



voices of manchester

by Duncan Battman



Tuesday 11 –
Sunday 16
November 2025

altrincham
garrick
studio

Manchester Voices

An Introduction by playwright and director **Duncan Battman**

The Garrick is an exciting place to be at present with an embarrassment of riches in the quality of talent available across the whole theatre – we are very lucky to have such a place on our doorstep. The productions on the main stage have reached new heights of late but never at the expense of The Studio which has continued to be supported by quality actors, the theatre's management and most importantly by you – the audience – willing to take a chance. I thank and applaud you all.

In May, I was asked by Joe if I would like to write six monologues with our great city as their backdrop. I jumped at the opportunity to re-engage artistically with the Garrick for the first time since the Covid lockdown but was concerned about putting something together from scratch in time for this slot. As such, I decided to adapt three of my short stories which fitted the bill, *'Rendezvous'*, *'I Don't Like Coffee'* and *'A Dog in the Road'* and create three new pieces *'Dad (An Almost True Story)'*, *'The Streets'* and *'Gigging'* to go alongside them. All are based on real people, people I have encountered, albeit (in five of the cases) just in passing. They are people to whom I have spoken or, if not directly spoken to, overheard (eavesdropped) in conversation – conversations that made me prick up my ears as Alan Bennett's Joe Orton might have put it. *'Voices'* is an affectionate look at the people we find around us every day, on the streets, in cafés, on buses and trams, in bars and in the pub. It is a chance to dip into their lives for a moment, to share their hopes,



their loves, their worries and – perhaps – to realise how close we all are to one another in this increasingly fractious time in which we are living.

Personally, I have always loved Manchester, it is a special place. It is lauded for many things from the industrial revolution to the great causes of workers' civil rights and women's suffrage. It is a city accepting of diversity whether you are walking down the curry mile, through China town or along the tow path on Canal Street. It has a musical heart at its centre, catering for all tastes, classical, indie or jazz. It is alive with great humour and characters. It is a city that has led the world, shown the way and fought many a good fight, and yet it is a city – like all others – with homelessness, pockets of

severe poverty and the drugs, crime and violence that come with social instability and insecurity. My stories touch on some of those issues but do not labour them, rather they celebrate this exciting city and the people who pass through it – not all born here, but all welcome here – by most.

I have stayed clear of the stereotypical 'Manc' with his bucket hat full of attitude, as I tend to in general, and instead have put together six stories that present a kinder and I believe more honest image of the Manchester I know and love. I hope you find something to love in all the characters – especially as one is me!

I regularly travel into 'town' (for free these days!) not just for a meal or a beer or a night at the theatre but also to go to gigs. I don't go to massive stadia to see Oasis or whoever's left of Genesis, Yes or Pink Floyd, but to places like The Deaf Institute, The Soup Kitchen, The White Hotel (it's not white and it's not a hotel – and for the pedants, it's actually in Salford!) and many other tremendous, tiny venues dotted around the city. These places might only hold 100 on a good night and more likely 30 to 40 on a wet Tuesday in November, but at them I get up close to the musicians – less famous but no less talented – and I feel part of the act. It is a thrill. I believe that Studio theatre offers that same experience, that same buzz, that same feeling of being part of the show and hence that same thrill.

I hope you enjoy *'Voices'*. If you do, perhaps I'll see you at a gig one night in town.

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Voices from the North

The playwrights who put Manchester on the theatrical map...

Manchester has always been a city that speaks its mind. You can hear it in the clatter of its streets, in the roar of the football terraces, in the hum of a café debate that lasts longer than the coffee. So it's no surprise that its playwrights – past and present – have given voice to the lives, loves, and struggles of ordinary people with extraordinary eloquence. From the pioneering realists of the early 1900s to the fierce, funny, and fearless writers of today, Manchester's theatre scene has been a stage for revolution, revelation, and razor-sharp wit.

The Original Rebels: The Manchester School

Before the bright lights of London could claim British theatre, there was Manchester's own Gaiety Theatre and its in-house playwrights – an ensemble that became known as The Manchester School. Led by the visionary *Annie Horniman*, this early 20th-century movement took northern life – textile mills, factory towns, family squabbles – and made it the stuff of drama.

Among them, *Stanley Houghton* stood out. His 1912 play *Hindle Wakes* dared to ask whether a working-class woman should marry the man she'd spent a holiday with. The answer – no, she shouldn't have to – shocked Edwardian audiences. Fanny Hawthorn, its unapologetically independent heroine, was a Lancashire lass who rewrote the rules of respectability. The play went from Manchester to London and the world, heralding a new age of social realism.

Then there was *Harold Brighouse*, whose *Hobson's Choice* (1915) remains a comic masterpiece. It's the tale of a stubborn Salford cobbler undone by his clever daughter, Maggie – an early feminist heroine with a fine head for business and a sharp tongue to match. The play's blend of humour, class commentary, and warm humanity set the tone for a century of northern storytelling.

In their day, these writers were outsiders. They didn't just write about Manchester – they wrote from it, in its dialect and its rhythms. Their plays were as local as a pint of Boddingtons and just as lively.

Postwar Grit: Shelagh Delaney and the new North

Fast-forward to the 1950s, and Manchester found a new voice – young, fierce, and female. *Shelagh Delaney*, born in Salford, was just nineteen when she handed *A Taste of Honey* to director Joan Littlewood. She'd written it in a fortnight after seeing a play she thought didn't understand

working-class life. Her own play did, and then some.

Premiering in 1958, *A Taste of Honey* shocked audiences with its honesty. Its heroine, Jo, was a teenage girl who becomes pregnant by a Black sailor and shares her flat with a gay friend – subjects few playwrights dared to touch at the time. But Delaney's language – warm, witty, and defiantly northern – made it a triumph. Critics called it “*the voice of the people*.” Film followed stage, and by 1961, Delaney's story was winning awards in Hollywood.

Delaney's influence rippled through decades of British drama. She proved that working-class life wasn't just worthy of the stage – it was the stage. Every woman who wrote from her own experience afterwards owed her a debt.

The Political Pulse: From Jim Allen to Trevor Griffiths

The 1960s and 70s saw Manchester voices turn political. Playwright *Jim Allen*, a former building worker and staunch socialist, used the stage (and later, television) to argue for justice. His plays like *The Lump* and *The Big Flame* didn't just tell stories – they made manifestos. Allen's collaboration with director Ken Loach brought Manchester's social conscience to national screens.

Meanwhile, *Trevor Griffiths*, born in Ancoats, turned working-class comedy into a weapon. His acclaimed *Comedians* (1975) followed a group of aspiring northern stand-ups learning their craft – and learning, too, how humour can reinforce or resist oppression. It's part theatre, part moral battle, and it remains one of the most intelligent dissections of British masculinity ever written.

Both Allen and Griffiths shared a belief that theatre could change minds, not just entertain them. Their legacy echoes in every socially aware drama produced in the city today.

The Personal and the Political: Mike Leigh's Mancunian Heart

Mike Leigh might be better known as a film director, but his theatrical roots lie deep in Manchester soil. Born in Salford, Leigh developed a unique rehearsal process based on improvisation – a method that captured the cadences of everyday speech. *Abigail's Party* (1977), a portrait of suburban awkwardness, became a cultural phenomenon. His stage work, like his films (*Secrets & Lies*, *Vera Drake*), retains that unmistakable Manchester quality: empathy for flawed people, laced with humour and heartbreak.



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Leigh's influence has been enormous, not least because his characters feel so real. You could imagine bumping into them at the Arndale or in the queue at Greggs. He made authenticity the new avant-garde.

A Woman's Voice: Charlotte Keatley and Beyond

In 1987, Manchester's Contact Theatre premiered a new play by **Charlotte Keatley** – a young local writer who wanted to explore the unspoken bonds between mothers and daughters. ***My Mother Said I Never Should*** was intimate, poetic, and quietly revolutionary. Spanning four generations, it told its story in fragments, jumping across decades, showing how women inherit not just family secrets but expectations.

The play's success was unprecedented: it went on to the Royal Court, then the world. Today, it's the most performed play by a British woman playwright. And it all began in Manchester, nurtured by a theatre that has long championed new, diverse voices.

Keatley's success paved the way for a wave of female playwrights from the North West – **Chloe Moss**, whose ***This Wide Night*** (2008) looked at women rebuilding their lives after prison, and **Zawe Ashton**, whose 2019 Royal Exchange co-production ***For All the Women Who Thought They Were Mad*** examined identity and belonging through a modern, multicultural lens.

The Modern Maestro: Simon Stephens

If there's a playwright today who carries Manchester's dramatic DNA into the world, it's **Simon Stephens**. Born in Stockport and trained at the University of York, Stephens began his career as a teacher in the city before emerging as one of the UK's most prolific dramatists.

His early play ***Port*** (2002), set in Stockport, follows a young woman's struggle to build a life amid urban decay. It's raw, compassionate, and recognisably northern – filled with the yearning and toughness that define the region. His range is broad: the spare, urgent ***Motortown*** and ***Harper Regan*** sit alongside lyrical, intimate pieces such as ***Sea Wall*** and the global phenomenon ***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*** (his stage adaptation of Mark Haddon's novel), which won multiple Olivier Awards and transferred internationally. Yet even when his plays travel far, they carry the heartbeat of Manchester's realism: working people, messy lives, moral questions, and moments of grace.

Stephens has described Manchester as "a city that believes in its own stories." He's proof of that faith.

Stages that Shape Stories

Today, a new generation of writers is emerging from Manchester's creative hotbed. Young playwrights from every background are encouraged by the city's festivals – like **Manchester Fringe** and **Push** – which offer spaces for experimentation, while small companies like **Box of Tricks** and **Monkeywood** tour new writing across the North.

The Royal Exchange also runs the **Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting**, launched in 2005, which has become the UK's most prestigious competition for new voices. Winners such as **Duncan Macmillan** (***People, Places & Things***) and **Kendall Feaver** (***The Almighty Sometimes***), the latter set in Manchester, show how the city continues to nurture national talent.

A City That Speaks Its Mind

Manchester doesn't just produce playwrights; it produces voices. Voices that challenge authority, question tradition, and celebrate survival. Whether it's the feminist defiance of Delaney, the political fire of Allen, or the compassionate realism of Stephens, each generation of writers adds a new verse to the city's song.

As long as there are people in Manchester arguing, dreaming, and telling stories in their own accents, the drama will keep coming. Because in this city, the stage isn't somewhere you escape to – it's where you go to see yourself.

voices of manchester

Six Manchester Talking Heads.
A Tram. A Pub. Six tales from our city.

The Cast

'Rendezvous'

Jennifer, an educated lady in her fifties

Jennifer Louise **Kershaw**

'Dad'

Duncan, a well-spoken man in his sixties

Duncan John **Jones**

'I Don't Like Coffee'

Lillian, an elderly lady

Lillian Victoria **Johnson**

'A Dog In The Road'

Mick, a bit of a lad in his thirties

Mick Jamie **King**

'The Streets'

Jimmy, a man in his forties

Jimmy Sandy **McGregor**

'Gigging'

Siobhan, an Irish girl in her early twenties

Siobhan Rachel **Jacquest**

The Author **The Author**

Other parts played by members of the cast.

The Production Team

Director Duncan **Battman**

A.S.M. / Production Assistant Sandra **Ash**

Trainee A.S.M. Kerry **Edwards**

Lighting & Sound Design Geoff **Scullard**

Lights & Sound Operation Fred **Isaac-Dixon**

Props Christine **Chrystal**

Assisted by Sue **Berry**

Costumes Mike **Shaw & Team**

Set coordination Paul **Simpson & Team**

Workshop Steve **Cox & Team**

Information believed to be correct at time of going to press...

The Director

Duncan Battman



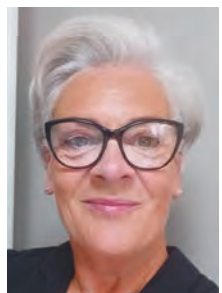
"I began writing plays after appearing, here in the main theatre, in a play the name of which I'd perhaps best not mention for fear of upsetting someone. Oh, what the hell! It was called Two and Two Make Sex. It was the second time that I had played (the same role) in the play, twelve years and one mile apart (the first being at the old Club Theatre on Oxford Road). I thought it was a bloody awful play, couldn't believe that two theatres would want to stage it and foolishly declared that I could write something better. 'Zugzwang' was my first piece, a play the Garrick took up to Edinburgh 38 years ago (I know the year because my son was born that October). Family and work commitments saw the next twenty years fly by, until I was persuaded by my wife to return to the theatre and to start writing again. 'Consequences' was the result, with the wonderful Tony Broughton in the lead role – another trip up to Edinburgh followed, Tony's last. I then became involved with a London based company who bought my plays through an agency and later commissioned new ones, showing them in Edinburgh and in several venues in the capital. My wife once gave one of their London productions a 1-star rating on-line after misunderstanding the voting system on her new phone – the company (and me!) thus denied a full-house of 5-stars!

I first acted at the Garrick over forty years ago as Macleish in Willis Hall's wonderful play The Long, the Short and the Tall. It was back in the days of the old theatre which then held 499, or so I remember. On our first night we only fell short of a full house by just 471, playing to an audience of 28! With five minutes to curtain there were more of us backstage than in the seats of the auditorium! Though I say it myself, it was a terrific production with a strong cast - Eamonn Riley, who played Bamford went on to act professionally - and most of us who were involved have continued to act, direct and even write for theatres locally and around the country. Attendances did improve as the week progressed, but I don't think we ever reached the 50% mark. I tell this story because despite the disappointing numbers those involved in the show, from props to prompt, from actors to director, from stage crew to front of house never once let their heads or performances drop. Whether they numbered in the tens or in the hundreds, each house was treated with equal respect and importance, and each night was treated as if the theatre was full, every ticket bought that week having the same worth. I have since taken shows to Edinburgh, selling out on some shows and playing to a solitary paying customer on one memorable day of another – the same attitude applied.

Full, The Studio holds just 49 – a sold-out week's run would not fill the main theatre – but be assured every customer is as highly prized as those who turn out to see the 'bigger' shows in the main theatre, the cast just as strong, the attention to detail just as important and rehearsal schedule just as intense. The Garrick is very proud of that.

I last acted on the main stage at the Garrick as the headmaster in Alan Bennett's The History Boys with Nick Sample as Hector and, I seem to remember, a certain Joe Meighan as one of the boys! I have acted and directed on several occasions in The Studio and have enjoyed every one of them. 'Voices' is my first new play for almost five years and the first (of my own) that I have directed. I hope you enjoy it."

The Company



Louise Kershaw *Jennifer*

"Despite being involved with the Garrick before, directing a studio show last year, this is my first acting role in 35 years! Having studied a degree in Drama and having taught and examined it since the mid 90's I am putting my money where my mouth is by playing *Jennifer* in this beautifully observational piece about my beloved home city of Manchester. Thanks to

Duncan, the cast and crew for their support.



John Jones – *Duncan*

John is a latecomer to acting, having started in 2015. No one is more surprised than him! He trained with Northern legends David Johnson and Jim Cartwright.

John made his Garrick debut in our post-Covid staging of Alan Bennett's *The Lady In The Van*. His other theatre credits include *Start Square* (Hope Street and Gladstone Theatres);

Entertaining Angels (Brookdale, playing a vicar); *Rapid Reel Monologues*; *A Deadly Sequins of Events* (Various N.W. venues); *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Wilmslow Green Room); *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (Wilmslow Green Room, again a vicar) and *The Fox* (Studio Below, Gladstone Theatre and Studio Beyond).

TV credits (usually lurking in the background but not always) include *Coronation Street* (several times), *It's A Sin*, *The Other One* (again a vicar) and *World On Fire*. John has also done several music videos and a number of short films... So if anyone is looking for a vicar, he could be your man!



Victoria Johnson *Lillian*

Victoria has been involved in amateur theatre for over 35 years, both on stage and working behind the scenes.

It's over 12 years since Victoria last appeared on stage in the Studio, as *Hilary* in *The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband*, also directed by Duncan Batman, and she is delighted to be

back and working with the same director. Main stage appearances at the Garrick include *Geraldine* in *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Jan* in *Ladies Day*, *Ruth* in *Calendar Girls* and, more recently, *Mrs Webb* in *Our Town*.

Elsewhere, Victoria's favourite acting roles include *Florence Foster Jenkins* in *Glorious*; *Lady Edna* in *The Titfield Thunderbolt*; *Norma* in *Mr Wonderful*; *Woman* in *Two* (for which she won a GMDF Best Actress award); *Veta* in *Harvey*; *Evelyn* in *Kindertransport*; and *the Queen* in *Handbagged*. Perhaps the most unusual was playing *Alison Uttley* as part of the *Amazing Women by Rail* season, performing on busy commuter trains and at stations, so being on a tram in *Voices of Manchester* seems like the perfect progression. She has also enjoyed being part of a number of one act play festivals for which she has won a variety of awards over the years.

Victoria is excited to be part of this production and to work with such a great cast and crew. She hopes you enjoy this great piece of new writing and getting to know these Voices of Manchester as much as she has!



Jamie King – *Mick*

At the Garrick Playhouse, Jamie has appeared in *Queers*, *Dick Whittington*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Our Town*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Let the Right One In*, *Jane Eyre*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Waiting for Godot* and recently appeared in the previous play in our Manchester Season, as *Geoffrey* in Carole Carr's moving production of *A Taste of Honey*.

Jamie studied Creative Writing at the University of Bangor, where they acted in productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *The Crucible*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (excerpt), *The Tempest* (excerpt), *A Doll's House*, *This is a Play* and *Blackadder the Third*. Other theatre includes: *Suddenly Last Summer*, *High School Musical* (Pontio Arts), *Hindle Wakes*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Wilmslow Green Room Theatre), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Antimatter Productions/Manchester Pride), *Amalgamations Vol. 6: Bloom* (Niamos Radical Arts Centre), *QI: Queer Improv* (Hoopla Improv Theatre), *Clothes Swap* (workshop) (Green Carnation Company), and *Sunny Girl* (workshop) (HER Productions/New Adelphi Theatre).

As a writer and director, they have co-directed *Talking Heads* (Bangor University), written and co-directed *The Peace Talks* (short film), co-written *12 Scenes of Christmas* (Liberty Rep), and written *The Resignation Speech* (Questors Theatre and Etcetera Theatre).

Jamie is absolutely buzzing to be one of the *Voices of Manchester*, and to be working with the brilliant Duncan and this wonderful cast and crew.



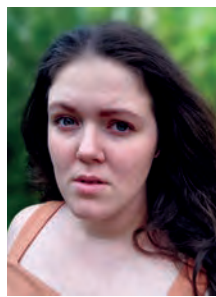
Sandy McGregor – *Jimmy*

Sandy is originally from Dumbarton and moved to Stockport in the 1980s. Since then, the vast majority of his theatrical activities have been at the Stockport Garrick as an actor, lighting designer/operator and director. Notable appearances on stage have included *Lonesome West* (Coleman), *The Birthday Party* (McCann), *Copenhagen* (Heisenberg), *Speaking in Tongues* (Leon/Nick), *The 39 Steps* (Clown),

Hamlet (Marcellus), *In Camera* (Garcin), *Molly Sweeney* (Frank), *The Crucible* (Putnam) and *Road* (Eddie). He has lit over twenty productions: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Bluebird*, *Terre Haute* and *Katherine Howard* amongst others. He has directed *April in Paris*, *Dear Jack*, *Dear Louise*, *The Children*, *The Thrill of Love*, *Insignificance* and, earlier this year, *King Lear*.

Acting appearances with other companies include: *Blue Remembered Hills* (Raymond) and *Molly Sweeney* (Mr Rice) at CHADS, *The Weir* (Finbar) at Wilmslow Green Room and *The Hothouse* (Lush) and *The Dumb Waiter* (Ben) with Viaduct Theatre Company.

This is Sandy's debut at Altrincham Garrick. He is very excited to get the chance to perform in the theatre in this exciting production.



Rachel Jacquest – *Siobhan*

This is Rachel's fifth production at the Garrick, after appearing most recently as *Cynthia Weil* in June's smash hit production of *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical*, which came hot on the heels of her performance as *Judy* in the Garrick Ensemble's unforgettable staging of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. She also played *Evelyn* and was part of the *Ensemble* in *Merrily We Roll Along* (2024), and appeared in the Studio as *Amy* in *Pronoun* (2023).

Rachel studied theatre at Lancaster University, where she performed in numerous productions. Since graduating, Rachel has appeared in *The Winter's Tale* and *Into the Silence* at the Bear Pit Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, and in productions of *Little Shop of Horrors* with Whitefield AODS and Farnworth PAC, most recently as *Ronette* in 2022. She has also appeared in Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*. She is delighted to be back at the Garrick, working with such a talented and welcoming company.

Special thanks to...



Sandra Ash

A.S.M. & Production Assistant

Unravelling the Ribbon in the Studio in 2023 marked the first production on which she worked backstage by herself, gaining invaluable experience while not panicking, and she's delighted to be back. Sandra's behind-the-scenes credits have included *The Jungle Book*, *Home I'm Darling* and *Sleeping Beauty*...



Christine Chrystal

Properties

Having originally joined the Garrick as a volunteer on Front-of-House, Christine has since become an invaluable member of the behind-the-scenes team by taking on the onerous, stress-filled task of sourcing and organising the props for numerous shows... and she still loves it! As we love her!

Without our incredibly dedicated, enthusiastic team of **Volunteers and Staff**, whose sheer hard work often goes unnoticed, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse would simply be unable to continue providing such a range of top-quality productions for everyone enjoy.

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kindertransport

A modern classic about one woman's struggle to come to terms with her past.

by **Diane Samuels**

Directed by **Celia Bonner**

**Tuesday 20 –
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Directed by
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