

# **A Kick Up The Arts Podcast**

## **Episode One: Is 'Regional' A Dirty Word?**

### **Large Print Transcript**



**Saphena Aziz**

**Host – playwright, performer, producer  
and musician**



**Luke Barnes**

**Guest –**

**Playwright, actor and director**



**Catherine Jones**

**Guest – freelancer journalist for  
publications like The Stage and former  
Arts Editor for the Liverpool Echo**

**ANNOUNCER 1:** Welcome to Unity's brand-new podcast, Kick Up The Arts. This first episode was recorded prior to the developments of COVID-19 that has seen a closure of all theatres across the UK. Consequently, some of the information and dates referenced may no longer be accurate. To find out how you can support UK theatre, audiences and artists throughout this time please visit the resource centre at [unitytheatreliverpool.co.uk](http://unitytheatreliverpool.co.uk)

This first episode explores the word 'Regional'. But before we jump right in, here's a word from one of Unity's Patrons John Bishop.

**JOHN BISHOP:** Hello to everyone at the Unity and happy 40th birthday. I'm proud to be a patron of this Theatre and next year the Unity is trying to raise £40,000 to represent the 40 years that it's been open to continue its work in bringing people to the theatre who wouldn't normally come and to help them create their

own work and see it played out in a proper theatre environment.

It's an exciting year ahead - good luck everyone and please support it if you can.

**ANNOUNCER 2:** To support Unity visit

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**SAPHENA:** My name - I suppose I should do my own introduction

- is **SAPHENA** Aziz. I'm a playwright, singer and develop choirs -

that kind of stuff... but I'm here today with **LUKE** Barnes - and

**LUKE** - I'm going to read this, which says award-winning northern

playwright from Liverpool who's recent plays include Lost Boys,

National Theatre - I went to see that, I came to see that at the

Unity - The Jumper Factory, Young Vic and All We Ever Wanted

was Everything, by the Bush Theatre and various venues - and

also our Sister in Arms here is **CATHERINE** Jones who is a

freelance arts journalist and writer based in Liverpool whose

writing credits include reviewing for the Stage and you're also the former Arts editor of the Liverpool Echo and I think that's probably where I know you from. Liverpool.

**CATHERINE JONES:** Yes, That it is, yes. It's a big village, Liverpool.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah, Great. And like, before we get onto the meat of our conversation today is, **LUKE** - I'm gonna ask you a question because I think this is really really interesting. You were in Game of Thrones - how did you get that gig?

**[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE BARNES:** Amazing. This'll never ever leave me.

**SAPHENA:** [LAUGHTER] It's amazing! I did, I thought that's amazing.

**LUKE:** I used to be an actor. I went to drama school and did that for like three years, and was an actor for about... for about four or five years, I think. I stopped doing it, I reckon, about seven years ago now, But, em, but yeah... I went to drama school... auditioned for it... did it... and then never worked again.

[LAUGHTER]

**LUKE:** Well I did actually. I did a few episodes of - I did an episode of Skins, and like I did that thing for the BBC. Yeah, I did a few things, but like... yeah. Wasn't for me. That was amazing. That was, eh, that was like a once in a lifetime experience.

**SAPHENA:** That's amazing isn't it?

**LUKE:** Yeah it was brilliant.

**SAPHENA:** So d'you... so obviously our talk today is going to be on regional theatre, but let's feel happy to ping pong around I think. Because surely as an actor as well, that probably gives you an insight doesn't it? Into being a writer, d'you think?

**LUKE:** Ehm, it's interesting. because I was thinking this morning, on the way here... this is like... this is .. I'll just go for it anyway. I got this idea of like, shame and how shame is like, useful as like an artist. And I think what being an actor taught me actually was that like I felt a great deal of shame about my ehm, sort of lack of purpose as social tool as an actor? Or like, I felt I was sort of like... sort of like, being an actor I felt, from my experience - I'm sure it's not true for everyone - played to, like, ego and not like purpose, And I felt a great deal of that shame I felt like... in that sort of



space, made me start thinking about why we tell stories and why art exists.

**SAPHENA:** Wow.

**LUKE:** I think that was the start of the process for me, As an actor. I think probably my rejection of that world was the reason I started doing this and found this path through the arts. But that's like on a, sort of like, deep philosophical level... but, like on a practical level, all the lessons I think know about playwriting, or storytelling, came from the lessons I learned about acting. So, as an actor you've got to understand like that characters have a goal (...) characters got a journey, they encounter problems and you know succeed and fail to achieve them. Then they have a big problem and whatever... all that stuff is inherent in the questions you ask as an actor

**SAPHENA:** Sorry, sorry to interrupt you there -probably not great for a podcast. But I think David Mamet and certainly Sam Shepard as well - David Mamet has written a book I think about how it's really great if... he always recommends that writers at least go and do some acting 'cause it gives you an insight of the other side of the fence I think. Really fascinating.

**LUKE:** Yeh, for sure. I think the best... well, not the best... but the writers I like, a lot of them are either from like... a lot of them are former actors. A lot of them have a sense of place and like linguistics of what words feel like in your mouth. I think that's an important thing to like feel I think. Yeah, 'cause like, actors got to say them and they got to... I think you can understand how words feel - this sounds, this is so indulgent -

**[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE:** How words feel in the space.

**SAPHENA:** Hey listen, we're doing a podcast on theatre - it doesn't get more indulgent.

**CATHERINE:** Do you find that when you're writing your plays you are speaking them? Do you hear the dialogue in your head or do you speak it out loud? I sometimes when I'm writing my copy, I read it out loud to see how it reads and how someone will read it in their mind, So, in a way, hearing it in your mind is how it will come out of someone's mouth

**LUKE:** Yeah. It's interesting that. I think like - with things like dialogue - I don't think you can teach it. I think, like, you've got to feel it and I think like... I can't describe it. I don't, I don't say it out loud... but I think I can - I feel the rhythm of it? If that makes sense?

**CATHERINE:** Yes.

**SAPHENA:** Totally. 'Cause I... it's one of the reasons why I can't listen to music when I write. Because music has been in my life for a That was the start of the process for me. long time in a company around lots of everything to do with Voice. So, often times when I'm writing as well. Yeah I really really do. Like a word will just be off beat I think 'I need to replace it that's just not the right rhythm for me'.

**LUKE:** That's all it is. It sounds stupid, but like, so much about writing is about noticing what feels jarring. And like, then questioning why that's jarring. And like problem solving. People over inflect that. it's not actually a matter of trying to be clever. It's just a matter of feeling what doesn't feel right and how you can make that feel right and do and do something. People forget that,

writing isn't an intellectual act, it's just becoming so familiar with the act of reading that you can write. I know it sounds silly but like you've gotta just... the reason I can write theatre - I've never done a course in it, I don't read books on it, I don't know anything about it - it's just I've spent a lot of time reading plays or scripts and watching theatre, so I sort of know what I think; my experience with... of what I think theatre wants - needs- to be. How I think theatre can be useful. And then the practice of writing it is just like... the stuff that I enjoy. So the language rhythms and like the things in it that... the set piece, the music, the songs or whatever it is - it's 'cause I like that.

**SAPHENA:** That's fantastic.

**LUKE:** And it's a really simple question of saying like; what do I want to do and what do I like and that's how you make Art really. There's no point going along those lines of mad intellectual

benders where you just want to say 'I just want to make a funny show about sadness'.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**CATHERINE:** I think you should give some tips to other writers. I judged the first three Liverpool Hope Playwriting Prizes and I only had to read the final scripts. You know, they were whittled down from about two hundred entries to the final ten. It's interesting what you say then about the rhythm and the music and the naturalness of it and... not all of the entrants at all times had that sort of an over intellectualising it and trying to be too clever and then it not feeling right... and you know, you know when you read it when it feels right.

**SAPHENA:** Is the Hope - look at this segway people -

**[LAUGHTER]**

**CATHERINE:** We're into two different podcasts already!

**SAPHENA:** Is the Hope Playwriting prize a regional writing prize?

**CATHERINE:** It's an international writing prize - well, no, it's national. It's a national writing prize.

**SAPHENA:** It's comedy isn't it?

**CATHERINE:** It is, which is incredibly tricky to write.

**SAPHENA:** And is it affiliated with the Royal Court in Liverpool?

**CATHERINE:** Yes it's the Royal Court and Liverpool Hope University, they're the two partners in it. So, I think it's the second

highest - I'm giving it a plug here, aren't I? I'm not a judge in the new competition, they've had a little change, a shake up in the judges is fine, but yes; it's for a new comedy play – not necessarily a Royal Court style comedy play, just a new comedy play. And, ehm, it's a ten thousand pound first prize. So, I think - after Bruntwood- it's the second highest prize for playwriting competition - I think - in the country... I may be wrong. And it's an anonymous submission.

**SAPHENA:** Oh, so it's the same as Bruntwood as well then, isn't it?

**CATHERINE:** Yes.

**LUKE:** So is the deal the play goes on at the Royal Court, then?



**CATHERINE:** Not necessarily. The first play went on here actually (Unity Theatre) – Omnibus, the first winner. Katie Mulh –

**SAPHENA:** Oh, that's because the Royal Court was getting refurbished I think, wasn't it?

**CATHERINE:** I don't know.

**SAPHENA:** I think I came to see that.

**CATHERINE:** Robert Farquar worked it up with Katie who won.

**LUKE:** I think I saw that. ...

**SAPHENA:** Robert Farquar. I can never say that man's name .. I can never say that man's surname enough times, frankly.

**CATHERINE:** It's a great name.

**SAPHENA:** It is. It's great.

**CATHERINE:** And then, the second one hasn't found a stage yet. I immediately thought of it as something that could even go on at the Theatre Royal in London. It's got that whole ... it's a sort of Moliere play in it. It was the one that made me really laugh out loud. I read the script on the Pendellino on the way to London and I just sat there and chortled all the way through it – and that was written by an actor.

**LUKE:** Really?

**CATHERINE:** Yeah. And that's had a reading. That had a reading at the Royal Court studio. And then the third one I don't know what's happening with. I haven't heard, so...

**SAPHENA:** The Royal Court up here?

**CATHERINE:** Yes. Sorry, yes. In the studio... basement studio. So anyway, I know we're digressing, but I just find it's interesting...

**SAPHENA:** No, it's the same thing. Because we've got a Royal Court London and a Royal Court Liverpool.

**CATHERINE:** I know, I know, yes. We immediately assume we're talking about – well I do - immediately presume we're talking about Royal Court Liverpool. Unless otherwise - unless someone says Soho Square. There you go. So, that's interesting.

**SAPHENA:** I think it kind of fits into our theme of today really which is about... I suppose talking about what we think, what we

feel about regional theatre. And I suppose the first question is the word 'Regional'. What do we reckon? Loving it? Hating it?

**CATHERINE:** It's not as bad as the word 'Provincial'

**SAPHENA:** Oh, God.

**CATHERINE:** At least we seem to have lost that in the mists of time!

**LUKE:** Yeah.

**SAPHENA:** No one calls it provincial anymore do they.

**CATHERINE:** No, it's all a little bit Beryl Bainbridge isn't it.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE:** It's interesting, it's interesting because like, there's a handful of theatres in London that exist to serve the nation, in that the capital, the capitals theatre's. The National Theatre, I think the Royal Court as well, to be fair. It seems like leading theatres that do like, that hold conversations for a nation, right.

Other theatres in London, I think, are essentially serving smaller communities in London, say for example The Kiln, The Bush, Stratford Theatre Royal East, whatever.

I would say they are regional theatres, because they are regional in London, they're doing the exact same thing.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah, exactly.

**LUKE:** They're not doing the same job that the National or The Royal Court or even some of the RSC, they're not holding big conversations for a nation.

So, everyone's in a region right.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah

**LUKE:** And within that I think that we have to understand that these buildings are in certain communities and places

**SAPHENA:** Yeah

**LUKE:** And I don't think it's useful to say that anyone inside London is different than everywhere else, because it's not.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah.

**LUKE:** It doesn't help anyone. It doesn't help us, because it makes us feel 'othered' or different.

**SAPHENA:** I would agree.

**LUKE:** Just not them, because they think that they, um ....., actually I don't think it's anything to do with that.

I think that there's a perception of these buildings that they are not existing to serve specific places. And specific places in London have as diverse challenges as we do.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah.

**LUKE:** You know like, The Hampstead Theatre is very different to The Bush Theatre. Very different communities. They've got a surplus of communities aswell.

So I think it's um ....., well I just think it's stupid.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**CATHERINE:** I think the word 'community' is key. I know for example that I've had this conversation with Alex Clifton, the Artistic Director at Storyhouse over in Chester, who absolutely hates the word 'regional' and gets really irate about it, and says every theatre is a community theatre.

**LUKE:** Sure

**CATHERINE:** You are serving your community.

But I think it's easier to see that in some areas, I mean, you've named checked some London Theatres, that the general public might not immediately think of as London theatres.



The general public might think of the West End, they might think of Shaftesbury Avenue.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**LUKE:** That's fair.

**CATHERINE:** You know, Charing Cross Road, theatres around Leicester Square, those kinds of areas. And I find it harder to see what kind of constituency and community they serve. As I said, having been at the Wyndhams last year, and it was full of Americans....

**LUKE:** Yeah. It's a different proposition because those buildings don't rely on Arts Council NPO funding, they're commercial theatres, they exist to make money, right?

**CATHERINE:** No, but this whole discussion of 'London' and 'regions' and what you perceive as London theatre being.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah

**LUKE:** Yeah, I don't even think of those buildings really because I work in subsidised centres

**CATHERINE:** Exactly

**LUKE:** And they don't even cross my mind to be honest.

**CATHERINE:** But you know, The Arcola and The Bush and The Hampstead and whatever, and things going on at The Young Vic, and even down in Hammersmith, are not the things that possibly the majority of people who might take a trip to London to the theatre, will immediately go and see.

**LUKE:** Yeah, you're so right.

**CATHERINE:** And I think that's the thing, that's even more confusing that we're talking, in a way, about three different things.

**LUKE:** Yeah, yeah, sure.

**SAPHENA:** Do you think the word sometimes...

It's like the word 'community' for me, having worked in community arts for like most of my life, that there's something that is attached to 'regional' and 'community' that is about quality.

That sometimes people don't think, it's like the word 'provincial', that in some ways, necessarily it's not...

The quality goes down in some way.

**CATHERINE:** Yeah I think the word 'regional', I mean this is where I'm conflicted about it, because I do use the word 'regional', but I very much think it depends on whose using it and in what context.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah

**CATHERINE:** And you're right, you know...

**SAPHENA:** If it's Boris Johnson...

**[LAUGHTER]**

**CATHERINE:** Let's leave that there! But...

[MORE LAUGHTER]

**CATHERINE:** But, it depends on who's saying it and in what context basically.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah

**CATHERINE:** When I talk about regional theatre, to someone who works within the regions, I don't talk about it in a derogatory or condescending manner. Whereas some people, they may not mean to be condescending, but just the context they use it in, and the way they describe it, comes over as condescending.

**SAPHENA:** As opposed to just geography

**CATHERINE:** As opposed to just geography, absolutely.

Because London is just another region of this country, in some ways.

**SAPHENA:** Yes

**CATHERINE:** But it's inevitable because, you know, in my long career as a journalist, I don't know how many times I was asked 'So, do you want to go to London? Is your aim to be on a national?' Well no actually, my aim is not to work for a national newspaper. It seems like the only way I could validate myself as a serious journalist is somehow to want to be working in London on a national newspaper and that is in a way the same in the theatre world. You know, I know this is something we're going to discuss, have you made it if you haven't made it in London?

**SAPHENA:** But I think there's something really interesting, in with lots of creatives, that I think that London is still seen as a

benchmark, as an aspiration in some ways, you know, I'm working on independently producing three artists, northern based artists, ones Manchester based and two are Liverpool based. You know, a lot of our aspirations when we sit down and talk is, you know, we've got to get these shows to London. And it's still seen as that, which I suppose, because **LUKE**, your career is really interesting, in the fact that a lot of your work has achieved that goal I suppose in some way. Is it wrong to still have that as an aspiration, is it narrow of us, or do we have to be honest about, actually London is an aspiration.

**LUKE:** I think honestly what we've got to do is, the most harmful thing for the mental well-being of creatives is trying to live your aspirations by someone else's goals.

**SAPHENA:** That's really interesting.

**LUKE:** going to London is really useful because it does a lot of things. It raises profile, you get national press, you can talk to bigger organisations with more money to make bigger scale shows, that's really useful.

**SAPHENA:** There's a pragmatism there as well.

**LUKE:** Yeah pragmatically, for sure, it's really useful to do a play at, for example, The Royal Court [London], because loads of people see it, you can meet people at different mediums, higher profile, collaborate, whatever, it's good for career, sure.

Undeniably because loads of the industry is there. But, that's not everyone's goal, right? You as an artist have to set your own standards for success, because if you don't, you will always live to someone else's and you will always fail. So you know the whole game is, this is useful to be happy, right?



**SAPHENA:** That's so lovely

**LUKE:** It's really important because if you set your goals to be like 'I want to be at the Royal Court by the time I'm 35', like Simon Stevens did, you'll probably fail, you'll give up and you'll hate yourself, right? Whereas, I think what you've got to do is set your own standards for success, like say look, everyday I'm going to try and make something that's useful, I'm going to make something that has a tangible effect on a place, I'm going to make something that.. Whatever. Then that is like you saying 'I am a useful artist', that makes me happy, makes me feel like a success, makes me feel like my work is purposeful, makes me feel like I'm not for my own self, useful to everyone else. All those things are more important than saying 'I'm going to try and do Simon Stevens'.

**SAPHENA:** Because I don't even think Simon Stevens aspired to be Simon Stevens at 35.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**SAPHENA:** He became a benchmark and you know.

**LUKE:** It also creates a view of writing, like that model is from the 80s, it's not the end goal anymore, it doesn't, the industry doesn't work like upstairs behind the curtain ..... The Court and National, RSC, West End. That journey doesn't happen, I can't think of anyone that's happened to in my generation. It doesn't work like that, it's a project by project basis, you've got to set out to achieve those projects, I think this project exists for this reason, with this impact on this place, and you set that goal and you achieve that single goal, alright, and every time you got to try and do that. As opposed to saying 'I want to be at the main stage at National by the time, this' because that's..

**SAPHENA:** Yeah, yeah.

**LUKE:** If it happens, then what happens?

**SAPHENA:** I just need to correct you on something though **LUKE**, because like, don't say the 80s and say antiquated in the same sentence. You're talking about my youth there.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**SAPHENA:** I thought you were going to say like the 30s or something. **[LAUGHTER]** No, I understand what you mean.

**CATHERINE:** I hate to say it but the 80s is history now.

**SAPHENA:** I know, 40 years ago, very scary. One of the things that I loved about what you just said, about writing something that

has a tangible effect on a place, I think there's something really interesting about that. I mean, I know the league of gentlemen have taken this phrase and made it cliché, which is 'local stories for local people'. But actually, there's real value in local stories for local people by local people, but also, there's something really interesting about the fact that, regional writers, local writers can also write stories that are universal, universal stories.

**CATHERINE:** I had this conversation with Willy Russell, Willy Russell has written a careers worth of stories about Liverpool people, but they are universal, they go everywhere, look at the moment, Shirley Valentine has been touring again, Educating Rita has been touring again. Blood Brothers is always on the road. You don't have to be, and I'm going to use the word parochial, you don't have to be parochial, those are universal themes, they're just set in a particular place, absolutely.

**LUKE:** Also, they don't have to be set where you live, like Ali McDowall, who wrote X.

**SAPHENA:** I've just got his work.

**LUKE:** Really?

**SAPHENA:** A friend recommended him to me.

**LUKE:** It is brilliant. He's probably like one of the most lauded writers of my generation

**SAPHENA:** Yeah he's great

**LUKE:** He lives in Manchester and he was like – "I hate it when people call me a Northern artist", I was like, that's interesting because I'm the opposite, I identify as that, and he was like "well I

just happen to live in the North, and be an artist. I'm not a Northern artist." That's interesting because he sets nothing in, well his first play was set in Middlesbrough, where he's from, the rest of it's just...stories.

**SAPHENA:** So why do you call yourself a northern artist then Luke?

**LUKE:** I think it's an integral part of my perspective on the world and my work, you know, I think like everything I do has; I have in mind, how I want to talk about where I live and grew up and other people I know and how they interact with other people and counteract that. Everything I do, I think, is about me celebrating and defining what the culture stereotype is of the world that I see, my world being looked at by other people. You know, I grew up...I don't wanna name names, anyway, I grew up erm...

**SAPHENA:** No, please do, honestly.

**LUKE:** Don't wanna name names, 'cos it's not fair but...

**SAPHENA:** Oh I see!

**[LAUGHTER]**

**SAPHENA:** Oh yeah, no I'm sorry! I mean obviously!

**LUKE:** I grew up watching versions of like, Liverpool, but also across the North, mainly being defined as a place, poverty stricken, people are depressed and sort of like, all the men drive cabs and wear flat caps and eat chips, and the women seem to have like three kids and they're all prostitutes or something

**CATHERINE:** Or everyone's on the rob...

**LUKE:** Exactly, or drug addicts, but like actually, the world I know, I mean obviously that exists..

**SAPHENA:** Yeah, absolutely

**LUKE:** but yeah the world I know, isn't defined by that. It's defined by human resilience, by people being fun and celebrating like, not even just people but geographic landscapes and y'know, that's how I saw the world

**SAPHENA:** Yeah "It's grim up North" has to go, as a narrative

**LUKE:** I think it's really important to like, bear that in mind. I live here, I'm from here. If I am gonna speak about the place that I am from then I think it's really important that I defy cultural



stereotypes, otherwise are you doing, just reinforcing this idea that, you know, erm, the place you're from is terrible. We all know that that's not true!

**SAPHENA:** Absolutely. I write, obviously a lot of characters who are people of colour, and erm, sometimes, I'll put in a name that obviously means that somebody cannot cast a white person in it [the play].

**[LAUGHTER]**

**SAPHENA:** And also I'll have people who are Muslims who never talk about being a Muslim

**LUKE:** Yeah Yeah Yeah

**SAPHENA:** It's just the fabric of life isn't it

**LUKE:** Do you know Ishy Din, playwright?

**SAPHENA:** No I don't

**LUKE:** He's got this amazing play called Snookered, it was at the Bush years ago, but he's from Middlesbrough, he's a taxi driver, and this play is just these like, four Muslim lads playing snooker and never talking about anything except playing snooker, ... that's the whole idea and it's brilliant, awesome, anyway... That's aside anyway

**SAPHENA:** Brilliant!

**LUKE:** But anyway, but it's the same thing, like, I think is a part of my fabric as a person that's an artist, that I think is really important, everything I do is in relation to that, is what defines that,

I think, that's why, like Ali [McDowall] just like, wants to talk about big universal ideas through like his art form. Its cool, whatever, but like, everyone's got their own thing right?

**CATHERINE:** You can still talk about big universal ideas, setting them in...

**LUKE:** Oh sure, of course yeah, I'm just saying he's not bothered about place

**CATHERINE:** Oh yeah yeah... I'm not getting at you, [LAUGHER] I'm just saying that the two are not mutually exclusive, in being set within your , where you come from and talking about , you know, universal ideas and till having that strong voice and where you come from, I mean, whether it be Northern, Cornish, or whatever, it transcends that, good art transcends that.

**SAPHENA:** Cos there's some interesting, isn't there, some great writers coming out of , let's say you know, erm out of London, yourself included Luke, look at that, the way I kind of bigged you up there! Erm and Simon Stevens but there's nice.... I mean, you go to the theatre a lot, what was the last piece of work that you can think of that like, was from a Northern writer or a regional writer?

**CATHERINE:** My god, you're gonna put me on the spot! I can't remember what I had for dinner last night, often let alone what I saw...

**[LAUGHTER]**

**CATHERINE:** I'm going to see Jonathon Harvey's Our Lady Of Blundell Sands tonight, and having read the initial rehearsal script I'm really interested to see how that has ended up on the stage

now. Oh gosh, d'know what, I don't know...what did I even see last week, or the week before? That's terrible isn't it, I'd like to apologise for not having a really good answer to that!

**[LAUGHTER]**

**SAPHENA:** Maybe I should have given you that question before you came in...

**CATHERINE:** Exactly, just so I could have genned up! I mean I don't know 'cos I obviously have a catholic theatrical experience, catholic being with a small "C" because ...

**SAPHENA:** Catholic? I have never heard that... what is that

**CATHERINE:** Well with a small C, well I mean I go to every venue in Liverpool, I'm not like, it's not like, you know I'm an Everyman

type of person, I'm a Royal Court type of person, I see things everywhere, so I get that, sort of, broad sweep from the big budget touring musicals at the Empire to new work that's being given a try out at Hope Street or downstairs at the Royal Court or whatever.

**SAPHENA:** Ok, 'cos I think the Royal Court, our Royal Court is like really interesting

**CATHERINE:** Yes!....

**CATHERINE:** Talking about community, talking about a strong voice and sense of place.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah and there was something that I read and it was Lyn Gardner who said: 'One regional theatre is not like another, regional shouldn't be a dirty word but a badge to be worn with pride like the one worn by many foods or local beers'. I thought

that was really interesting because we kind of celebrate slow food and locally sourced food - but locally sourced art or creatives seems to be denigrated I think. Cause I think sometimes possibly The Royal Court gets a hard time in some ways, do you think? In terms of some of the work that it produces, but I actually celebrate it because of the breadth of the work that it does, because of the studio, the fact that it's also incubating and nurturing the black theatre company, it's really interesting.

**CATHERINE:** Since it got Arts Council funding, it's really been able to expand its remit, its fantastic, you know Boisterous.

**SAPHENA:** Loads of local artists are putting on their shows in the studio space, which I just think is..

**CATHERINE:** I've got a friend, they've got a scratch, not a scratch night, I can't remember - it's April 2nd to 4th, it's new writing,

there's two or three plays a night on. I often pop down there, I'm seeing something on Friday, that's actually an oral history in Liverpool 8.

**SAPHENA:** Oh it's Maria, Maria Paul.

**CATHERINE:** Exactly, and Margret Connell is in it who used to run the Lantern Theatre. And Siobhan does a lot at Hope Street.

**LUKE:** Is that Mike's mum, Mike Noble.

**CATHERINE:** Yes, Mike Noble's mum yeah, who was in A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time the evening that the ceiling fell down at The Apollo Theatre.

**SAPHENA:** How did I miss that!



**CATHERINE:** Talking about Simon Stevens, Six Degrees of Separation, he's a great actor, yeah. I've lost my train of thought now. Basically, yes, and then you've got The Main Stage, and they know their constituency, and yes it may not be everyone's cup of tea but they know exactly who their audience is, and they do push the boat at times - to see see they can just push them in directions that they might not have taken before. Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't, but good for them for trying it.

**SAPHENA:** It seems like that constituency that The Royal Court has serviced and put shows on, has actually, actually feels real ownership of that theatre which I think is a phenomenal thing really, when you think about it. I'm sure they probably helped in terms of the refurb in terms of ticketing. It's consistently packed isn't it.

**CATHERINE:** Yeah.

**SAPHENA:** I think I went to see Girls Who Don't Play guitars.

**CATHERINE:** Which is coming back apparently, later this year.

**SAPHENA:** It is coming back! Mr Ian Salmon, give him a little plug.

**CATHERINE:** Well we're talking about local writers, and in fact he came up through the playwriting competition as well yeah, Gerry Linford has just gone like 'whoosh', like that since he was a runner up in the competition. I think he's had about two or three shows on there now in the last 12-18 months, so, but yes, sorry to interrupt you but yes, I greatly admire The Royal Court.

**SAPHENA:** I do as well. I do.

**CATHERINE:** Because, they found, they went with their gut feeling, built that audience from pretty much nothing.

**SAPHENA:** And look what an audience can do, I mean, if you, it's like to the other theatres, if you look after your local constituents, you're going to have a loyal audience.

**CATHERINE:** If you build it, they will come.

**SAPHENA:** It's not wrong.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE:** Going back to being proud of local foods and stuff, there are a lot of scouse artists in that building. I seen other buildings across the country, something about like, those people aren't

present in creative teams on the stage. A weird distance happens I think.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah we've got to be really careful haven't we.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE:** I think when you have like, those voices not present in the writers, directors, actors or designers, it makes people, my friends, my friends have said it makes them feel like it's not their space. It's like coming into communities and saying 'This is what good art is, please appreciate it'.

**SAPHENA:** Really interesting, I would agree with that I think to some extent, yeah.

**CATHERINE:** Did you follow the whole debate that came out of what Adrian Scarborough said at last year's Whats On Stage awards, when he won the award for Madness of George the Third?

**SAPHENA:** No.

**CATHERINE:** Because this created a whole dialogue about actors and creatives, and London theatre and regional theatre – in fact I think Lyn Gardner probably wrote about it. Adrian Scarborough – and I think he said it entirely not in a condescending way, I think he meant it perfectly passionately – when he picked up his award, he said that he had had a very rewarding experience working in Nottingham, and that he wished that London actors would come out and do more work in the regions. You know, come out and be there in the regions. And it was an interesting debate as well, because then there was this whole debate about “hang on a

second, London actors doing us all a favour by gracing us with out presence”. And you had some regional actors around here – there was a lot of it going on on Twitter – sort of saying “well hang on, I can’t even get an audition at my local theatre. I’d like to work in my own city, or region! But I’m not even getting the auditions...”

**LUKE:** It’s so important, it’s really important conversation to have I think, because the trouble is those actors, you want them in the building because they will sell tickets and that’s great...do you know what I mean? Brilliant if... Mark <unclear> wants to come and do a play at the Everyman, fantastic – it will sell out in a day, brilliant. But, I think... I really think that we have to have a majority body of people based in the community on that stage. Otherwise, we just feel...I feel like you are telling me what’s good, and you are saying “you should be worshipping at the altar of genius”. And genius is the biggest problem that we have in theatre at the

minute. People are putting their ego and themselves before purpose, and it's a massive, massive issue across new writing.

**SAPHENA:** And why do you think that is? Do you think that's historic, is it a hangover...?

**LUKE:** It's historical, it's the way we've treated writers... it's the way that certain buildings in London have treated writers over the last 30 years. It has made young writers feel like they are... the reason that theatre exists, and that their genius must be celebrated. It's the same in the way some people see directors. I think it does come from London to be honest because, like, obviously Scotland is amazing at it because most of their... like, the National Theatre of Scotland is a properly functional, community-serving theatre. Like their model is fu... sorry I'm swearing...

**[LAUGHTER]**

**CATHERINE:** It's in the editing **LUKE**, don't worry!

**SAPHENA:** Well stopped **LUKE!**

**[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE:** ...I think the National Theatre of Scotland, right? It's properly serving the nation, it's starting a conversation that needs to be had in an innovative and familiar way. Amazing, and I don't think that anyone...I don't know, I can't think of anyone... I don't think anyone is saying we have to go see the new duh-duh-duh... like people like Rob Icke, it's like "but Rob Icke will be amazing"... and you're like, "that's great, that's cool" but, like... we need to think of theatre as being purposeful if it's being funded by the state, if we're an Arts Council institution... NPO funded or



whatever, art has to have a function and an impact. That has to be the priority, and we have to be collective about that. And that involves taking the ego away from that, it involves saying “it’s not about me, it’s not about you”, it’s about us coming together and doing something that has a purpose to exist. And it’s really really important we start thinking like that because...and that’s the thing, like the function of buildings... you know? Part of the function of buildings is to serve communities, to facilitate conversations for communities to have with themselves about where the community is going. And part of that is listening to local people, listening to artists – they live in a place, they engage with a place - and allowing that to happen.

**SAPHENA:** Yeah

**CATHERINE:** You’ve still got to persuade people to come in through the door and buy a ticket though don’t you. That’s the...

**LUKE:** That's fine...the Royal Court is doing it...

**SAPHENA:** Exactly, it is.

**CATHERINE:** I'm not, I'm not... you know, I think that the reality of the situation is that those are all things you should have set out to achieve but you have got to do it within the reality of the situation, the economic model. As you say, you know, you get Kim Cattrall to play Cleopatra on the stage at The Everyman, at the Playhouse, and you sell out, exactly. And it's... I would hope the two should be able to co-exist, absolutely.

**LUKE:** For sure, yeah yeah

**CATHERINE:** But you know, the reality is going back to the idea of the creative, the actors... being local or national – if there is

such thing as a national actor, you know – is part of the regional theatre debate I think, is the discussion about who we see and what we see on our stages. And compared to London, where, you know, inevitably – as you say – the critics all concentrate in London. Trying to get someone to come out and review a show outside...North of Watford and West of Reading is really very difficult.

**LUKE:** For sure

**SAPHENA:** Yeah... you would think we were massive, weren't you, like the US. Like, do you know what I mean, like, oh that's why people can't travel a couple of hundred miles up the road.

**CATHERINE:** Two hours ten minutes when the West Coast Mainline is working... which isn't very often...two hours ten minutes on the train from London to Liverpool isn't it.

**SAPHENA:** But it seems like, it's not just, it's not a geographical thing always is it. It's completely fabricated isn't it.

**CATHERINE:** Somewhat psychological.

**SAPHENA:** Yup

**LUKE:** Yeah...it's like "I don't want to go to Leeds on Wednesday"...

**CATHERINE:** It's engrained as well, I mean this idea of regional vs London is unfortunately an engrained one and I don't know if there's a way past that in all honesty.

**SAPHENA:** Well, do think about things like regional awards then. Do you think that just compounds that divide?

**CATHERINE:** ...well...yes and no, because I think the reality of the situation is that... I mean look at the awards. You've got awards that are just for London – the Offies have just been chosen and announced, the winners of the Offices. You've got the Oliviers. What's On Stage are... national, with one specific regional award, but inevitably, they are dominated by shows that are in London. And in fact, the Oliviers, if you look at the Oliviers shortlist is dominated by about eight shows in London, that are not even the breadth of shows in London. And the UK Theatre Awards are national aren't they, they're not... but again London tends to dominate. So, do you go into the pot and fight your corner against the big shows, with the big names, on the big stages and hope that you will be another name that did very well at What's On Stage last time, like Hope Mill Theatre. Or do you have a chance for many different regional productions to shine by having awards that are concentrated on areas outside the West End of London? And I don't know, I think I would rather still have

the regional awards! And give people the opportunity to hear about those productions that they might not, if you're up against... you know... James McAvooy in Cyrano de Bergerac...Toby Jones in Uncle Vanya...

**SAPHENA:** It's not a level playing field is it.

**CATHERINE:** It's not a level playing field, and I just think that when I talk about the reality of the situation – in an ideal world you would have a set of awards, everyone would be in there. It would celebrate theatre in its glorious entirety.

**SAPHENA:** I looked at, just before doing this chat I did a bit of research and I was kind of shocked – don't know why I was shocked, but I was. That since 2010, it's almost exactly double the investment that the National got than, you know, something like, you know The Everyman or something...

**CATHERINE:** Is this Arts Council?

**SAPHENA:** Yeah. It was like, you know, when we're saying it's not a level playing field, it's clearly not remotely....it's ridiculous.

**LUKE:** There are some horrible stats. There is more Arts Council funding in Islington than there is in every former coalfield in the UK... honestly... I mean, that includes Sadlers Wells, I'm being...

**CATHERINE:** They have made a commitment to, what was it, to spend 75% of the lottery funding they get outside London.

**SAPHENA:** But also didn't, one of the big organisations forwent – or forgone? – it, it either gave back its Arts Council funding so that another organisation wouldn't lose theirs. And I think that there's something kind of wonderful about that. And that actually if those

bigger organisations, in some ways speak up and say, actually don't cut that funding, have some of ours **[LAUGHTER]**

**CATHERINE:** I mean, the biggest funded are the National, the English National Opera, and the RSC. I think. The RSC – I'm making this figure up – but at least one of them gets something like 46 million pounds. And you look at then, yeah, comparatively...

**SAPHENA:** We've got, haven't we got a Shakespeare Theatre opening up in...

**LUKE:** Prescott

**CATHERINE:** That's very exciting. Yeah, the Shakespeare North Playhouse.



**SAPHENA:** Shakespeare North. We know where it belongs!

**LUKE:** The RSC and the NT, I think a lot of that work they do doesn't get spoken much, and they are actually amazing resources for artists and they give a lot of money for development and commission people they are not going to produce that kind of thing...a lot of the money they are spending... just going back to awards thing, here's my hot take – I think it's stupid!

**[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE:** Honestly, I don't understand what the point of them is because, like, look at the film industry. They exist so they can amplify a film's profile to sell tickets, ok? We do these things a year after the shows been on. I don't really care who was the best actor in a play I didn't see. It's irrelevant to me.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE:** It doesn't really matter. I think again...

**SAPHENA:** There's that play that I didn't go to see, that isn't on anymore! **[LAUGHTER]**

**LUKE:** ...but, I mean we can laugh, but I care about the mental health of artists because it's such a thing to do...

**SAPHENA:** It's really interesting what you're talking about, yeah

**LUKE:** ...to put yourself out there. And again, I think to think about art in terms of quality is stupid to me. It shouldn't...how are you going...

**SAPHENA:** It's not a race. Yeah.

**LUKE:** ...It's not a race, it's like I'm doing a thing, I think it's important, is the way I'm doing it exciting for this reason, let's try and have a conversation about it. But the issue is, if you are at the Bruntwood Prize for example, and Brecht enters and Sarah Cane enters, and Arthur Miller enters, who is the winner? How do you choose it? All these people who are spellbindingly good, generationally...

**[LAUGHTER]**

**CATHERINE:** Isn't that life though? You can say that about every single aspect of life. What's the best building, why have a RIBA Architect Award? What's to say that one building is better than another. And they are ice-cream and cheese anyway, you are comparing different... plays... you are comparing different...yeah...

**SAPHENA:** Doesn't it feed into a human need though. There's Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs isn't there, and at the top is self-actualisation and realising...

**CATHERINE:** Not toilet rolls!

**[LAUGHTER]**

**SAPHENA:** So, like, what's the most important thing to us and actually, near the top is recognition sadly...

**CATHERINE:** recognition, success and praise, and I take your point

**LUKE:** In Germany, instead of saying 'best director', 'best actor' accolade they get 10, 20 shows – I don't know what it is – for a

month and they do them all again and say, here is all this boss work, let's do it again. I think that feels like something more progressive to me because we can't keep going with this idea of comparative art. It's stupid and it kills peoples, I mean what if Sarah Cane writes her first play, sends it to Bruntwood, it gets knocked on the first round, Sarah Cane never writes again. And what if John McGrath sends his play off, I don't know, he disappears, and suddenly we lose the entire of 784 and Hull Truck. These people may not be good writers in the eyes of a certain person

**SAPHENA:** So there's something in what you were talking about in terms of the mental health of artists, but also that kind of resilience of artists as well isn't there, that actually I think those things shouldn't be held up as the sole judgement of whether you're good enough because, I suppose there is a book that can be written on the people who haven't won awards and the three of

us would probably sit here and say how amazing those people are.

**LUKE:** For sure. I just think that eighteen-year old's or twenty one-year old's, young new writers send a play in the Royal Court in London, they go back and say 'nah thanks', you're maybe not going to write a play again. And then what happens...

**SAPHENA:** All them voices...

**LUKE:** you live in Stockport, you love Stockport, you make work in Stockport, and somebody goes 'this is rubbish' – you lose out, community loses out, everybody loses out. You want people to say, I want to make a thing here, because it has a reason to exist, how do I learn to do this and how do I set up that conversation, how does it happen? This is the worst thing about art, we should

stop thinking about people being good, it's useless, it's absolutely useless

**SAPHENA:** It's really difficult though isn't it, to try and extricate what those kinds of awards mean and what they bring, because there is finance attached to it sadly

**CATHERINE:** I mean, we've talked about Arts Council funding and NPO funding and all the hoops you have to jump through and what you do for that funding, how much you get, whether you get continued funding, and it does come down – in a way – to profile and success. They want results.

**SAPHENA AND LUKE:** Yeah

**CATHERINE:** And it's how you quantify those results, I suppose, and it's complicated and it's that balance and I take everything

you've said on board about the taking liberties side, I suppose I come at it from a different point of view. The number of times I've written 'Olivier Award-winning artist, writer, director' whatever, in the same way we'd write 'Oscar-winning' and inevitably

**LUKE:** For sure

**SAPHENA:** It pushes sales

**CATHERINE:** It pushes sales, and if I was a marketing person, it does push sales. You know, they've just got on-sale this morning at the Empire, Sheridan Smith appearing as Cilla Black in Cilla the Musical for 4-weeks this Autumn, and you go 'well, yeah, ok, I'd like see if Sheridan can reprise her Cilla'. You've got a name there, she's famous



**LUKE:** She's famous because she was in Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps and then she won the awards, and now she's a well-known figure right

**CATHERINE:** We've digressed from awards to having 'a name' as some kind of hook or cache

**LUKE:** There's nothing wrong with that at all, I love tele casting

[Laugh]

**CATHERINE:** Talk about regional, I just think there is a big way to celebrate regional rather than to feel like it is a dirty word.

**LUKE:** 100%

**SAPHENA:** Absolutely

**CATHERINE:** and I think it's up to us to do it, you know

[Noise off camera]

**SAPHENA:** Strange noise

**CATHERINE:** That was the ghost of the Unity saying 'I agree with you'

[Laughter]

**LUKE:** I know what you're saying. Manchester has done it really well.

**SAPHENA:** Places like the [Royal] Exchange you mean?

**LUKE:** Everybody wants to work there [Manchester]. Everyone, you know.

**SAPHENA:** I love the Royal exchange I have to say I thought Sarah Franklin did some amazing work there

**LUKE:** Roy and Bryony are brilliant as well

**SAPHENA:** So we got like its two headed artistic direction now

**CATHERINE:** and we got a person like Maxine Peak who is of the community, who invests,

**SAPHENA:** oh and she is brilliant

**LUKE:** Yes, That's the ideal

**CATHERINE:** who invests in the work in that community whose there as a strong voice shouting about it and being in it, writing it, acting in it

**SAPHENA:** and is absolutely a Northern bird and is was very very proud of that

**CATHERINE:** Yes! But! It is not to the detriment of her general profile, or whatever

**LUKE:** Yes, she's a very good an example where she worked she was like I want to move back to Salford She was like A - I want to make be able to make choices that matter in my career and I want to have an impact on my community, I was like brilliant

**SAPHENA:** Because also regional theatres I mean the thing about Regional theatres is, whether some of them should be doing this and some of them are doing this better than others , I mean again being political, I'm not going to say "there's room for improvement", let's just say it reminds me of my school report.

Laughter could do better

**[Laughter]**

**SAPHENA:** But there are youth theatres attached to our Regional theatres and there's outreach programmes and schools and surely they are future building the audiences of tomorrow and the actors of tomorrow and that's another reason why regional theatres have to exist and that is why it was heart-breaking when you were saying the statistic around funding for regional is going down

**LUKE:** oh it's not going down I was just saying there is major changes

**SAPHENA:** sorry but yes it is decreasing and the sad thing is that, there is short-sighted ness in there because, these future audiences and these future actors and these future writers, and all of these voices

**CATHERINE:** but also all those voices of future actors and writers of the future I think this is the other thing to say it's not just

regional and national or regional and London it is that we are not just a breeding ground to for everyone to be trained up

**SAPHENA:** like a feeder school laugh

**CATHERINE:** like a feeder school – whatever you think of him I think it was Ed Vasey who said in parliament “Culture does not just happen in London” and we are not you know , I am not like you know I will do my training in Liverpool and then go have my career in London, I mean we are not a feeder ground either you know it should be you know we are creating amazing artists of the future, to work here as well so it’s not just a stepping stone you know which I think is important in this regional debate, we are NOT just a stepping stone , we can be , but we shouldn’t be exclusively , I mean you know you have got to work in your city only forever laughs

**SAPHENA:** you know there is that thing being Northern or from Liverpool of telling universal stories that probably have national

significance and you that that the thing isn't it I suppose it's all about ultimately about the work surely Luke at the end of the day

**LUKE:** yeah,

**SAPHENA:** yeah laughs

**LUKE:** Yeah laughs

**SAPHENA:** ok so like thank you so much for err

**LUKE:** is that it laughs

**CATHERINE:** Laughs

**SAPHENA:** laughs I mean we can carry on but ... one of the things I was going to ask was what are you looking forward to seeing, let's talk trivial

**CATHERINE:** what I want to go and see it's too late for the podcast but I am looking forward to seeing our lady of Blundell sands tonight very much

**SAPHENA:** I know Jonathan Harvey's you know he's got an interesting career hasn't he

**CATHERINE:** and he's moved back to Liverpool

**SAPHENA:** yay

**LUKE:** yeah he lives round the corner from me, I think

**CATHERINE:** Does he?

**LUKE:** well so people keep telling me,

**[Laughter]**

**CATHERINE:** now he was someone, he was someone who spent years and years building his career in London, but has always had a foot in Liverpool and has now moved back to Liverpool

**SAPHENA:** now he's someone who I like, he does book and television as well



**CATHERINE:** yes and he's not writing novels at the moment I was lucky to have a chat with him for the stage and he was saying that he uses the same part of his brain for novel writing as he does for playwriting. He wrote about 6 or 7 novels in 7 years and now he's come back and is doing more playwritings.

**SAPHENA:** that's amazing

**CATHERINE:** Yeah, it was an interesting discussion actually about the creation of plays versus TV actually, erm yeah

**SAPHENA:** what about you Luke what have you coming up

**LUKE:** oh I not got dates, laughs but oh yeah like talking about regional and national theatre, I am doing a coproduction it's on at the Leeds playhouse and then at the old Vic it's on for a week long run in laughs July [laughs]

**SAPHENA:** you know I would love to do an interview with you about your career and you starting out because what I think is

really important is back to regional and all that I think role models is really important and how do we, because really sometime you meets writers I sure you do or actors or any kind of creative and what they want to know is how do you do it? ... How do you get in that door? You know so it would be lovely to have a chat to you about those steps

**LUKE:** Anytime, Anytime

**SAPHENA:** sorry did I just completely interrupt you whilst you were talking about what you were doing? Laughs

**LUKE:** ha its ok so yeah the two theatres so the job is yeah to work with their theatre refugees groups where the two collaborate and they can tell their stories about what their expectations of freedom where, when they first arrived here and what they actually found, when they were here er yeah, what else am I doing erm an outdoor family show I am doing with my company called middle child

**SAPHENA:** ok yeah

**LUKE:** in May goes to rehearsal in a month, still writing songs at the minute

**CATHERINE:** where's that

**LUKE:** its touring outdoor festivals, which I have never done before it's a very specific thing you know it's been so hard

**CATHERINE:** yeah

**SAPHENA:** that's fantastic

**LUKE:** it's been a really really hard job, probably the 2<sup>nd</sup> hardest thing I've ever done the thing about is it – that space is so hard to fill – a big outdoor space man – like there's no roof and I am used to singing stories to the roof and I know what that feels like

**SAPHENA:** where my roof ha-ha

**LUKE:** I used to going into a theatre , I know that feeling of going into a building but to fill an outdoor space – it's a place I very

rarely go it's a different way of speaking, everything about it is different I've written about 7 versions of it so far

**SAPHENA:** yeah

**LUKE:** it's come down to like 10 pages it used to have like 110 pages

**SAPHENA:** and are you one of those writers who is constantly writing are you really disciplined like that

**LUKE:** yeah

**SAPHENA:** yeah

**LUKE:** yeah I'll write all day, every day

**SAPHENA:** ah that is really good because it's good for like your mental health well I'm assuming as well

**LUKE:** it's terrible

**SAPHENA:** is it!

**LUKE:** you spend all day on your own writing,

**[Laughter]**

**LUKE:** I mean when you are writing I have days where I am like argh I can't write – I am terrible what's the point of me doing this we put ourselves through if you stay on your own enough you are bound to have those thoughts, laughter, honestly I know I keep saying this but I mean this, it is so easy in this process, I have to say this ...you will keep saying to yourself why am I doing this .....it is rubbish... but we have to remember why we started this journey. If you started the journey thinking I hope someone will like me more – if that's it – then game over.

**SAPHENA:** how did you know?

**LUKE:** game over every time you have to remember the reason you are doing this is because it's bigger than you and if you remember that, then those hard moments become easier to deal with you become more resilient to them if you like, its ok I am

refining something for a reason I am doing this for a reason it is not about me proving it to myself or to other people

**SAPHENA:** Yeah, so what are you looking forward to seeing this year?

**LUKE:** oh one last thing ... I'm doing a play with 20 Stories high

**SAPHENA:** yay

**LUKE:** in July

**SAPHENA:** did you do some work on the Spine?

**LUKE:** no I didn't do that one

**CATHERINE:** I loved the Spine

**LUKE:** yeah really

**CATHERINE:** yes I was just so energised by it, I was absolutely in the moment of it

**SAPHENA:** oh we mentioned regional theatre and actually buildings are regional but there are

**CATHERINE:** and Kneehigh I mentioned Kneehigh earlier, oh and where are Told by an Idiot based because that was a joy to behold from start to finish ... the laurel and Hardy one where are they based are they London or regional? Again it was something I was totally in the moment with.

**SAPHENA:** so that models really interesting isn't it

**CATHERINE:** touring? Regional Touring? Yeah that's a whole different conversation and I was going to mention I am really looking forward to Shandyland at the Everyman in May which is a northern voice it's a coproduction between Northern stage and probably another couple of theatres I can't remember, err and its set in a Northern man's working club I'm really fascinated to see how that works so well but there's loads of things there's always things it like a box of chocolates

**SAPHENA:** I'm going to see

**LUKE:** sorry to interrupt but talking about those companies middle child, Kneehigh, Tmesis I mean they exist in places, but they tour nationally, it might have a resonance of the place but then move it I don't have a problem with it touring, yeah the first thing is we are doing a thing here for this place

**SAPHENA:** that's really interesting yeah

**LUKE:** if you want to write a play its fine I mean know why you're are doing these things

**SAPHENA:** that's really interesting, so regional theatre companies not he buildings actually have all the things we've been talking about the, the regional buildings are maybe seen as lacking in quality but actually the regional the touring companies are like, the Kneehigh's are absolutely seen as top quality aren't they the 20 Stories, I mean they can take their work nationally and



**CATHERINE:** Slunglow

**LUKE:** Slunglow

**CATHERINE:** but then again who sees regional theatre as being inadequate in the background with big circles around it – so it all depends on who it is, who you're talking to and the context in which you put it. it really doesn't matter and that's the reality of the situation its unhelpful massively unhelpful but I don't think you can get away from the word regional all you can do is to embrace it and erm to take it back and to give it make sure it always gets given and is talked about in the right tone the right tome actually. Yes exciting innovative work that doesn't often or always rely on the bottom line and getting all these tourists in, isn't it its experimental work that's exciting work that's really out here work happening that's always like people are missing out I'm always like people are missing out and thy don't know what they are missing out on in, I feel sorry for all these London audiences ...

**SAPHENA:** laughs

**CATHERINE:** I do, because they don't get all of this fantastic work, they miss out on it so ...

**LUKE:** I'll tell you what I saw ...

**CATHERINE:** I'm really sorry London

**LUKE:** there's defo more of it down here than in London

**SAPHENA:** yeah, yeah

**CATHERINE:** I pity them at this point

**SAPHENA:** laughs

Catherine not in a condescending way obviously, but yeah

**SAPHENA:** brilliant well yeah ... I'm going to say thank you to you two wonderful people, Catherine Jones, what are you journalist, critic

**CATHERINE:** I suppose of gosh, arts writer I suppose

**SAPHENA:** Arts writer that sounds nicer

**CATHERINE:** critic maybe ha yeah

**SAPHENA:** Ok Luke! The very Northern lovely playwright, thank  
you so much

**LUKE:** you're all right [laughs]

**CATHERINE:** Thank you

**LUKE:** Thank you

**-END-**