Narrator** *steps forward*.

Narrator (*speaking*) So did y' hear the story of the Johnstone twins?

As like each other as two new pins,
Of one womb born, on the self same day,
How one was kept and one given away?
An' did you never hear how the Johnstones died,
Never knowing that they shared one name,
Till the day they died, when a mother cried
My own dear sons lie slain.

The Lights come up to show a re-enactment of the final moments of the play – the deaths of **Mickey** *and* **Edward**. *The scene fades*.

Mrs Johnstone *enters with her back to the audience*.

An' did y' never hear of the mother, so cruel,
There's a stone in place of her heart?
Then bring her on and come judge for yourselves
How she came to play this part.

The **Narrator** *exits*.

Music is heard as **Mrs Johnstone** *turns and walks towards us. She is aged thirty but looks more like fifty*.

Mrs Johnstone (*singing*) Once I had a husband,
You know the sort of chap,
I met him at a dance and how he came on with the chat.
He said my eyes were deep blue pools,
My skin as soft as snow,
He told me I was sexier than Marilyn Monroe.

And we went dancing,
We went dancing.
Then, of course, I found
That I was six weeks overdue.
We got married at the registry an' then we had a 'do'.
We all had curly salmon sandwiches,
An' how the ale did flow,
They said the bride was lovelier than Marilyn Monroe.
And we went dancing,
Yes, we went dancing.
Then the baby came along,
We called him Darren Wayne,
Then three months on I found that I was in the club again.
An' though I still fancied dancing,
My husband wouldn't go,
With a wife he said was twice the size of Marilyn Monroe.
No more dancing
No more dancing.
By the time I was twenty-five,
I looked like forty-two,
With seven hungry mouths to feed and one more nearly due.
Me husband, he'd walked out on me,
A month or two ago,
For a girl they say who looks a bit like Marilyn Monroe.
And they go dancing
They go dancing
Yes they go dancing
They go . . .

An irate **Milkman** (*the* **Narrator**) *rushes in to rudely interrupt the song*.

Milkman Listen love, I'm up to here with hard luck stories; you own me three pounds, seventeen and fourpence an' either you pay up today, like now, or I'll be forced to cut off your deliveries.

Mrs Johnstone I said, I said, look, next week I'll pay y' . . .

Milkman Next week, next week! Next week never arrives around here. I'd be a rich man if next week ever came.

Mrs Johnstone But look, look, I start a job next week. I'll have money comin' in an' I'll be able to pay y'. Y' can't stop the milk. I need the milk. I'm pregnant.

Milkman Well, don't look at me, love. I might be a milkman but it's got nothin' to do with me. Now you've been told, no money, no milk.

The **Milkman** *exits*.

Mrs Johnstone *stands alone and we hear some of her kids, off.*

Kid One (*off*) Mam, Mam the baby's cryin'. He wants his bottle. Where's the milk?

Kid Two (*off*) 'Ey Mam, how come I'm on free dinners? All the other kids laugh at me.

Kid Three (*off*) 'Ey Mother, I'm starvin' an' there's nothin' in. There never bloody well is.

Mrs Johnstone (*perfunctorily*) Don't swear, I've told y'.

Kid Four (*off*) Mum, I can't sleep, I'm hungry, I'm starvin' . . .

Kids (*off*) An' me, Mam. An' me. An' me.

Mrs Johnstone (*singing*) I know it's hard on all you kids,
But try and get some sleep.
Next week I'll be earnin',
We'll have loads of things to eat,
We'll have ham, an' jam, an' spam an'
(*Speaking*.) Roast Beef, Yorkshire Puddin', Battenberg Cake,
Chicken an' Chips, Corned Beef, Sausages, Treacle Tart,
Mince an' Spuds, Milk Shake Mix for the Baby:

There is a chorus of groaning ecstasy from the **Kids**.

Mrs Johnstone *picks up the tune again*.
When I bring home the dough,
We'll live like kings, like bright young things,
Like Marilyn Monroe.
And we'll go dancing . . .

Mrs Johnstone *hums a few bars of the song, and dances a few steps, as she makes her way to her place of work –*

Mrs Lyons' *house. During the dance she acquires a brush, dusters and a mop bucket*.

Mrs Lyons' *house where* **Mrs Johnstone** *is working*.

Mrs Lyons *enters, carrying a parcel*.

Mrs Lyons Hello, Mrs Johnstone, how are you? Is the job working out all right for you?

Mrs Johnstone It's, erm, great. Thank you. It's such a lovely house it's a pleasure to clean it.

Mrs Lyons It's a pretty house isn't it? It's a pity it's so big. I'm finding it rather large at present.

Mrs Johnstone Oh. Yeh. With Mr Lyons being away an' that? When does he come back, Mrs Lyons?

Mrs Lyons Oh, it seems such a long time. The Company sent him out there for nine months, so, what's that, he'll be back in about five months' time.

Mrs Johnstone Ah, you'll be glad when he's back won't you? The house won't feel so empty then, will it?

Mrs Lyons *begins to unwrap her parcel*.

Mrs Lyons Actually, Mrs J, we bought such a large house for the – for the children – we thought children would come along.

Mrs Johnstone Well y' might still be able to . . .

Mrs Lyons No, I'm afraid . . . We've been trying for such a long time now . . . I wanted to adopt but . . . Mr Lyons is . . . well he says he wanted his own son, not someone else's. Myself, I believe that an adopted child can become one's own.

Mrs Johnstone Ah yeh . . . yeh. Ey, it's weird though, isn't it. Here's you can't have kids, an' me, I can't stop havin' them. Me husband used to say that all we had to do was shake hands and I'd

be in the club. He must have shook hands with me before he left. I'm havin' another one y' know.

Mrs Lyons Oh, I see . . .

Mrs Johnstone Oh but look, look it's all right, Mrs Lyons, I'll still be able to do me work. Havin' babies, it's like clockwork to me. I'm back on me feet an' workin' the next day y' know. If I have this one at the weekend I won't even need to take one day off. I love this job, y' know. We can just manage to get by now –

She is stopped by **Mrs Lyons** *putting the contents of the package, a pair of new shoes, on to the table*.

Jesus Christ, Mrs Lyons, what are y' trying to do?

Mrs Lyons My God, what's wrong?

Mrs Johnstone The shoes . . . the shoes . . .

Mrs Lyons Pardon?

Mrs Johnstone New shoes on the table, take them off . . .

Mrs Lyons *does so*.

Mrs Johnstone (*relieved*) Oh God, Mrs Lyons, never put new shoes on a table . . . You never know what'll happen.

Mrs Lyons (*twigging it; laughing*) Oh . . . you mean you're superstitious?

Mrs Johnstone No, but you never put new shoes on the table.

Mrs Lyons Oh go on with you. Look, if it will make you any happier I'll put them away . . .

Mrs Lyons *exits with the shoes.*

Music is heard as **Mrs Johnstone** *warily approaches the table and the* **Narrator** *enters*.

Narrator There's shoes upon the table an' a joker in the pack,
The salt's been spilled and a looking glass cracked,
There's one lone magpie overhead.

Mrs Johnstone I'm not superstitious.

Narrator The Mother said.

Mrs Johnstone I'm not superstitious.

Narrator The Mother said.

The **Narrator** *exits to re-enter as a* **Gynaecologist**.

Mrs Johnstone What are you doin' here? The milk bill's not due 'till Thursday.

Gynaecologist (*producing a listening funnel*) Actually I've given up the milk round and gone into medicine. I'm your gynaecologist. (*He begins to examine her*.) OK, Mummy, let's have a little listen to the baby's ticker, shall we?

Mrs Johnstone I was dead worried about havin' another baby, you know, Doctor. I didn't see how we were gonna manage with another mouth to feed. But now I've got me little job we'll be OK. If I'm careful we can just scrape by, even with another mouth to feed.

The **Gynaecologist** *completes his examination*.

Gynaecologist Mouths, Mummy.

Mrs Johnstone What?

Gynaecologist Plural, Mrs Johnstone. Mouths to feed. You're expecting twins. Congratulations. And the next one please, Nurse.

The **Gynaecologist** *exits*.

Mrs Johnstone, *numbed by the news, moves back to her work, dusting the table upon which the shoes had been placed*.

Mrs Lyons *enters*.

Mrs Lyons Hello, Mrs. J. How are you?

There is no reply.

(*Registering the silence*) Mrs J? Anything wrong?

Mrs Johnstone I had it all worked out.

Mrs Lyons What's the matter?

Mrs Johnstone We were just getting straight.

Mrs Lyons Why don't you sit down.

Mrs Johnstone With one more baby we could have managed. But not with two. The Welfare have already been on to me. They say I'm incapable of controllin' the kids I've already got. They say I should put some of them into care. But I won't. I love the bones of every one of them. I'll even love these two when they come along. But like they say at the Welfare, kids can't live on love alone.

Mrs Lyons Twins? You're expecting twins?

The **Narrator** *enters*.

Narrator How quickly an idea, planted, can take root and grow into a plan.

The thought conceived in this very room
Grew as surely as a seed, in a mother's womb.

The **Narrator** *exits*.

Mrs Lyons (*almost inaudibly*) Give one to me.

Mrs Johnstone What?

Mrs Lyons (*containing her excitement*) Give one of them to me.

Mrs Johnstone Give one to you?

Mrs Lyons Yes . . . yes.

Mrs Johnstone (*taking it almost as a joke*) But y' can't just . . .

Mrs Lyons When are you due?

Mrs Johnstone Erm, well about . . . Oh, but Mrs . . .

Mrs Lyons Quickly, quickly tell me . . . when are you due?

Mrs Johnstone July he said, the beginning of . . .

Mrs Lyons July . . . and my husband doesn't get back until, the middle of July. He need never guess . . .

Mrs Johnstone (*amused*) Oh, it's mad . . .

Mrs Lyons I know, it is. It's mad . . . but it's wonderful, it's perfect. Look, look, you're what, four months pregnant, but you're only just beginning to show . . . so, so I'm four months pregnant and I'm only just beginning to show. (*She grabs a cushion and arranges it beneath her dress*.) Look, look. I could have got pregnant just before he went away. But I didn't tell him in case I miscarried, I didn't want to worry him whilst he was away. But when he arrives home I tell him we were wrong, the doctors were wrong. I have a baby, our baby. Mrs Johnstone, it will work, it will if only you'll . . .

Mrs Johnstone Oh, Mrs Lyons, you can't be serious.

Mrs Lyons You said yourself, you said you had too many children already.

Mrs Johnstone Yeh, but I don't know if I wanna give one away.

Mrs Lyons Already you're being threatened by the Welfare people. Mrs Johnstone, with two more children how can you possibly avoid some of them being put into care? Surely, it's better to give one child to me. Look, at least if the child was with me you'd be able to see him every day, as you came to work.

Mrs Lyons *stares at* **Mrs Johnstone**, *willing her to agree*.

Please, Mrs Johnstone. Please.

Mrs Johnstone Are y' . . . are y' that desperate to have a baby?

Mrs Lyons (*singing*) Each day I look out from this window,
I see him with his friends, I hear him call,
I rush down but as I fold my arms around him,
He's gone. Was he ever there at all?
I've dreamed of all the places I would take him,
The games we'd play, the stories I would tell,
The jokes we'd share, the clothing I would make him,
I reach out. But as I do. He fades away.

The melody shifts into that of **Mrs Johnstone** *who is looking at* **Mrs Lyons**, *feeling for her*. **Mrs Lyons** *gives a half smile and a shrug, perhaps slightly embarrassed at what she has revealed*. **Mrs Johnstone** *turns and looks at the room she is in. Looking up in*