

CAROUSEL: IN CONVERSATION WITH FIONA MOUNTFORD

PODCAST TRANSCRIPTION

*INTRO MUSIC *

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

It's my great pleasure to be sitting down with four of the performers who play key female characters in Timothy Sheader's gloriously reimagined production of the classic Rodgers and Hammerstein musical Carousel. Joining me today are Carly Bawden, who plays heroine Julie Jordan. Jo Eaton-Kent who is fairground owner Mrs Mullin. Christina Modestou who's Julie's best friend, Carrie Pipperidge and Natasha May-Thomas who plays Julie and Billy Bigelow's teenage daughter, Louise. Welcome all. Tim Sheader has reimagined this classic American musical in a way that makes it more resonant for British audiences. I wonder if we might start with the four of you giving us a snapshot of the tone, of the vibe of this production.

[JO EATON-KENT]

I suppose maybe a good place to start is that it's really, it feels more grounded, in a sense. I think the orchestration lends to that, I think the environment of the set that we're on lends to that.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Tell us about that environment and the set for people who haven't seen it yet.

[JO EATON-KENT]

So, the set is actually if you can imagine one big square that's been plonked in the middle of the park and then inside of that square a circle has been cut out, put a hinge through it and they've twisted it on its axis. And so we have one big plain, circular plain for use to play on and then a big red square which is to represent, like a dock, or some kind of pier.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

'Cause it's a seaside setting. Coastal setting. Yeah.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

I think what makes our version of Carousel different from the original, I wasn't overly familiar with the original. I don't think a lot of us were, so we kind of came at this from, I think, a really fresh perspective. I think tonally we've sort of taken away the fluff and what we're left with are all these issues that are usually sort of buried in the piece. And that we've sort of tried our best to bring those issues to the forefront and perhaps deal with them as much as we can without, within the realms of not being able to change everything – if that makes sense.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes, I love that, tonally you've stripped away the fluff. Because I wanted to ask you all. This production doesn't shy away from putting the issue of domestic violence absolutely front and centre. Was that the tone you've stripped away? Some of the niceness. It's

real, it's gritty, these are real people with real lives. Not just chirpy people singing songs, are they?

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

A hundred percent and the first week or two we spent having conversations about gender inequality, about suicide, about depression, about domestic abuse, about all of those things, didn't we? We spent quite a lot of time in rehearsals digging into those before we really started digging into the text.

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

Yeah, I feel like there were a lot of conversations that we needed to have but I think that's sort of what's really helped us with these issues because, I don't know, I think it's allowed us to go in with a really good idea of how we want to play this. Yeah.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Sure, yeah, okay. So, the domestic violence. Why was it important, do you think, to foreground this issue of domestic violence because yeah, the fluff has been stripped away. Why do you think that was important.

[CARLY BAWDEN]

I think it was a big priority in this production to bring the female narrative more to the forefront. I think often with this production it can be further back in the story and I think it was especially important for us in this production to not let Billy off the hook. So that, in turn, created quite a big shift in our production – a necessary one.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And a very powerful one. And those who don't know, it's not spoiling anything to say that this is not set in America anymore. It's set in this country and I think again it means we can't shy away from the issues. We're listening – I found myself listening afresh to a show I'd seen many times before.

[JO EATON-KENT]

And that was a decision very much consciously made by Tim and the production to actually locate it closer to home. I think really. Because we are a UK audience coming to watch this show it needs to be for the people who are watching. And to actually let it bring something closer to home, it makes it seem more real because the reality is, that through the pandemic. I don't want to get too into it, because it's horrible, but the cases of domestic violence that have come across in the pandemic through this year it's skyrocketed. And

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Some terrifying statistics, 60% increase. I've been reading different ones. And you're right, this is a very enjoyable musical but I think by setting it where it is and doing what you do it does make us all sit up a little bit and listen again. And another thing is that the company notably speaks and sings in your own everyday accents rather than assuming this uniform speech. I found it surprising and really refreshing for a musical to do this. I wonder what it was like for all of you to work with.

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

I enjoyed it. I found it a lot easier because it didn't feel like I'm playing this girl that's really far away from me and she's nothing like me. I felt like I could really add Natasha into it – if that makes sense. I think it was easier to make it a lot realer. It's helped me to get into the character of Louise and I'm sure it's made it easier for you guys as well, because it's not someone who's really far away from you. You can bring a bit of you into it.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Exactly and I think for all of you, for the performers and for the audience as well. It's not these people who speak in a way like nothing I come across in my daily life it's people who speak exactly like everyone else does. Carly and Christina, Natasha's just spoken very eloquently about the accents and I know you two are seasoned musical theatre performers, what was it like performing, singing in your own accent rather than the accent superimposed by the show?

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

I mean honestly I've been trying to get a Welsh accent into a musical for my whole career.

laughter

Because you just don't hear it! You never hear Welsh accents in musicals and it drives me mad, because it's such a lyrical accent! And so many times I've done shows and they've gone, "no no no, you have to be from London, you have to be from up North or you have to be Scottish". And I'm just thinking – why? There's a whole section of the UK we're missing out here, who actually love the arts! So for me, being able to bring – I saw Carrie when I was auditioning for this, because again, Carousel for me is not a show that I would cast myself in. So when I found out that they were doing something new with it, I jumped at the chance. I started looking at the material and suddenly started seeing all, lots of people from my childhood which I really recognised in her. And to bring that sort of working class, fun, raunchy side of her through the accent. Because I think Gavin and Stacey put us on a map and then we fell off a little bit.

laughter

So it's actually really lovely to

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

The post Gavin and Stacey boost in Welsh accents!

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

Yeah, quite a few jobs I've done I've had – I've spoken to writers or directors and they went "why didn't we let you use your own accent?" So, for me, it's thrilling. It's one of the things I think I enjoy most.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Lovely! And Carly I know you've been in stacks of musicals. What did you make of being able to be Carly.

[CARLY BAWDEN]

It's quite liberating. And, as Natasha touched upon, I think it was really important to the creative team and us as a company to represent a community that the audience know. And have a connection to. And it's so wonderful because we've just got such a different mixture of accents and backgrounds in our company. It just speaks to so many different communities.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

It's reflecting the London and the streets outside. Yeah. Watching this production, I was forcibly struck by the lack of options and expectations that are available to all of your characters. Economically, socially and indeed romantically. Carly and Christina, what are your characters expectations when it comes to relationships? And I was wondering what shaped those expectations?

[CARLY BAWDEN]

Well, I think, for Julie she very much – at the beginning of the show – you see her working at Bascombe's cotton mill with Carrie. They have to live in, they're very controlled and within this patriarchal system and you know, living for the weekend. Living for that day off to go to the fair.

laughter

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

To win a teddy bear!

[CARLY BAWDEN]

To win a teddy and a goldfish.

Christina laughs

But I think Julie very much sees the system and wants out and is a dreamer and wants to see what's beyond that town and what's possible and I think that is also what connects her and Billy. She also freely says "I'm not gonna marry – I'm not going to get married. I'm not going to do that thing that all the other women are doing. I just don't see myself in that – "

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

-In that set role

[CARLY BAWDEN]

Yeah – I want to get away from that. And then, of course, she falls head over heels for Billy and does – inevitably – end up within that system. Albeit in a very different way. But she still, you know, even though she has all that desire to get beyond and break free of it. She ends up getting sucked into it.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And what about your character [Christina]– what expectations did she grow up with?

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

I think that's what's so beautiful about Julie and Carrie is that they are literally opposite ends of the spectrum and they are best friends. Like, they are chalk and cheese, Carrie has definitely grown up buying into that system and watched all the Disney films and gone "I'm going to be that princess". And perhaps she doesn't get a lot of male attention, but is quite sexually aware as a woman but that is sort of repressed, I think. And I think that she's grown up, sort of. We had this discussion in the rehearsal room of her having her own little music box that she opens up and watches these two – this man and woman dancing – and that's the top of her wedding cake. Do you know what I mean? She buys into all of it because she thinks that's how she'll be happy. That's all she has so she totally buys into that. She totally buys into that.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So she buys into that picture perfect version of the system while Julie Jordan doesn't. Okay – how interesting! I like – Carly you said the patriarchy because it very much is a patriarchal society. And yet, what struck me again about your wonderful production is that Billy Bigelow is just as much a victim of the rigidly prescribed gender role as the women, isn't he? He's behaving in the way that he has learned that men can and do. Or am I being too fair by saying he's a victim of these prescribed roles as well? Am I cutting him too much slack.

[CARLY BAWDEN]

You are right that he is, without a doubt, a product of what has happened to him and that there is a lot of toxicity within what is expected of certain gender roles but I think where other past productions maybe have excused that, the important thing is to not excuse that. So you're right, absolutely, but it's then how people move forward, or maybe don't move forward from that.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yeah, yeah that's lovely – absolutely. Sort of highlights it but says it's still not okay. I'd like to ask Carly and Jo – given that you play the two female characters who love Billy I think we can say. What is this man's enduring appeal? Let's just remind ourselves.

laughter

Let's just remind our listeners that Julie Jordan is, as Carly has said, is an upright mill worker who jacks it all in to go off with this penniless man she's only just met. While Mrs Mullin keeps re-employing this highly unreliable and sometimes violent worker. My simple question to both of you is – why?

[JO EATON-KENT]

That's a very good question. But why do we fall in love at all maybe is an appropriate response. It could be anything. It could be to do with something that he says in a particular way, at a particular time when the blossoms are falling. It could be anything to do with something so nuanced. It could be something more practical, like he is a – I say in quotation marks – "a free spirit". He is an artist and he goes out and travels with the fair and he's one of those people who doesn't do the respectful thing say, like

Mister Enoch Snow. He doesn't do the keeping house – no that's not what I mean. He's the breadwinner – that's what I mean. He doesn't fill that role.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

He's not worried about his monthly bank statements and that sort of thing, is he?

[JO EATON-KENT]

He lives as the coins come in.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yeah, I like that.

[CARLY BAWDEN]

He doesn't play by the rules and I think Julie gets completely sucked in by his free spirit and his otherness. His nature, his creative nature – his nature is an outsider, his bravery. I think and definitely not playing by the rules, as somebody who grew up playing by the rules. As somebody who doesn't want to play by the rules any more.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

He's arrived in this society and said – “you're following these rules and I'm not” and it's quite startling!

[CARLY BAWDEN]

And it's something that Julie wants to do. She wants to break free of those things as well.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

And he challenges the world too, doesn't he? Because he says, you know the line but, you know. He talks about why are we even here? What is this world? He talks about the bigger picture as well and I think that's something that potentially you guys share and for me, watching in rehearsals. What is this planet we live on?

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And then the big questions that, I think, in this community that not many people are asking. They're getting on with the daily grind and Billy comes in with a set of questions that are new. Christina, I was fascinated by the relationship between Carrie and Mr. Snow because customarily in other productions of Carousel this relationship is held up as kind of paradigm of wedded bliss in contrast to the tempestuousness of Julie and Billy. But fascinatingly, I didn't entirely get that sense here. There's a wonderful undertone of ambiguity in the work, I thought I detected a little bit – an unsettling hint of control. Of controlling behaviour in John Pfumojena's lovely performance as Mr. Snow. Tell us a little bit about that. Am I imagining things?

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

You are not imagining things!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Ooooh good.

laughter

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

I think in this production and one thing that has always struck me about this show and why I've perhaps why I've not always been a fan of it – there it is, I've said it!

laughter

Is that you cannot categorically say that a kept woman is a good relationship. We had lots of conversations about it and there was a version a couple of weeks ago when their entire relationship – we stripped all the fun out of it and it was all very controlling. From the get go. And we've peppered back in some of that humour, otherwise I think it -

laughter

People need to leave feeling something other than depressed! But we wanted to, I think, to be clear that actually relationships are not as black and white as that. And although Enoch thinks he's doing what's best and he's adhering to the rules that society gives him. He's made a plan for his life and he's saving this woman as far as he's concerned. It's the way he's traditionally brought up that ends up being actually something that kind of hinders Carrie but she sort of lives with it and she does end up in this kind of capitalist relationship ending up having to churn out these kids [she] doesn't hate it. But she has made her bed.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yes, she's made a decision.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

She does get stuck and she's controlled financially by him, you know. So there is that there.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

I think you give the sense that Carrie is a huge lover of fun and Mr. Snow might be reliable and dependable but possibly isn't so much fun. And one wonders, eight years down the line we come into their relationship some years later, we won't give away any spoilers, but one wonders how much fun Carrie is having.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

A hundred percent, a hundred percent. And I think the sad thing is, that I recognise it in so many women in my life. My family are Greek-Cypriot and often it's arranged, arranged marriages. And you know what, I've been really lucky with my parents because they fell in love and have been married fifty two years but you see it quite a lot. Before the days when it was – when it wasn't okay to get divorced – and when you did have to deal with it. We don't talk about it enough, I think. I think there is something in this show which is for that woman.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

And again I think that is what brings this production of this show so vividly into the present day, it's these relationships and exactly as you've just said, we can all relate to some of these not perfect relationships. We've either been in them or we know people

in them. It's really, it's not this fantasy musical other land of these chirpy people, just singing their jolly songs, is it? It's something else.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

And everyone is flawed. As a human everyone is flawed. The men and the women and it's just.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yeah, absolutely. They're grown-ups, they're proper grown-ups.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

Yeah and I think what this cast manages to capture so beautifully, I think, when I watch. Is that you see everyone character's flaws and every character's dreams.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yeah, it's a 360 degree portrait and I like that. Absolutely. Natasha, now Natasha you're Louise, you're Julie and Billy's daughter and I was wondering. What stories has Louise grown up hearing about her father? What's her mother told her?

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

I think it's a bit mixed. So we discussed this a lot, but we kind of – I feel that Julie has portrayed Billy as how she sees him in such a loving, caring, he didn't mean to, sort of way. The problem we have is everyone else tells her the opposite, what a horrible man he is. You know, like, she gets bullied for it. So this is where there's such a big conflict between Louise and Julie because I think she realises, "you're not telling me the truth here." And I think that's where they don't always see eye to eye and there's a lot of frustration from Louise, because I think yeah. She knows that her mum's just still stuck on this thing that she's been stuck on for sixteen years that she's been alive and it's frustrating. She wants to know the truth.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Do you think, we're extra-textual speculation here, but why no, it's Friday afternoon. Do you think Julie has been honest with Louise and said, "your dad, your know. He hit me, but he's a troubled man and I love him so much" or how honest was she with her daughter about any of this?

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

So I think she wasn't honest at all until, I think, Louise had that conversation with her and said "look I know and I can't keep going on if you're not going to tell me the truth." And I think she then did admit because once you get to fifteen, sixteen you can't. There's only so many lies you can tell. I think she sort of may have then told her, "okay yeah this did happen" but I think she would've quickly flipped it back to the good things about him.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Whereas the people of the town have been telling Louise some very un-good things about him. When we first see your character Natasha, you're doing this wonderfully, highly expressive wordless dance. Beautiful beautiful work.

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

Thank you.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Just tell us a bit more about that. What are the emotions that Louise is pouring into that dance?

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

So, so many. I feel like it is a rollercoaster. The first thing that is in Louise's mind, obviously the audience don't see this, she's had a conversation with Julie before this and – well this is how I interpret it. She's got these male friends and she's getting a bit older and she's said to her mum, "look I want to see my friends – I want to go play with my friend blah blah blah." And Julie's a bit wary of this situation now she's getting older and they've had a bit of a scrap and a bit of a falling out and she's like "oh my God, I'm sixteen – come on!".

laughter

That's how, in my mind, I imagine my mum and when she's told me off and I'm like "MUM"

laughter

That's what's going on, so I really try and get into that headspace. Literally. So first it's frustration and it's anger and it's Oh my God, why me. I feel like her life is just – she's had so many things that haven't exactly gone to plan. Her dad, she's bullied, she's just had an argument with her mum. They do get on, but like any teenager with her mum they don't always see eye to eye. So there's a lot of frustration and there's a lot of anger. But then, I don't want to ruin it, but then it gets a bit more playful so that's "oh yeah, I'm fine my friends are here, let's have some fun". It then turns really dark and then I think it's almost like yeah, she's intimidated and she's a bit more vulnerable at that point, which you don't normally see because she's quite strong and she doesn't like to show that side of her. She's quite feisty. Then it changes to her to her kind of, feeling a bit like a sense of hope, I think when she meets the Barker Boy and kind of fancies him a bit. That's – I feel like she hasn't experienced that much joy and that's the first moment. Especially because the rest of it hasn't been, you know, that joyful. So I think that's a lovely moment for her and then again it switches and she's back in that place where she's vulnerable and she always turns to anger. And that's when we see the whole angry.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Yeah, yeah yeah yeah. Her emotions being channelled via anger rather than. And what you say, one imagines, again, this society that Louise and Julie a single parent family. There aren't probably all that many single parent families in this tightly knit traditional society so maybe that again made Louise feel a little bit more like an outsider and so on. Yeah, that dance, it's very visceral it's very powerful doing that. At the end of it are you drained each night or are you pumped?

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

Laughs I'm pumped! I've just come off stage and everyone's a bit tired and I'm like "Wooooo!"

laughter

I'm just like buzzing!

[CARLY BAWDEN]

We're just old now!

laughter

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

You're not!

[JO EATON-KENT]

I'm feeling old now *laughs*

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

You power everyone to the finish with that! Come on!

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

I love it, I love it. It's so fun. It's hard sometimes to get into it but once I'm in it, I'm in it.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Now, it's been a mighty strange sixteen months for all of us in this country. But we all understand that it's been especially tough for actors with theatres closed for so long. How did the four of you keep yourselves motivated over the last year and a quarter? Or did you just think – like the rest of us – take to your sofa and Netflix and hibernate?

[JO EATON-KENT]

Well I made a short film!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Did you indeed! That is very enterprising.

[JO EATON-KENT]

I just got so bored I thought I've got to do something! Why not just go crazy and make a film and so I bought a camera and I called up my friend and said "Hey, do you want to make a film" and she was all the way in Liverpool so she got her camera out. So we set it up and over Zoom we got it set up, laptop and we were calling each other but then we set up cameras just above the web cam and we just. I put a little script together and we just did the thing and then I pieced it together with the footage she sent over from her camera all the way in Liverpool. I was in, just below Catford. And yeah, just spent a good few months.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So that's how you kept yourself motivated. By taking

[JO EATON-KENT]

It's on YouTube, it's called Lessons. But we're not here to advertise that!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So were you all, sort of counting down the days, the minutes, 'til you could get back in a theatre or, I mean? I don't know, did you feel frustrated?

[CARLY BAWDEN]

It felt quite up and down for me. I definitely, I wasn't as amazingly proactive as you were Jo – that's amazing!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

You didn't take up learning the harp or something.

[CARLY BAWDEN]

I'll be honest, I did a lot of coffee drinking and watching daytime quiz shows.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Very good!

[CARLY BAWDEN]

Bit of Tenable – all of that. Bit of Tipping Point. Terrible! But I also did have the amazing opportunity to do a week of live streamed performances of the show that I was twenty four hours away – I think, from going to America and doing a snazzy three month tour. With a show called Romantics Anonymous and that got cut short, for obvious reasons but we did get to do a week of livestreamed performances at Bristol Old Vic. And that was last September which just broke up the -

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

An oasis in the desert of lock down.

[CARLY BAWDEN]

It was, it really was. It was amazing. So that kept me going.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Good. Christina, how did you? Netflix, telly, short films? What did you do?

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

There's pressure now, isn't there! No, I was really fortunate in that I'd just finished doing The Boy in the Dress at Stratford literally two weeks before we locked down, so I was a little bit ready for a break. So I was geared to that and so I really struggled when it got to sort of the second lock down. Second and third lock down but I'm quite proactive, in the last four years I've been wanting to set up my own business of supporting other creatives and other actors. So actually I took the time in lock down to set up something called The Agony Actor. Which is there for people when they are in work, out of work, if they just need some help, if they need someone to read with them for an audition, or if – well there were no auditions –

laughter

But it kind of spans a personal mentor. So I launched into that and really loved it and met some incredible people and still have my one to ones now and keep that going. And then I also got a call from a really dear friend of mine who I worked on In The Heights with who said "Christina, have you ever thought about doing your own show?" And I was like "Well, yeah but I don't really think I've got anything to say." And he was like "I think cabaret will be back before theatre, would you like to do it?" And so we did! We did

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

So you made your own cabaret show!

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

We did, we did it in Huddersfield and then it came to Southwark Playhouse for four Sundays so – in all honesty – I managed, the great thing about being a creative is you can do it anywhere. And I think something that the last eighteen months has taught me is that – for too long I sat down and waited for someone else to give me a job and sometimes you can access it.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

You can generate it.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

You can generate it, or give other people opportunity, so yeah. I also did a lot of sitting around in my pyjamas and walking my dog and yeah.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Now, Natasha I know that you have only just graduated. You'd only just graduated from drama school – a period that is tough enough at the best of times – and I think we can say that this has not been the best of times. So how did you navigate this strange last year?

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

Yeah, it was weird. So I, I think I was going into rehearsals for one of my shows for the end of third year. That then got cut short. I had about two rehearsals and then, obviously, everything locked down. So it was a bit weird for me, I was doing online classes, that was how I spent my time until summer. But then after that, I felt like a little lost puppy *laughs*. For that whole next however long it was. It was like, you're not there anymore, so you're not getting classes from there anymore and you have no guidance. I was very lucky and had a great friendship group and we tried to keep each other motivated. I tried to keep taking online classes and things like that. It was quite up and down again. I feel like, I just did what I felt with each day. I didn't put too much pressure on myself, I just kind of. I think, looking back. Not that I wanted it to be that long. I did need that time, to sort out myself, sort out my life – not that I had that much going on 2020. But just get into a really good mindset and I did actually feel ready. When we went back into lockdown again I was a bit over it – I won't lie. I took to TikTok, I became a TikTok addict.

laughter

But yeah, at that point I was really ready for it to be done and luckily I found that this was still going ahead, because I know a lot of people haven't had anything to go into. I was really excited – I was excited anyway. But you know 'cause I wasn't sure if it was happening or not.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Delayed gratification! A year extra!

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

Exactly!

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Now, let's take our attention back to focus on Carousel again because, I was wondering, by the end of this production. What have all of your characters learned about themselves? By the end of each show. What, slightly hackneyed phrase, what journey have you been on? What do you know about your characters that you didn't know at the start? Jo, you're looking very pensive. What about Mrs Mullin.

[JO EATON-KENT]

Yeah. I think from Mrs Mullin's point of view. She has a very unique set of circumstances from the way we're telling it. From a trans perspective specifically. I think how her relationship with Billy sort of ends its course, in a way, is the biggest cut off for their being together as two individuals regardless of how close they are. It's actually to do with the relationship with Julie and, I don't want to give away spoilers, this is the thing. The relationship between Julie and Billy how that manifest itself. There's this inevitable moment where she's faced with him revealing news to her about how it's developing and that's something that she cannot because of the world she lives in and the body that she has she cannot provide him, so she's left in a place where she has to go. "I know what you need and I cannot provide that, somebody else is immediately providing it for you and for my own sake, I must say goodbye."

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Wow, sure, that's a big journey of emotions. Natasha, what has Louise, I mean as we've discussed Louise bursts literally onto the scene quite late in the action but what has she learned by the end?

[NATASHA MAY-THOMAS]

I think Louise's journey is pretty quick but I think it's a lot about her relationship with Julie. I think she realises that Julie stands with her and she supports her, and she sort of. Because I think she comes into it very much on my own, I hate this place, I want to leave but no one supports me, you're all the same. By the end she realises everyone is with me and my mum supports me and my mum's almost guiding me to break the cycle. So I think she feels less alone. By the end.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Lovely, Christina, what is Carrie's revelation by the end?

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

I think Carrie goes full circle. I think she starts off being really true to herself, not apologising for who she is and then we sort of see that diminish. I think she tries to hang on to it. Because of the - we skip a big chunk – we get the beginning bit and two months has passed, then two days and then we get a seventeen year break

laughter

So for me, the important stuff happens for Carrie in that seventeen year break and she goes full circle. She starts of being true to herself and then gets that taken away from her very, very, very slowly and when she comes back seventeen years later she re-finds her voice and also, I think Julie and Carrie re-find each other. The very beginning of the show we spend a lot of time together and as the show goes on we sort of drift apart.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Your characters make very different romantic choices in life.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

A hundred percent. And because of that we end up going in completely different ways, but because of what happens to Julie, Carrie ends up holding on even tighter, I think, to her relationship. But also holding on even tighter to Julie and I think that by the time seventeen years have passed and we see that scene where she perhaps pops in on her every day. They have that. I feel like Carrie actually accepts her circumstances and almost goes full circle.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Lovely. Carly, what's going on with Julie.

[CARLY BAWDEN]

There's quite a big, pivotal shift near the end of the show for Julie and Louise and their relationship. And it's rooted in realising that she needs to let Billy go. Because you get this sense that through their relationship, through their relationship as mother and daughter that she has been. That a lot of her loyalty and her priority has been painting a good picture of Louise's dad for her. Thinking that she's doing right by her in doing that. And actually it's holding back their relationship completely. And I think the moment that Julie decides to let Billy go is the moment that is a complete shift for their relationship together and that they move forward together and that.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

As a team – as mother and daughter.

[CARLY BAWDEN]

As a team! Yeah! And to give Louise the love and the confidence to move forward and to break a long cycle and to say "don't make the choices that I made. I'm completely behind you and with you".

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

That's lovely. I like that. What does it feel like when you all join together to sing, at the end, to sing that glorious anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone." What's that moment like for all of you?

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

It's fresh. It almost doesn't feel like we're in the show at that moment. It feels like we're in life. I feel like, yeah. For me, anyway.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Sorry, just unpick that a little bit. I'm loving the thought. Just unpack that a little.

[CHRISTINA MODESTOU]

I just think we've come a really long way since the fifties but just not far enough yet. And I think that we all see things we recognise in this show, which is really sad. I think quite often we see a lot of the times where no one listens when a woman says no. And I think that even if you've encouraged it, that moment when you say no doesn't matter how far it's gone. If you're not heard in that moment, then it can be really scary. So I think that rings fresh for me and that final bit. When that final bit when we turn around and I think what's really lovely in this production is that the men in the company hold our hands in support. So I think that from the minute I turn around, there's obviously remnants of Carrie there. But for me, I want to see all of the women in the audience and say "I see you, I hear you and I feel you". And I think that's what that moment gives me

[JO EATON-KENT]

What I was going to say, the shape that we take at that moment. We're parallels of very vivid image created by Drew McOnie, who at the beginning during the prologue in which the ensemble take each other's hands. There's a complete full circle effect, no pun intended, between everyone holding each other's hands to this frantic music to suggest there's this system in place, there's this chain reaction thing going on between these people. They all affect each other. Then later on it's a slight modification and to different music. It's the same system but there's this sense of grounding and there's this support network linking it all together, I think. And then it's also because of that modification there is an allowance, there is a chance for Louise to take herself away from it, I think. I think there's a truth to that.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

Carly what did you find?

[CARLY BAWDEN]

I sort of have two different layers that feed into both of your points. I have one layer of singing that and looking at lovely Natasha as Louise, as my daughter singing those lyrics. I'm going to be honest – don't tell Tom Deering - but I have a job sometimes getting all of the *laughs* lyrics out. Sometimes I have to do a little bit of a mime for just a couple of words to get myself back together. Because it's really moving and it feels really important. And hopeful, I think that's what I get out of the end is a lot of hope. And I also feel like, you know, within the show as a character and in life as Christina said, but also it feels like a brilliant call to arms to be better and do better and move forward.

[FIONA MOUNTFORD]

That's lovely. I think on that note, I should say there's so much more about this wonderfully rich production that I wish we could talk about, but I'm afraid that's all we have time for as the actors have to prepare for tonight's show! So I'd like to say, very many thanks to Carly Bawden, Jo Eaton-Kent, Christina Modestou and Natasha May-Thomas.

[ALL]

Thank you!