

J ([00:00:01](#)):

Hello, welcome to the show. My name is J or Jon Spooner, and this is the second episode in my attempt to honour and preserve the memory of Unlimited theatre, an aural herstory of the company - how we formed, what we did, how we did it. This episode is a conversation with my co-founder and dear friend Paul Warwick. Paul was Unlimited's founding artistic director and the first of the original founders to leave the company, but not before he'd led us through the creation of some of our formative shows and projects, including Static, which won us our first Fringe First award at the Edinburgh Festival in the year 2000. The year 2000.

([00:00:48](#)):

Back in the olden days when Beyonce was still just one of Destiny's Child, the olden days when we only had one desktop computer in the Unlimited office, a very cold unit in the old Aire Street workshops behind Leeds City Station. One desktop computer that the six of us shared and had to book a time slot on if we wanted to use it via the piece of A4 paper that was cellotaped on the desk next to it. The olden days when Paul walked into that office one day and, in all sincerity asked, "Has the email Postman been yet?" thinking that, like paper post, email only came once a day. The olden days when Clare made me dress up that one time as a penis to promote sexual health and wellbeing. But that's for another episode. In this episode, I have a lovely free ranging chat with Paul about how he remembers Unlimited coming into being, how we made our first devised show, No Brave World, how we were ahead of our time in our opinion, combining SMS with live performance, why he left the company in 2001 and his advice for anyone setting up a company. Welcome to the show. I'm glad you could make it.

([00:02:02](#)):

It's a bit weird, isn't it? We've never done this before, right? We've never done something where we've recorded each other having

Paul ([00:02:15](#)):

It. We've never done that. I think we've also probably, I don't think we've ever really had a conversation about the history of Unlimited and our time together. I don't think we've ever really,

J ([00:02:28](#)):

Which is extraordinary, really given

Paul ([00:02:30](#)):

How long was it like 30 years? Is it 30 years? 25 years

J ([00:02:33](#)):

Well, okay, so I suppose my first question to you is who are you and how do we know each other?

Paul ([00:02:40](#)):

So I am Paul Warwick and I was one of the founding members of Unlimited,

J ([00:02:47](#)):

And now you are?

Paul ([00:02:49](#)):

Currently I'm the co-artistic director of China Plate, which is a producing company based in London and Birmingham and working all over the place, wherever they'll have

J ([00:03:01](#)):

I love that we've all got those lines, haven't we? Yeah. Hello? I am.

Paul ([00:03:07](#)):

Yeah, that's my little thing.

J ([00:03:09](#)):

So we were just talking, it's a long time and we've never had this conversation, which I don't think I'd actually consciously thought about, which is wild really, because we've known each other a long time and we've done a lot of stuff together and it's not like, I mean, we see each other, we speak a lot, right? And we've done lots of things together. Do you remember meeting me?

Paul ([00:03:33](#)):

Yes. I think I first met you when you were doing Torch Song Trilogy. It's the first time I remember you.

J ([00:03:42](#)):

First time you remember me was me wearing a dress?

Paul ([00:03:46](#)):

Yeah, I think so. I think that's the first time I met you properly.

J ([00:03:52](#)):

See that I have a really vivid memory of meeting and I dunno if this is real or not. I dunno if I've just sort of put this in my brain. I have a really vivid memory of arriving at Leeds University in my first week, and I wanted to do the English and Theatre Studies course, but I didn't have the grades to do it. I got on the English course instead and I wanted to make contact with the workshop theatre. And I remember going along in Fresher's Week, and I think I remember Thorpe wearing a leather jacket. He had lots of hair, very grungy. I think I remember Clare looking basically, you all looked really cool. Clare

Paul ([00:04:35](#)):

Was always the coolest. Yeah, Clare was the first person I met in Leeds when I went up for when I arrived at my first day, which I think would've been the year before you got there, right?

J ([00:04:45](#)):

Yeah. I took a year out

Paul ([00:04:46](#)):

And I remember going over to and finding the Workshop theatre, which was quite a weird and difficult thing to find on the campus. It's a tiny little church in the middle of nowhere, but in the middle of a massive campus of big sixties architecture. And yeah, Clare was there and at the time she was wearing

these really cool pink trousers. I dunno if you can have such thing as pink tweed. They were like pink tweed trousers, a leather jacket that I subsequently found she'd stolen from her sister.

J ([00:05:17](#)):

Everyone had leather jackets. I remember you wearing a leather jacket.

Paul ([00:05:20](#)):

I was wearing a leather jacket. And Clare at that time when I first met her, had this extremely short bleached hair, which later on was a hairstyle that I went for, but at the time it was Clare and I just remember thinking, oh my God, she's really cool. And I chatted to her. She was from London, I think she'd done a year out. I'd been milling around in Europe in my year, but Clare had done an art foundation course, so she was like an artist. She was super cool. And I'd come up from the back of Beyond in Essex and I was like, this is why I'm here. Because that was the thing for me going to, I was the first person and one of still only a tiny number of people in my family to have gone to university. And it totally opened my eyes to a different world. I wasn't from a particularly cultural background. I'd never eaten pasta until I went to Leeds.

J ([00:06:11](#)):

I don't think any of us had, it's because we're old.

Paul ([00:06:13](#)):

We are old. So I met Clare and there was this really cool woman with this funky outfit, this bleached hair. She'd been to art college and I was like, this is why I'm here. Yeah. So Clare was the first person I met. She was achingly cool. She still is cool, but she was very cool.

J ([00:06:31](#)):

I remember the three of you together and maybe Lou was there as well. Anyway, I remember you all wearing leather jackets. I remember, maybe I've just imposed this because you went through that period of having the peroxide blonde hair as well. But you all in the sunshine outside the workshop theatre September. And I hard agree with you. Same for me coming to Leeds was, oh my God, here are my people. I finally met people and I'm experiencing things that make sense of my life that nothing had before then because of how and where I'd grown up, which wasn't hard. It was just like you say, culturally,

Paul ([00:07:06](#)):

It was very different to growing up in the southeast in the eighties, which was a very, I dunno, weird, materialistic, weird kind of

J ([00:07:16](#)):

Violent.

Paul ([00:07:17](#)):

Well, it was violent. It was just very odd that whole, I always think about, I was six years old when Margaret Thatcher came to power and when we all met at university, basically that government was still in power and would be until 1997 with various different leaders. And there was a sense that there was

this, that was what the Southeast was about. And my family originally from the northeast, so I understood that the eighties had been very different in different parts of the country, but the bit of the country that I'd grown up in my family had got better off in the eighties. We'd suddenly had holidays and video recorders and all that kind of stuff. But then something about that kind of post-industrial, because Leeds is now this very bougie Knightsbridge of the North place, but it really wasn't in the early nineties. It was post-industrial and rough. And the whole thing looked like a Smith's album cover.

J ([00:08:16](#)):

So we spent all that time we met at Lees University, spent three years there making work and work

Paul ([00:08:21](#)):

So do you think that time in the Sunshine when we were the Golden Boys and Girls, was that before Torch Song Trilogy?

J ([00:08:29](#)):

Yeah, I think it was in my freshers week, right? I mean, like I say, I might've just made it up, but I'm pretty sure I

Paul ([00:08:34](#)):

I don't remember that. But there's going to be no memories.

J ([00:08:37](#)):

I can't believe you don't remember me. I remember you in this glorious sunshine

Paul ([00:08:40](#)):

No, I really remember you. I really remember you in Torch Song Trilogy, and I really remember that being a really amazing production. I remember Clare doing a great job of directing it. I remember

J ([00:08:50](#)):

She had the live band on stage.

Paul ([00:08:53](#)):

I dunno if Simon was in it, maybe he was Simon and Dan. All those people that we hung out with for years and years and years, all those musicians that we met and we did it traverse in a church or maybe we rehearse in the church and we in

J ([00:09:08](#)):

The Raven. We did it in the Raven.

Paul ([00:09:09](#)):

But it was so cool and I think that was really, so that is a strong memory. But we could have met, we probably did meet before that I guess.

J ([00:09:17](#)):

But I suppose we're not here to talk about the university years. How do you remember Unlimited starting? I'm really interested in story storytelling, memories and all that sort of stuff.

Paul ([00:09:27](#)):

Yeah, well yes, we're not here to talk about university, but the Workshop Theatre is a really important part of how Unlimited started I think. So Chris, Clare, Lou and me were all on that course and I think it was a really big deal for all of us, but certainly for me, it was completely transformative of my, when I came out of that course, I sounded different. I had a different worldview. It was such a profound experience for me. And I dunno if that course or indeed any university courses are like that anymore. And this is probably slightly rose tinted, but it felt like they just gave us a theatre for three years, told us to get on with it, and we just made stuff and then they gave us a degree at the end of it.

J ([00:10:12](#)):

That's literally what happened. I think we could rehearse in one of three theatres at any time that we wanted

Paul ([00:10:18](#)):

And we would do it at two three in the morning sometimes. And then I remember me and Thorpe finishing rehearsals at two in the morning and literally taking down black theatre curtains and wrapping ourselves in them and sleeping on the stage and nose and then getting up and doing it all again the next day, which I know just sounds ridiculous, but it was what we were doing. So in a way that was such an amazing experience that I think we just thought we wanted that to carry on. So in some ways we came together not because we had anything, I mean we did have stuff to say, but it felt like one of the really driving things was we'd met this amazing group of people and we wanted to carry on making work together and we wanted to be a theatre company. So that's what we did. So there's that. There were also other sort of moments where you could draw the line after we'd been at uni, we graduated. It was pretty, it's always tough. It was pretty tough in those days. It was pre national lottery, so there was literally no money. There was no project grant funding process really to speak of. And I remember we did, the university had been offered this gig in Murcia and we were,

J ([00:11:32](#)):

So this is I think the origin story. I think this is

Paul ([00:11:34](#)):

yeah this might be it. And they'd said, why don't you guys do it? We can't take a load of students there said, why don't you guys make a show and go to, I can't remember if it was Murcia or Alicante. It was maybe both. And we made a terrible show, which the first 20 minutes of which were us wrapped in these enormous linen cocoons, which we unrolled from really slowly over about 20 minutes and thought that was very profound. But suddenly there we were traveling to Europe doing shows in a European theatre festival, and it was just someone had said, why don't you do this? And we were like, yeah, we can do that. So we did it. So that might've been the first Unlimited show.

J ([00:12:14](#)):

I think it was the first. That's what I remember. And it was because I was still studying. You were all a year ahead of me. I'd taken this year out and I was so jealous that you were going to Spain to do this show. It was called Babel,

Paul ([00:12:27](#)):

Was it?

J ([00:12:27](#)):

Yeah, it was called Babel. Do you remember who it was that went out there?

Paul ([00:12:30](#)):

I think it was me and Chris. It was probably Liz and Lou, Dave Wolf might have been there.

J ([00:12:38](#)):

Think Dave Wolf was there.

Paul ([00:12:39](#)):

I think there was

J ([00:12:40](#)):

Did Clare not go?

Paul ([00:12:41](#)):

I think Clare went,

J ([00:12:43](#)):

I've got pictures of it, but the pictures are all of people wrapped in those.

Paul ([00:12:49](#)):

I wore a leather jacket in that show as well. A really awful

J ([00:12:52](#)):

For three years all you wore was a leather jacket

Paul ([00:12:54](#)):

I wore a lot of leather. I had leather trousers at one point as well.

J ([00:12:57](#)):

You looked good in the leather trousers.

Paul ([00:12:59](#)):

Yeah. So that may have been the first Unlimited show, but we all had other jobs, because there was no way of making a living.

J ([00:13:07](#)):

Were you called Unlimited then?

Paul ([00:13:09](#)):

I dunno, maybe. Maybe.

([00:13:13](#)):

I really remember that trip because none of us had ever had tapas before and we went to a restaurant, they were lovely. The people who ran the festival were really lovely and I think it was one of the stage managers or the production manager of the festival, his family ran an really amazing tapas restaurant and none of us had ever had tapas. And so they put all these plates of food in front of us. And because we were British, I just remember me and Thorpe and everyone else just shoveling all this mountains of tapas onto our plates to make a dinner we wanted. That's my dinner and all these Spanish people looking at us in absolute horror. What are you doing? What's going on here? That's my sort of memory of that and the show being a bit, maybe Nikki was there, I think Nikki was in that, Nikki Smith was in that show. I think she may have been in that show.

J ([00:14:05](#)):

I'm certain that you Thorpe Lou and Liz and Dave Wolf went, I dunno about Nikki Smith

Paul ([00:14:10](#)):

Have a feeling about, I have a feeling that Nikki was involved in that show, but we were all doing other stuff because there was no funding. So there was no real way of making a living in that time. What would now be called the Arts Council was then called Yorkshire and Humberside Arts. They had a tiny amount of money. It all went to the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

([00:14:30](#)):

Still does.

([00:14:31](#)):

There was no money and there was no way of applying for something like Grants for the arts or National Lottery Project Grants is now. That came a bit later. So we all had other shit to do. So I was promoting nightclubs. Lou was working in his shop and running a, Lou was running this weird marketing agency, Thorpe, I dunno what was doing. Thorpe was working in the bar. Thorpe was working a bar job. What was Liz doing? Liz might...

J ([00:14:56](#)):

She was working in Schuh.

Paul ([00:14:57](#)):

Yeah, Liz was working. So we all had other jobs. I think that got a bit frustrating.

J ([00:15:02](#)):

But you were all living together as well because I was in my final year and I was going out with Liz obviously. So

Paul ([00:15:08](#)):

We were

J ([00:15:08](#)):

Living, you were off doing a show. You were all graduated and you were all living together apart from Clare.

Paul ([00:15:13](#)):

Well, I was there for a bit. I was in Africa for ages and then I came back and

J ([00:15:17](#)):

Oh yeah, you went to Eritrea

Paul ([00:15:18](#)):

Yeah, then I came back and they'd rented this house off a weird guy that owned a gym and we ended up living in this house opposite the gym. And I think, yeah, I think me, Chris,

J ([00:15:29](#)):

Liz

Paul ([00:15:30](#)):

And Lou lived together and you were there most of the time. You were going out with Liz and we were all doing other stuff and it was a bit frustrating because we, I think we had got the idea that we were called Unlimited and we were this company, but nothing was happening because we weren't giving it enough time and we all went. So my origin story is that one day we all went to this cafe that used to exist in Hyde Park in Leeds, and we had some sort of morning meeting. It was definitely the morning we were all sat in this cafe and we just said, my memory of it is that we said, look, are we doing this or not? Let's give up our jobs and try and do this. And that for me is the moment it started.

J ([00:16:08](#)):

I agree. And that's my memory. And I think that happened after I'd graduated. I think that was 97 because I was there for that. Kate Toon was there for that. She was doing press and marketing for the time. She's now an extremely successful entrepreneur and businesswoman

Paul ([00:16:25](#)):

And author

J ([00:16:26](#)):

In Australia, but I think that was 97, I think you had a whole year, which is fondly referred to as The Dark Year, which was basically living in that house, working bar jobs,

Paul ([00:16:37](#)):

Partying a lot

J ([00:16:39](#)):

And all of that. And that's my memory because I was sort of in and out of that going, wow, this is cool. I can't wait to graduate. Then I went to London. I had an agent as soon as I graduated, worked out that wasn't for me. Came back up to Leeds, told my agent that I was going to, they were a really good agent and I remember going in and giving them some flowers and saying, yeah, thanks very much. I'm going to set up a company.

Paul ([00:17:04](#)):

Didn't they say, are you okay? FuWhat the fuck are you doing? I think my memory of that story is that they asked you if you were okay. They were worried about your mental health at

J ([00:17:11](#)):

A the time I was really down with it. I was so excited. But I do sort of reflect back on that and go, the version of me now can see sort of above that scene and see them looking at me really fucking weirdly going...

Paul ([00:17:24](#)):

You could beat Alan Cummings now Jon or someone like that.

J ([00:17:27](#)):

Well, they were representing Judi Dench and John Hurt and fucking Gambon or whatever, and they had this kid in there.

Paul ([00:17:35](#)):

But I think at the heart of your decision maybe, and certainly about what we were trying to do at that time is we didn't care about Judi Dench and John Hurt and all that. We were like, no, we are the future. And looking back, it does seem naive and it seems arrogant, presumptuous, and oh man, there was a whole load of stuff around the way the world was and is that we were unaware of, but we really did have the energy to just say, no, we are doing this. And so yeah, that moment. But then I think there's, after that there were other moments that could be different origin stories. So there's the moment when we got the Prince's Youth Trust business grant or something, which Liz managed. Now looking at what Liz does now, you can see why she did it. But she'd spotted this Prince's Youth business Trust grant or loan maybe, or I think we had both. And that meant, God bless his majesty, that meant that we had this little pot of money that I think got us our first office and our first computer.

J ([00:18:44](#)):

It paid for the computer and a video camera, which was a big part of what Clare was doing at the time, running the LGBT youth group in Leeds and making films with them. And I think just for context as well, sorry to interrupt, but it was, you mentioned earlier about this is 1997, this is the year that after the best part of 20 years of Conservative, Tory rule that that was the year that Labour came into power

Paul ([00:19:08](#)):

And it was the year that the National Lottery was created, which is really crucial.

J ([00:19:12](#)):

And at the time, unlike people that are trying to set up similar companies or work as artists now, even though it wasn't very much at all, we could claim the Dole - was it 35 quid a week and then 35 quid a week Housing Benefit as well. And that paid for, what that allowed us to do was literally to live. So I'm just thinking, we're sat here in your beautiful cozy front room in King's Heath in Birmingham. The fires going over there, but that's a far cry from, because we lived together,

Paul ([00:19:42](#)):

We lived in a house with no furniture and no heating. That first house, literally nothing. Literally no furniture. We had a tin bath in the living room and an old tv,

J ([00:19:50](#)):

Which was part of a set.

Paul ([00:19:51](#)):

Set, yeah. And I slept in it a few times that tin bath. Why did we...

J ([00:19:54](#)):

I was trying to think on the way here going, that house had literally no furniture. It

Paul ([00:19:59](#)):

Had no furniture

J ([00:20:00](#)):

And I remember you, how did we even communicate then? We didn't have mobile phones.

Paul ([00:20:05](#)):

Didn't have mobile phones.

J ([00:20:07](#)):

I remember getting a call from you going, I've got us a house.

Paul ([00:20:10](#)):

No, we went to it together.

J ([00:20:11](#)):

We did. But did you do the deal?

Paul ([00:20:13](#)):

No, no, we went together. I can't remember. Well, that's a whole other story. But yeah. So yes, that house was,

J ([00:20:19](#)):

But the landlord took pity on us and because we didn't have anything to put in it. And he went, "What, nothing?". We said, "No, no, we don't own anything". He put some mattresses in for us.

Paul ([00:20:28](#)):

Literally just all that house had in it was a cooker and a mattress on the floor in your room and in my room, that was it.

J ([00:20:35](#)):

But we had four bedrooms.

Paul ([00:20:35](#)):

We did. And we had ended up subletting one your brother and one to Tony Singh.

J ([00:20:39](#)):

Anyway,

Paul ([00:20:40](#)):

But that was sort of the joy of it

J ([00:20:42](#)):

But that's only possible because we could get housing benefit and Dole. And I think I'll get into this with probably Liz a bit more about the deal we set with ourselves about how we were going to repay that support. But we couldn't do that now. We couldn't spend the time that we took to develop as a company, I don't think, without that sort of support and you can't get that support.

Paul ([00:21:00](#)):

You can't get that kind of support. But there was no funding. So it's a different landscape, isn't it? There's a different, I remember being very flirty with the guy who was case assessor or whatever at the job center. And I remember writing, it was a game. We all did it. Everyone did it, Third Angel, every company that started around that time played this game. And I remember him going in and chatting to this guy about where I was at and he signed me on for it. And then I wrote a letter to his boss saying what a model civil servant he was and how he'd been so supportive and everything. So I was like you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours

J ([00:21:44](#)):

But we could be on tour and you could arrange to sign on in a different place at the time as well.

Paul ([00:21:51](#)):

Everyone used to sign on in Edinburgh, didn't they?

J ([00:21:52](#)):

Yeah. Oh, I wanted to say as well that you were talking about, we weren't bothered about Dench or whatever, but we had been properly inspired by other companies. Yes, we had so Forced Entertainment,

Paul ([00:22:03](#)):

Forced Entertainment, Peepolykus, like loads. There were loads of companies around in that time that were

J ([00:22:10](#)):

Companies.

Paul ([00:22:11](#)):

Companies. Yeah. I dunno if that's the thing now. Cos the thing then was you met people training wherever that was - Art school, drama school, university and you formed companies, you went out into the world, you did it for nothing for a bit, you hoped that you would get some funding at some point and you would become a company. And that was the journey I had in my mind. And in those days I think they were, I don't even think there was such thing as an RFO in those days, which is

J ([00:22:36](#)):

No, no, no. There was no, well, or

Paul ([00:22:37](#)):

Well there might have been anyway, but there was a sort of journey that you could see yourself taking. And then you are right about the Labour landslide in '97 sort of shifted things a bit. Well, massively. But I think the lottery came online in '97, but I think it had been set up, I think it was a Tory thing. I think it was set up by John Major, but it didn't materialize until '97. But then suddenly the Arts Council had all this money and they didn't know what to do with it. And they released this thing called A4E Express. Do you remember that? No. So it was A4Express was Arts for Everyone Express. And it was the first arts for everyone, isn't it? And it was the first bit of open access, what we would now think of as National Lottery project grants, it was the first thing and I think that was '97. And it was literally like a postcard. You pretty much filled in a postcard, sent it back, and they gave you five grand. All the grants were for five grand. But at the time when you're saying we'd been living on 35 quid a week, no money to make shows, suddenly we got five grand to make a show. And I think that's how we made No Brave World.

([00:23:47](#)):

We got five grand to make a show. And I'm trying to think...that might've been No Brave World. I think that might've been how we made No Brave World with that A4E Express Money. And that was another origin story. It sort of lifted us into a new world where you could start thinking about applying for money to make work and make work and write an evaluation and all that. And here we are, 30 years, 25, 30 years later, and that's what we do.

J ([00:24:14](#)):

That's wild, isn't it? That I don't remember that. But then maybe that's because we all had really clearly defined roles. Clearly my role wasn't involved in talking to Arts Council, but we all had job titles, right? Yeah. You were Unlimited artistic director, right?

Paul ([00:24:29](#)):

I was, yeah. Which meant I got to be incredibly anxious for most of the year about what on earth we were going to make, trying to get a script out of Chris or Clare and then try and work out a way to make

it. What we never had, which is just bizarre now, given what I do for a living now, is what we never had was a producer.

J ([00:24:46](#)):

Well, I would say... not at that stage, I agree. But I think what came out was me and Lou becoming producers further down the line because what we realized was we were really muddling through here,

Paul ([00:24:59](#)):

But initially we didn't have that role. And that was a challenge I think. But yeah, so it felt like Liz and I were the ones that were talking to the funders like Liz and I were chatting to initially to the Prince's Trust. And I think we arranged that A4E Express grant further down the line. Liz and I had that slightly weird relationship with the Training and Enterprise Council, which brought in, I think, wasn't there a training thing we did for about 20 grand or something, which at the time, I remember being in Cornwall or Devon when we got the news that we'd got that grant and it was an eclipse. There was literally, it was an Eclipse and I got told we'd been given 20,000 pounds. And that seemed at the time, like an astronomical sum of money.

J ([00:25:42](#)):

Well it was! I think it's important to hold onto and remember what a game-changing amount of money that can be to artists at the beginning of a career in whatever they're doing. I was also thinking when you're talking about submitting those Arts Council applications, what I do remember is I think the first one we did, Liz would always put it in the envelope and then she'd make us all kiss the envelope before it went in the postbox.

Paul ([00:26:04](#)):

No, that was later though. That was A4E Express. That was when they'd set up what I think were called Grants for the Arts. I think that's what eventually replaced A4E Express. We had an A4E Express grant. That was a really important thing. So yeah, those, there isn't really a moment. Any one of those moments is a very important early moment in our development. And I guess the final one I'd say is I really, really vividly remember Annie Lloyd giving us our first gig at the Leeds Studio Theatre.

J ([00:26:38](#)):

100%.

Paul ([00:26:39](#)):

And when I was a student, Jude Kelly had be doing her Checkhov season at the Playhouse and all of that, you worked at the Playhouse, didn't you? For a bit behind the bar. And I sort of didn't find that programme terribly inspiring, although I now see that a lot of the stuff that I thought was old hat and rubbish at the time was actually rather brilliant. But the thing that I found really inspiring and used to just go and see everything, there was what Annie was doing at what was, I think even then called the Poly Studio, but later on became LMU Studio. But I think it was The Poly when I was first there. But anyway, that studio, I mean the shows that Annie managed to squeeze in there and it was mind blowing and seeing Forced Entertainment shows there and all sorts of people there doing incredible work.

J ([00:27:26](#)):

Fecund.

Paul ([00:27:27](#)):

Fecund, yeah, I remember seeing The Hidden, no, the Hidden J was Forced Ents. What was that? Fallen Angels was Fecund!

J ([00:27:32](#)):

And Third Angel just before we started as well.

Paul ([00:27:35](#)):

Peepolykus doing a show there, Improbable, I think I saw an improbable show there

J ([00:27:39](#)):

I remember later as well, seeing Frantic Assembly do a show in there that literally just didn't fit because it was tiny,

Paul ([00:27:46](#)):

I remember when Annie programmed No Brave World in the LMU Studio and paid us. And I remember being in the dressing room and I can't remember which one of us said it, but one of us going fucking hell. Oh my God. Forced Entertainment had been in this dressing room and it felt like, wow, we've made it. We've been paid. I dunno, 400 quid for doing a show

J ([00:28:12](#)):

But it was someone taking us seriously was the thing. And also recognising what that meant. And I've always, I think Annie is an undersung hero of the contemporary performance scene in so many ways. Just the amount that she supported, how much she loved and supported artists, particularly in Leeds.

Paul ([00:28:31](#)):

Yeah, yeah. And I dunno mean Annie's always, I've known Annie for years. I don't see her that often, but I think she's always said to me that No Brave World was her favorite Unlimited show. Really the way she says it makes me think that she feels like it all went downhill from there. But it was a huge thing to give us that gig. I think it had a bigger impact on how we felt about ourselves than about how we were perceived by others. But it was a massive moment. The question was when did Unlimited start? It was one of them moments I think. It was one o' them...

J ([00:29:07](#)):

It's also important to recognise... you work with Ed Collier now. Ed was a year below me at university and came through the Workshop Theatre. But Ed was really important when you talking about not having a producer, but Ed was an assistant director to you in those early days...

Paul ([00:29:24](#)):

Yeah, I think he was officially our sort of, I guess we'd call him a production manager now. But yeah, I mean he

J ([00:29:31](#)):

Took the photos.

Paul ([00:29:32](#)):

It was fluid. He hung out a lot with us. He was, and still is an amazing friend to me, but also roles were very fluid. So yes, I was the artistic director. I was also the guy at 11 o'clock at night hanging up the set for No Brave World in Battersea Arts Center with Ed

J ([00:29:48](#)):

Cutting the top of it because it didn't fit!

Paul ([00:29:50](#)):

Didn't fit, yeah. We just did what was needed to do. But yeah, Ed was the guy that drove the van and helped us move stuff around, was sort of a production manager, stage manager. But he was also a really important part of that artistic conversation about the work. Definitely. And his taste and experience. I remember doing No Brave World in Chelmsford or no, maybe it wasn't Chelmsford, somewhere like that. And Ed's very elderly aunt and uncle coming to see it.

J ([00:30:20](#)):

It was Newcastle. No,

Paul ([00:30:22](#)):

No, that was his grandparents

J ([00:30:23](#)):

Oh right, sorry

Paul ([00:30:24](#)):

So Ed's uncle or Godfather maybe was literally M or Q, he was like the head of GCHQ, proper super spy and brought his wife to see No Brave World and was utterly baffled. One of those moments where they're going, what on earth is going on?

J ([00:30:40](#)):

Well, it was baffling, right? And I think it's one of the few pure devised shows that we ever really made because what we learned from that was that it was hard working in that way where you've got six very... so one of the things I love about Unlimited as a little sort of bit of backstory is that all of us are firstborns. So we're all the eldest of at least two, if not three siblings in our families.

Paul ([00:31:02](#)):

Do you know? I've never clocked that, but yes, that is true

J ([00:31:04](#)):

So I think there's something about that that as artists and in whatever profession any of us are working in right now, all real leaders. So devising a show, I mean it was super fun. We were young and all that

sort of, but taking ourselves very seriously and making our first professional show. Do you remember what was your experience of leading that process?

Paul ([00:31:26](#)):

It was exciting and it was a privilege and it felt like, wow, here we are doing it. We're doing the thing we wanted to do. But honestly, it was really hard because it felt like, I was trying to think about this the other day about what that show was about, and it was sort of about us all trying to find a way to, justify is maybe the wrong word, but kind of find our place in the world. And it felt like that's what we were doing as a theatre company, as individuals, as artists, as human beings - my God, it was naive and blinkered - but it really did feel like we were fighting for our lives making that show. It certainly felt that way to me. It felt like there was a lot at stake and it felt like this was, am I an artist or not? And what are we saying about the world?

([00:32:20](#)):

And it was also like, I dunno, as you know Jon, I'd spent years reading way too much Camus and Sartre, so I was like, I didn't even know if I existed, really. So there was all of that going on. And there was also, in some ways it felt like it wasn't political work because it didn't have a kind of party political affiliation. But because we were that generation that we were five, six years old when Thatcher had come to power and here we were as 21 year olds, 22 year olds making our first show. And Tony Blair just come to power. But everything in between had been the same and it felt like there'd been this. So it felt like we were that generation, that sort of Gen X generation, we were fully postmodern, we'd rejected, we were rejecting stuff all the time. We'd endlessly reject narratives and things we were told were true.

J ([00:33:16](#)):

We were young,

Paul ([00:33:17](#)):

But we rejected everything. And it was like, you look down, it's like, well, there's nothing left. What is there left? It felt to me like that show was trying to work that out, but on so many levels, who am I as a human being? Who am I as a person? Who are we as a company? Who are we as artists? Why are we here? What are we saying about the world? And that's what that show was. I think it was a really good show and it was also really weirdly, almost entirely inspired by that weird moment in Look Back In Anger. With the squirrel and is it the Squirrel and the Bear?

J ([00:33:55](#)):

Oh I'd forgotten! There was a puppet show!

Paul ([00:33:56](#)):

There was a puppet show in it with

J ([00:33:58](#)):

The Squirrel and the Bear. Yeah,

Paul ([00:34:00](#)):

Yeah. Which I remember dear old Martin Banham being very taken with that bit of the show. So there was also a really conscious acknowledgement of, are we talking nineties? So we're talking 40 years, 50 years of theatre history in there. We were quite aware of Look Back In Anger, Beckett through the sixties, seventies, then the whole Howard Brenton thing, because we'd just been through that at the Workshop Theatre. We knew our theatre history, we didn't know much, but we knew our theatre history or we knew a version of our theatre history. So it felt like we were genuinely trying to make sense of all of that in that show. That to me is what it was about.

J ([00:34:43](#)):

Thank you for that because I have a terrible memory and I don't find it very easy to remember those things vividly. But it was, I agree, really hard. Thinking back now to how much each of us were bringing some of our personal traumas to that. Well that sounds... bringing our history and authenticity to that. The things that people were individually talking about, their characters on stage or whatever. And then how that/

Paul ([00:35:07](#)):

Man, you had Louisa giving lethal injections to teddy bears. Weird people pushing weird faces through Lycra, Liz in some crazy red velvet dress being very odd and flirty with an audience. You being Grotowski Boy.

J ([00:35:26](#)):

Grotowski Boy, yeah!

Paul ([00:35:29](#)):

Dunno what Thorpe was doing.

J ([00:35:30](#)):

Thorpe was being exactly the same as he's now. He rewrote Jon Osborne's, he rewrote those.

Paul ([00:35:39](#)):

He wrote the puppet show. I think he

J ([00:35:40](#)):

He rewrote Jimmy in Look Back in Anger. "Yeah, I can do that better."

Paul ([00:35:45](#)):

So that was what was really hard for me. And I have a very, very, I think it was with you, a very vivid memory of being... So now we are not living, or maybe you and I still were living in the house with no furniture. We were, but Liz and Lou and Ed were living in a house, another house which DID have furniture and actually seemed quite nice. And we were there, we were trying to make the show and we were having a day working on it and it wasn't going anywhere. And everyone had brought all these different things to the show. And like you say, everyone was working through their own stuff and there was all this material and it was all sort of literally handwritten on bits of paper. And at the back of the house there was this little cobbled alleyway, I think it was you.

(00:36:25):

And we were kicking a football backwards and forwards in the sunshine. And then it suddenly just came to me and I went, I've got it. And I went back into the house and I put the bits of paper into an order and I sat down with the rest of you and I said, look, this is the order we do the show in. And everyone went, "Oh my God, yeah, that's it." And that was the show. And I really remember that moment. We'd been wrestling with that material for so long and then just in that moment of stopping thinking about it suddenly all just fell into place. And it was a good show, I think

J (00:36:56):

We have no record of it. I don't think so. There was some photos, a script

Paul (00:36:59):

You've got an amazing set design

J (00:37:01):

Yeah, that was cool.

Paul (00:37:04):

And I really remember being at LMU Studio and the warmups. You were very serious about

J (00:37:13):

My physical theatre

Paul (00:37:13):

Your physical theatre.

J (00:37:15):

That was your fault.

Paul (00:37:15):

I brought you that Grotowski Boy t-shirt and you were doing hour long warm ups. It was so good to watch. I absolutely loved it. I would sit and watch you warm up. I absolutely loved it. That dedication to that physical stuff that I'd been on some weird training thing at Rose Bruford with a Russian theatre director. I'd learned all this stuff that we used to do in workshops and you were really into it. And then you'd go out the back and Chris would, Chris's warmup would be eating a pie and smoking a cigarette out the back. And that was what he was doing. But that was, that show felt like everyone had their place in it and everyone came together in that. So that's a really vivid memory.

J (00:37:56):

We had a press night in the Workshop Theatre as well, which was our first, well it wasn't a press night - there was no press that would come!

Paul (00:38:03):

But we had a party.

J ([00:38:04](#)):

We invited all our friends and family to come on that night and it was like the launch of our first show that we were making together.

Paul ([00:38:15](#)):

Yeah, I remember that very clearly. In The Other Space we had a party

J ([00:38:17](#)):

Someone was sick in the front row.

Paul ([00:38:25](#)):

It sounds sort of impossibly pretentious to say it because it hadn't been at all my upbringing. There was just something about dropping out of the mainstream and deciding to be a bunch of artists together, living on nothing, living together on very little money and making art that was just impossibly romantic. And I love

J ([00:38:48](#)):

Okay, I'm going to kill the romanticism a little bit because also what I wonder if you're forgetting is in amongst all of this, we were deeply practical. I have a very vivid memory of a conversation about "We just want to be in the rehearsal room." And Liz, I think probably saying, well, yeah, but we have to do some other stuff to allow us to create that opportunity, the means to an end. And I think that's, so we were also touring Gilbert and the Goblin, you and I.

Paul ([00:39:15](#)):

Oh, man!

J ([00:39:15](#)):

You were Gilbert. I was the Goblin. There was two teams. Clare and Liz were the other Gilbert and the Goblin. This is a show that Chris wrote

Paul ([00:39:21](#)):

In verse! which was about your teeth. Yeah.

J ([00:39:27](#)):

It was about health. At the time, the thing for schools was about physical health. He had a Goblin that appeared. I remember coming home to that house one night and it was when League of Gentlemen first series was happening and we all loved League of Gentlemen.

Paul ([00:39:45](#)):

It was very funny.

J ([00:39:46](#)):

And then we'd come home from doing a day of touring into primary schools, telling kids about their teeth or whatever and dressing up as a, no, you were Gilbert. I was wearing a green leotard, which was shared with Liz, who was the Goblin in the other team. So you'd always put it on and go, it's still wet and

Paul ([00:40:08](#)):

I was dressed as a schoolboy.

J ([00:40:10](#)):

But we get home and the League of Gentlemen are on the telly and they're contemporaries of ours really, but they've got their own TV show and they've got a sketch about a group of people doing theatre in education, and

Paul ([00:40:23](#)):

That was us

J ([00:40:23](#)):

Legs Akimbo Theatre Company. And we'd watch that and go, oh, that's us. So I think we were absolutely doing the dropping out a little bit, but I think there's a practicality to what we were doing as well. And we were still doing things like we were still occasionally doing shifts in bars I think, and all that sort of stuff, but it was about creating the space where we really could really properly dedicate ourselves to the art of it.

Paul ([00:40:50](#)):

Yeah, you're right. We did make that dream come true. I remember having conversations about how you could travel quicker on your own, but we'll travel further together. There was a kind of thing that we'll be together, and I think you're right. We were resourceful. We did corporate gigs, we did schools tours, we did weird things for the, I remember doing a weird drugs awareness thing for the police in Bradford Town Hall

J ([00:41:15](#)):

That's one of my favorite things! I had my head wrapped in muslin and was half naked in the town hall in Bradford with the senior leadership team from the police and Synergy who were DJs running nights, in clubs, and Dennis from Synergy was projecting just the word "DRUGS" onto my torso

Paul ([00:41:38](#)):

And we were playing,

J ([00:41:40](#)):

Lou was inside a massive sort of withies fabric cone.

Paul ([00:41:44](#)):

I was also half naked as an angel. I had massive wings.

J ([00:41:49](#)):

Lou was embodying the experience of coming up on MDMA.

Paul ([00:41:52](#)):

I wonder what Bradford Police Force made of that show, Jon,

J ([00:41:58](#)):

I would love to hear anyone go "I was there".

Paul ([00:42:02](#)):

If you are listening to this podcast and you were a young or any kind of policeman in Brad, police person in Bradford at that time get in touch because holy moly.

J ([00:42:19](#)):

Another weird thing was Chris and Clare, sorry, Chris and Liz being in The Warehouse, the club, they were in the private room upstairs dissecting a dead rat.

Paul ([00:42:31](#)):

It was me and Liz.

J ([00:42:32](#)):

It was you and Liz? Not Chris and Liz. Okay, so you were The Doctor, she was The Nurse. And that was being live projected into the dance floor downstairs where loads of people off their faces were being confronted by the massive live image of Liz cutting up a rat

Paul ([00:42:47](#)):

Liz was a crazy nurse chopping up rats. And we used to buy frozen rats from the pet shop. I think people feed 'em to their snakes, don't they? Or something. But we used to buy frozen rats from the pet shop and defrost them in our house with no furniture. And then Liz would chop 'em up at two in the morning in nightclubs wearing a sexy nurse's outfit. But that was, again, that's

J ([00:43:09](#)):

Art.

Paul ([00:43:09](#)):

That was art. And it was also like I'm now having conversations with people about how you distribute IP from shows on different platforms, but that was that because that was The Nurse from Shades being used in a different medium or on a different platform. We wouldn't have thought about it like that, but we were taking that character and creating a different platform. It was sponsored by Vidal Sassoon. We all had Vidal Sassoon haircuts

J ([00:43:36](#)):

We had "directional" haircuts

Paul ([00:43:39](#)):

By Vidal Sassoon. And we would do that in a nightclub. And yeah, that is,

J ([00:43:45](#)):

Do you remember as well... there was that Bar Norman. It was very new at the time down on the calls. And Chris and Clare were live writing stories about, or inspired by people in the bar that were then being projected live as they wrote them onto the walls of the bar. That was '98

Paul ([00:44:06](#)):

When we first did Static in Edinburgh. Text messaging had just been invented and Chris was doing live text writing to people, wasn't he?

J ([00:44:14](#)):

He wrote the script for it. But that was me and Matt Locke, who was at the time at Huddersfield Art Gallery subsequently went on to the BBC and then Channel 4 as a commissioning editor, but you could sign up for a text version of the story from Static, which you received daily over two weeks or something on your phone. Yeah.

Paul ([00:44:37](#)):

And when was that? That was late nineties early noughties.

J ([00:44:40](#)):

So static in Edinburgh, must've been '99

Paul ([00:44:42](#)):

Yeah.

J ([00:44:45](#)):

And that was commissioned by Annie Lloyd at the Studio Theatre.

Paul ([00:44:49](#)):

That was a long, long way ahead of its time in some ways.

J ([00:44:59](#)):

So if it was so good... why the fuck did you leave?

Paul ([00:45:04](#)):

Well, yeah, so when you/

J ([00:45:05](#)):

/Because I was devastated.

Paul ([00:45:07](#)):

One of your questions was what would I have done differently? And I think leaving... I was the first to leave,

J ([00:45:14](#)):

What was it, 2001?

Paul ([00:45:16](#)):

Yeah, it was after Static had that amazingly successful Edinburgh. Now I absolutely stand by the decision to leave and when I left, because I felt like it was the right thing to do, but I don't think I did it in the right way. I don't really, I just felt like I just sort of left

J ([00:45:33](#)):

I don't think you did it in a wrong way,

Paul ([00:45:35](#)):

But I just couldn't go back into a rehearsal room because it felt like the way we were running the company, looking back on it, it feels like maybe it should have felt like an enormous privilege. But it was sort of my job to sit in that office in Aire Street and sort of decide, okay, this is what we're going to do, and Chris, you can write it. And it felt like the level of energy that I needed to have to be able to take everyone through a process to make a show we didn't have. After that, I went and became a sort of jobbing director and I understood the processes that are basically used in most theatres to make a show, and the meeting structures, the whole process that is making a show. We didn't have ANY of that. We had literally none of that.

J ([00:46:22](#)):

We had literally no experience. We were making it all up for ourselves.

Paul ([00:46:25](#)):

Literally making it up for ourselves. So it felt like it took so much out of me to hold that space that I honestly felt like I couldn't do it again. And I didn't leave straightaway. I said I couldn't do that again. And we tried to find other ways for me to be in the company but not be in that role. And I performed in a show that we did at BAC, but that just wasn't my thing.

J ([00:46:51](#)):

Getting naked.

Paul ([00:46:52](#)):

Naked, yeah, we were always naked. But then I was like, I can't do this for me. And I also felt like I am not the right person. It would be irresponsible to be at the wheel and take the ship out into a storm again. It felt like that's what we would do. There's that naff metaphor isn't there about you find somewhere new by going off the edge of the map. But it really did feel like that's how we made shows. We'd just go off into the storm and find our way. And I just didn't feel I could do that again. And I didn't think it would be the right thing to do for the team. So I left and then I regretted it almost immediately. It was really, I know various people in the company were pissed off that I'd left, and I totally understand

that. But it was a real loss. It felt like I was really grieving for it for ages and doing, I did a load of weird TV stuff and did

J ([00:47:45](#)):

a cool film out in the desert.

Paul ([00:47:47](#)):

I did a terrible film out in the desert.

J ([00:47:51](#)):

But you had a good time

Paul ([00:47:51](#)):

I had some interesting experiences, but I didn't really find... what I'd cherished most about Unlimited was the way we as a group of friends worked together. I didn't really find that, again, until I set up China Plate with Ed. And that's the main, it's not the main reason, I mean, Ed is brilliant and China Plate is brilliant and we try to do good stuff and all of that. But all that time when I was freelance directing, acting, I did all that weird, I was in About A Boy as the barman in About A Boy. I did some weird,

J ([00:48:26](#)):

You were in an episode of Spaced! Or maybe that was still during Unlimited time.

Paul ([00:48:30](#)):

But yeah, all of that, I was just, I didn't enjoy it really. And was missing family, I guess. We were like a family, weren't we? And then I found that again with Ed after Ed. Ed had gone off and done LAMDA and we'd ended up living together in London for a bit. And after I left Unlimited, I had nowhere to go. I literally went to London and slept on Ed's floor for six months. And then yeah, I started to do various things and then Ed and I had that chance to go and run The Hurst together. And here we are now. We've created, and it was a sort of similar thing, like Ed and I worked together at The Hurst and then we were like, oh, this is a good thing. So I did it again. We left there and we were like, let's carry on doing some of those things together that we like doing. So we set up China Plate in order to be able to do that.

J ([00:49:23](#)):

I think there's a bunch of really interesting things in here. First thing I want to say is I don't know of anyone being pissed off with you at all. I think maybe in the moment and at the time, because it's not what we all including yourself actually wanted. By that stage we'd been out of university making stuff together in a very intense way for what, three, four years? Something like that. And I really hear now in particular that thing about the pressure of that leadership role. And we did look to you to lead those processes and to come up with the ideas, the plans, the way of working that we would just turn up and go, it's all right. We dunno what we're doing today.

Paul ([00:50:06](#)):

Paul will run an amazing mind blowing workshop for us.

J ([00:50:09](#)):

Exactly. But you would put the amount of work that I really know that you would put into creating, devising those workshops, the amount of time that took. But also it's exhausting. And you look at, there's a lot of talk at the moment about shared leadership models and we've evolved into version of that at Unlimited in a way that's very different. Very similar - six artists as we were when we set up, but very different in terms of the shared responsibilities of that actually. So I'm sorry that I don't think I really truly understood. We said before, I think before pressing record, we've not talked about it in this way, that that was so hard an experience for you, which I think we in part understood, but also that we weren't able to find a way for you to really offload some of that and for us to share more of it as well.

Paul ([00:51:02](#)):

Yeah, I think we did try, we did look at a different sort of model and I took some time out and I went to Venezuela

J ([00:51:13](#)):

To find yourself like in 'Static'

Paul ([00:51:14](#)):

Not to find myself, but just to get a bit of a break. Again, this is going to sound really weird, but I had this weird moment of clarity in a canoe going down the Orinoco River. It's just such a wanky thing to say but

J ([00:51:29](#)):

It's either the alley in Leeds or a river in...

Paul ([00:51:36](#)):

I was sat at the front of this, I guess it was a canoe raft thing going. We'd been in the jungle for New Year's Eve and I was coming back to, I can't remember where I was going back to. Anyway, I had been on this winter break somewhere and I coming down the river and just sat in this boat and I was thinking about coming back to Leeds and trying to make another show. And I just remember thinking, no, the best thing here is for me to leave and say I can't do this anymore. It'd be better for me and it'll be better for everyone else. And it was, because Unlimited went on to be amazing and to do amazing things under your leadership. And it felt like a good time, if I'm honest. It also felt like a good time because we'd gone to Edinburgh for the first time the year before.

([00:52:21](#)):

We'd won a fringe first. For the first time. We'd had all those five star reviews, we'd had that sellout show. So in some ways it felt like the company was there. We'd achieved (I'd achieved) the things that I'd, in my very limited view of what being a theatre company, meant. Going to Edinburgh, getting a nice review off Lyn Gardner, winning a Fringe First. All of that stuff that you feel, felt, was important, we'd just done it and it felt like that's the moment to step away while we're on that high and try and do something else.

J ([00:52:54](#)):

It was definitely the right thing for you, the right thing for the company. I don't know, it was just a DIFFERENT thing for the company, but I think it speaks to how difficult it is.

Paul ([00:53:03](#)):

Actually I did come back though once after that. I came back as an actor and we did The Swing Left.

J ([00:53:09](#)):

Oh yes.

Paul ([00:53:10](#)):

Which I really loved. So that for me was a really healing experience. I came back then, I think

J ([00:53:18](#)):

That was a proper play as well.

Paul ([00:53:19](#)):

And Steve, it was so nice to be in an Unlimited process where I didn't have to lead it. And I was just acting, doing a show. We'd had quite a cool, a really cool time of it in that workshop thing we'd done in Harrogate Theatre where we'd sort of devised it with Steve Dykes and then he went away and wrote this play, which I thought was actually quite good. A really interesting look at 1997 through the lens of 1945. I thought that was all brilliant. And I came back and it was joyful. I remember staying with you guys. Me and you used to run in the mornings, do rehearsals all day. Dancing with Clare, dancing with Liz, acting with you, and with Chris.

J ([00:54:00](#)):

We learnt to Lindy Hop,

Paul ([00:54:01](#)):

We learnt to Lindy Hop. We did a good show and people loved that show. And weirdly years later, my current life partner Sarah, was in that show.

J ([00:54:12](#)):

Yes. In the second version.

Paul ([00:54:13](#)):

In the second version of it. Yeah. But that was a really nice thing because it felt like.... maybe my timeline is out. Maybe we did the R&D at Harrogate Theatre with Steve before I left, and that's why I came back to be in the show. But that was a nice way to come back and to be making work together again as a group.

J ([00:54:34](#)):

Well, it's not like we haven't continued to make things - when you were just talking about coming back and going and running in together. I think that was it for me. It's like we'd lived together by that stage for years.

Paul ([00:54:44](#)):

Yeah, years

J ([00:54:45](#)):

With varying other people as well. But I'd lost my partner. You've gone off.

Paul ([00:54:56](#)):

It was a fork in the road moment. You have to make a call sometimes.

J ([00:55:01](#)):

But we've all stayed in, sorry. That's what I was saying it. It's not like we never spoke to each other from that moment. We all stayed in intimate contact and it was slightly, I think the honesty of it, it was slightly awkward for a bit because it's like, well, we are the gang. We are the six. That's what everyone knows us as well. Now what's happened to Paul? None of us have, it's 2023 and we've only just started speaking about it. All of that I think is another thing to add to this in another conversation, again, probably with Liz as the sort of company manager figure, there was a structure in place I think a lot of other companies don't have for, we had a notice period. We had an agreed notice period with each other. And that's why I think you didn't leave immediately. It was quite long in its sort of planning is my recollection. Maybe it wasn't.

Paul ([00:55:49](#)):

Maybe. I think that's interesting that that's your memory of it. My memory of it is you being quite cross because I didn't honour the notice period.

J ([00:55:57](#)):

Oh, maybe that's what you did do! You fucker!

Paul ([00:55:59](#)):

I don't know. I had that job

J ([00:56:03](#)):

You had the offer for the film.

Paul ([00:56:05](#)):

So I went off to do the film, but I had to earn a living because also I'd, I'd not just lost my job. I'd lost my friendship group. I'd lost my home.

J ([00:56:16](#)):

I'd lost my Saturday morning trips to Morrison's!

Paul ([00:56:20](#)):

You still had Liz. Whereas I had to find a way to make a new life somewhere else. And I did it in my end.

J ([00:56:31](#)):

But it's really worked out. And I think that's what I mean. It's about, it's the right decision for you. And you said you described it's the wrong feeling. It was the right decision for the company. It's just a decision, isn't it? And I think increasingly what I'm speaking about with the people that make up the

company now is, look, no one's dying here. It might feel difficult, but this is really manageable. We can get through this. The point at which someone's literally dying or really ill and we need to support them, then we'll do that. And we're all still really good friends. And you've worked with most of us again, in different contexts.

Paul ([00:57:02](#)):

All of us. Everyone.

J ([00:57:03](#)):

And you're still intimately involved in producing Chris's work.

Paul ([00:57:06](#)):

Yeah, well, Chris the most. And Ed of course. But yeah, I mean we've all worked together in one way or another or we've hung out together. But I mean it was such a profound experience. I don't think it could have been in any other way really. Unless there had been a terrible falling out. A kind of Bill Gaskell, Max Stafford Clark falling out, which almost sort of then defines the rest of your career.

J ([00:57:31](#)):

Yeah. But I think there were definitely flashpoints for all of us in our personal relationships and intensified by what we were doing. But it was never the case that permanently damaged anything. We're all too good friends. We knew each other too well.

Paul ([00:57:45](#)):

Yeah, and Jesus Christ. Think about, I mean, talk about a lack of work-life balance. Our lives were just, that was, it was just, we lived, as you said, we lived together, we worked together, we made art together, we toured together. It was everything. It was literally everything.

J ([00:58:03](#)):

It was cool.

Paul ([00:58:04](#)):

It was cool. I wouldn't change it for the world. I thought it was an amazing thing to have done.

J ([00:58:09](#)):

So what is the one thing you learned specifically from your experience of setting up or working with Unlimited that you would offer as advice to anyone thinking of or in the early stages of setting up their own company now?

Paul ([00:58:23](#)):

Do it.

([00:58:26](#)):

So I recently I did a little guest lecture thing at a university and there were a group of, I can't remember if they were second year or third year students in a room with me. And this particular university had a few years ago, had a very fruitful period, a bit like Leeds back then. It isn't Leeds. They had pumped out

a bunch of theatre companies who'd been quite successful. They'd gone to Edinburgh, big load of hoo-ha about it. And like, oh my God, what's happening at this university? Them producing all these amazing companies. And one of those shows had just gone into the West End. I don't think the company's gone into West End. I think it's the writer. And it wasn't me who asked the question. I was in there to talk to them about something else. But the lecturer said, oh, we always start off the sessions with a look at The Stage newspaper.

[\(00:59:14\)](#):

That's the course reading. So one of the big stories in The Stage that week had been this show. Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons into the West End. And he said to the group, how does that make you feel? And I was astonished by the response from that room full of students who basically were like saying, we could never do that. It makes me feel really frightened. It makes me feel really anxious because I'm not good enough. And I was really astonished by that. There was one American student in the group who was like, guys, we can do whatever we want. But amongst the British students who were from a range of different backgrounds, there was this profound sense that it wasn't possible. And so I sort of spent the rest of my time with them trying to say, it's possible. It's not easy. Nothing's easy, but it's possible.

[\(01:00:09\)](#):

There's nothing to stop you being that story. That is what I did. I am living proof that that is possible. And we did it in an environment where, yes, there was the dole and has benefit, but there wasn't National Lottery Project. Literally any of you could apply for a National Lottery project grant tomorrow to make art and you could get a grant and make it happen. You could do that. You could literally do that tomorrow. And you are lucky because there isn't a funding system like that to my knowledge anywhere else in the world where there is that amount of readily accessible project money for literally anyone. You don't need to be a company. You don't need to have a qualification. So I guess that's the thing for me is we didn't quite didn't know what, we didn't know what the fuck we were doing.

[\(01:00:53\)](#):

We really didn't know what we were doing. But the thing we had going for us was that we were going to do it and we just said, yeah, fuck it. Let's do it. And we did it. And I get it. I understand. People will say, oh, well, it's different now. It was hard then. It was really hard then. It's hard now. It was probably hard 20 years before we did it. It's always hard, but it's possible. And that's the thing is like you've just got to want it. You've just got to say to yourself, I'm going to do it. I'm going to make it happen and you can make it happen. Yeah. So that's the thing. I feel like had we been in that room, we'd have been coming out with all sorts of arrogant shit about why that show was fucking terrible and why we wouldn't make that. And we'd have been completely missing the point. We'd have been utterly misguided and arrogant and pigheaded because we were terribly like that. But we'd have been saying, no, we are going to do that and we're going to do it better. That would've been us, right? And yes, so that is my thing. It's like it's possible. Do it, do it. Just do it. And if you don't feel like that, it won't happen. Ed and I talk all the time about, but

J [\(01:01:59\)](#):

At that stage, don't do it if you don't want it and you don't really want it, but

Paul [\(01:02:03\)](#):

You have to do it. This is the thing Ed and I say when we do our Optimists training course, it's like, yeah, there's lots of good ideas in the pub about what would make a great show. And they just stay in the pub.

Someone's got to do something. Someone's got to talk to someone. Someone's got to try and take responsibility for making it happen. And if you do that, not everything we did was a success. We've touched on some great shows. There were some terrible shows as well.

J ([01:02:28](#)):

At least one,

Paul ([01:02:29](#)):

Well, there was/

J ([01:02:29](#)):

There's one we don't talk about.

Paul ([01:02:30](#)):

There's one, we don't talk about. Two. There was some bad shows as well. We didn't always get it right. No one gets it right all the time, but we did it. It wasn't that we knew what we were doing. It wasn't that we had more support. You could say we may have had a different kind of privilege to some people have now, but I feel like we were also disadvantaged in different ways back then because of the way the industry was and the funding systems were.

J ([01:02:54](#)):

Well, we had the support of each other, and I think that's what it had.

Paul ([01:02:58](#)):

We just had the nerve to say, let's do it. Let's do it. And see what happens.

J ([01:03:05](#)):

Well, when you've got five other people around you saying that, yes, we can, it means that on the occasions where you are the one going, I really don't think we can, you've got five other people pulling you together. One of my favorite things that I remember another artist saying was, the thing that I love about you lot is the way that you are always united. You always sort of come out. You're always together. And I always loved that we talk about "the company screensaver" when we were on our own. We'd be quiet, we might argue we might have these things, but once we got out there, you present unified and that's a really powerful thing.

Paul ([01:03:36](#)):

Yeah, a few of these people have been mentioned, but it's worth, it's easy to focus on the six of us. But there was Ed, there was Deb, there was Pam, there was Tim Skelly, there was all the team really at the Workshop theatre, Richard Boon. There were all those people that support us. Jane Plastow

J ([01:04:00](#)):

Partners, family, friends,

Paul ([01:04:02](#)):

All of those guys. Yes, absolutely. But there were people who were in the trenches with us, literally driving the vans, making the show happen. Annie Lloyd. There were people who were, they were on the team in a different sort of way who really should be acknowledged. I think I've probably not remembered them all,

J ([01:04:21](#)):

But it's difficult. I've been trying to do this myself, but there's so many people that have been part of this. I think that's why I'm really excited about, I hope that I've reached out to as many of those that should have bringing everyone together in September.

Paul ([01:04:34](#)):

If you could, would you do it again? I certainly would. I mean, I absolutely would. And I feel like it was fun.

J ([01:04:41](#)):

It's been a ride.

Paul ([01:04:42](#)):

It really was a really great ride, I think, and I think I learned a lot. I think I learned a lot about turning up and doing it and doing the thing you said you were going to do.

J ([01:05:00](#)):

What are you going to do at the unFinale?

Paul ([01:05:03](#)):

I did ask Chris if he'd got a record of his practical essay.

J ([01:05:06](#)):

I want him to restage it.

Paul ([01:05:07](#)):

I know. I did say to Chris, come on mate, should we do your practical essay? But he says, there's no written record of it.

J ([01:05:13](#)):

I think it's got to be purely from memory and collected memories of everyone else. And there's got to be more to it than just pissing in a bucket

Paul ([01:05:20](#)):

The only thing anyone remembers about it is him pissing in a bucket. But I remember there being quite a good script, and I remember he and I spending ages doing a load of leaping. We did quite a complicated, it wasn't really physical theatre, but there was some sort of game we were playing where we would have to do press ups and star jumps and speak.

J ([01:05:41](#)):

It was like riRidiculusmus crossed with the Sleaford Mods is my recollection.

Paul ([01:05:47](#)):

Someone described it as like The Dangerous Brothers, Rick Mayall and Ade Edmondson. That was, someone expressed it. It was a bit like that. But yeah, I did think about doing that.

J ([01:05:56](#)):

Cool.

Paul ([01:05:57](#)):

I tell you what I would say to everyone, thank you. Thanks for the friendship, for the support, for just the sheer joy of doing that together when you are 19, 20, 21, 22, having that ride and having, whenever that origin moment was when we all got on the boat, we did all do it for a bit. And that was a really cool thing to have done. And one of those things you can look back on in old age and go, yeah, I'm glad we did that.

J ([01:06:33](#)):

I wholeheartedly agree, Paul. Yeah, thank you.

([01:06:37](#)):

MUSIC

([01:06:37](#)):

I really enjoyed having that conversation. I hope you enjoyed listening to it. Thank you for being here and for listening. In the next episode, I'll be speaking with my co-founder and dear friend Louisa Ashley about her most vivid memories of her time with Unlimited. If you have any questions or comments you'd like to share, please get in touch on Instagram, Facebook, or if you really must, Twitter, where Unlimited is @untheatre on all of them. Or email me on j@unlimited.earth.

([01:07:12](#)):

This podcast is written and produced by me, J Spooner. Editing and sound design is by Oliver Spooner. The intro and underscore music you heard at the beginning and during my conversation with Paul was composed and recorded by David Edwards, AKA Minotaur Shock for Unlimited's 2009 production 'The Moon The Moon'. The track you're listening to right now is called 'Sex Motives', also written and recorded by David Edwards for a scene in our 2013 show, The Noise to underscore the introductory monologue of a character called The Agent who says

([01:07:44](#)):

"I have got better fucking things to do at this stage in my career.

([01:07:48](#)):

The yacht? Ya, she's 64 feet. Bernice. Me? Benjamin Smith. Ben. Like the 19th century explorer. I suppose I've always identified with him. You haven't heard of him? Don't worry. Nobody ever has. Discovered a lot of the high Arctic Islands. Other end of the world from here, of course. Had a plastics firm, sold up two years ago. Wife died. Thought I'd buy a boat. I guess you could call me a wanderer.

([01:08:11](#)):

This transcript was exported on Dec 20, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Jesus, even I hate this fucking guy. I'm going to come down on you like a ton of bricks for not getting in touch, you fucking real life Fargo Fuck. But most of all, I'm going to make you regret making me be this guy. And Christ, this fucking constant noise isn't helping."

[\(01:08:32\)](#):

You can listen to an EP of all the music from the Noise on Unlimited Theatre's Spotify channel, and there's a full script and film of that 2013 production on the project page at Unlimited's websites

[\(01:08:42\)](#):

<https://unlimited.earth/project/the-noise/>