



# Ghost Town

by Jessica Fisher

Education Resource Pack: **UPDATED**

By Helen Cadbury

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## The Company

### Creative Team

Director- Katie Posner  
 Designer- Gem Greaves  
 Sound Designer - RJ McConnell  
 Lighting Designer- Andy Pilliner  
 Assistant Director- Oliver O'Shea

### Actors

Jill McAusland- Megan  
 Damson Idris- Joe  
 Sheila Atim- Keira

### Tour Dates include:

Terry O'Toole Theatre, **North Hykeham, Lincolnshire** - 6th & 7th February  
**Stamford** Arts Centre - 10 & 11th February  
**York** Theatre Royal Studio - 12th - 19th Feb  
 Cast Theatre, **Doncaster** - 20th and 21st Feb  
 Riverhead Theatre **Louth** - 24 & 25th February  
**Lincoln** Performing Arts Centre - 27 & 28th February  
 Gulbenkian, **Canterbury** - 3rd - 4th March

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# Introduction

## Ghost Town

by Jessica Fisher

Presented in association with LOV (Lincolnshire One Venues)

Directed by Katie Posner

An east coast beach. A cold October dawn. A young woman lies unconscious on the tide line. Joe stands over her watching, panicking. He is hiding a secret so dark he will do anything to make sure she won't tell.

Joe's world is about to explode.

Megan has found herself somewhere that seems familiar. What is she searching for and why does she recognise the young man at the water's edge, washing his hands?

Can Megan help stop Joe's self destruction?

Together Joe and Megan struggle to make sense of their shared past and the mismatched versions of the events that have brought them to this place.

Ghost Town is a new play about lost friendship, memory and what it means to be courageous, written by Nick Darke Award winner Jessica Fisher

This Education Pack takes you behind the scenes into the process of creating this Pilot and Lincolnshire One Venues co-production.

There are interviews with the company and unique background information into how this new play was created, which will give students an insight into the process of developing it and also guidance on some of the themes, especially around mental health, which are thrown up by the play.

The pack will be of interest to teachers and students of performing arts, drama, including BTEC National Diploma in Acting or Technical Theatre, AS/ A level Drama and Theatre, and PSHE.

If you'd like to book a workshop please contact [mandy@pilot-theatre.com](mailto:mandy@pilot-theatre.com)

**Keep in touch, ask questions & tell us what you think about our work**

**[www.pilot-theatre.com](http://www.pilot-theatre.com)**

**Twitter: [@pilot\\_theatre](https://twitter.com/pilot_theatre)**

**When you've seen the play, explore in your own drama or writing what you think happens next in Joe and Megan's story.....**

# Meet Jessica Fisher

## writer

### How did you start writing Ghost Town?

Pilot Theatre announced Generation Zed, a call for emerging writers to submit ideas for new plays aimed at Pilot's audience profile. I was thrilled to be the chosen, winning writer and to have my work developed with the help of playwright, Richard Hurford, and Pilot Associate Director, Katie Posner.

It started as a completely different play. Originally, I was writing a story about a time a few years after the 2011 riots, as if they had never ended. It featured Joe and Megan on the beach in a future dystopia, where everyone was still in conflict. As I worked on it, it became clear to me that it was their human relationship that was the most important element.

### There is an element of your own life experience in the play. How did it emerge into the story?

Joe suffers from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. This is something I have direct experience of, although in a slightly different way from Joe. It's a condition that is often misunderstood and I wanted to try to express what it can be like to be constantly bombarded with negative and upsetting thoughts. At the time I was writing, I was having treatment from a specialist and making great progress. In some ways, this let me take a step back and think about what OCD is like, not only for the person who has it, but for their friends and family. The condition takes many different forms and in the character of Joe, I chose to explore an area that tends not to get so much media attention. Of course Joe is a person, not a page from a textbook and there's much more to him than this medical condition. Although the issue of OCD is in the play, it's not the only issue; it's just one part of Joe and Megan's story.

### How many different drafts did you write before you got to the final play?

At least seven already! Plus tweaking. I've been able to do some research and development, which is invaluable. After the first R and D, we ended up with a script that was half as long. We played around and moved sections about, and what we ended up with was a skeleton. It had been there all along, but it was hidden behind other stuff. The second R and D was with the actors. That was fantastic because I could start visualising who the characters were going to be. Katie and I created timelines for Megan and Joe, so we were sure about where they'd been at different times. One of the hardest things as a writer is to know how much to give away and how much to make the audience guess, and at what stage. It's also good to give the audience something to think about as the play ends, not necessarily to wrap everything up neatly.

### What was it like working with the cast, while still writing the play?

Doing the second R and D with the actors who were going to play Joe, Megan and Keira was fantastic. I love that theatre is a collaborative art form with lots of creative people

# Meet Jessica Fisher

continued

contributing to the process along the way. It was so helpful for me to talk to the actors about their characters; they could see things and ask questions that made me think about things in a new way and open up even more possibilities. It's a lovely moment when you realise that other people care about these characters who've been knocking around in your head.

## What is the attraction of the sea?

I wanted to explore the idea of the way things get washed up. The sea brings new stuff up every day, and that's like our minds, our personalities. My experience of OCD is that it is a rise and fall condition, periods of panic and calm alternate; the sea expresses for me how this can feel.

## What advice would you give to someone who wanted to be a writer?

It's true that writing is about re-writing. A useful technique is to go through your work and mark what doesn't need to be there, then you have to work out what is missing from the story.

I'm a fan of quick writing, keeping the pen on the page and just getting it down without letting yourself worry about what's coming out; you can edit later. There are some great character development exercises on the Ideas Tap website from the playwright Simon Stephens, which will get you started. <http://www.ideastap.com/ideasmag/the-knowledge/simon-stephens-interview>



Jessica celebrating winning the Generation Zed playwriting competition with Ghost Town  
(photo: York Press)

## Jessica Fisher

### Playwright

Jessica is a playwright and youth theatre practitioner. In 2010, she won the Nick Darke Award with *Paradise*, a play for young audiences about a 12 year-old guerrilla gardener.

Her plays for young actors include an adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful*, *Once*, devised with 11 - 14 year olds and *Tell Tale*, a piece about the life and works of Edgar Allan Poe.

In 2011, her short monologue, *Female Fagin*, was performed at The Bush Theatre, London and The Carriageworks, Leeds and live-streamed for Pilot Theatre's Pilot Live. In 2012, her short play, *Murmur*, formed part of the fringe entertainment at the York Mystery Plays, before being taken to the Galtres Festival.

She is currently developing a play for adult audiences, *Grace Notes*, some of which was produced by Park Bench Poets as a scratch performance at Hull Truck Theatre.

Jessica has an MA in Applied Theatre from The Central School of Speech and Drama. Her thesis focussed on the importance and impact of complex and mature subject matter in plays for young actors and audiences.

# Meet Katie Posner Director

## What's exciting and inspiring you as you work with Jessica Fisher on her new play, Ghost Town?

It's great to see a new play grow and develop, and to bring Jess's ideas to life. Also, I'm looking forward to hearing the ideas RJ (RJ McConnell, sound designer) comes up with for the soundscape. It will be an evocative sound and it will complement Gem Greaves's set design. In an earlier draft, there was going to be a beach hut, but it's now a more open setting, so it's not so literal, but more of a metaphorical space. The sound will be crucial in defining it, so I imagine we will have a constant underscore, to evoke the feeling of the sea. The sound of the sea should also evoke the waves of thought and the intensity of Joe's mind.

In terms of the characters, I'm enjoying exploring how to develop Keira. What is her relationship to Joe? And how does she respond to Megan? She is an exciting and unusual character that we will discover and develop during the rehearsal process.

## How important has the Research and Development process been?

It's been essential. It's enabled Jess and I to work together. At the earlier stages the playwright, Richard Hurford worked alongside us. We were able to explore what the essential elements of the play were and what didn't need to be said. The second part of the R and D, with the actors, allowed us to get it up on its feet and work out how it works physically before Jess went away to create the final rehearsal script. It gave us a chance to hear the language and feel the relationships between the characters.

## What would you like young people to come away from Ghost Town thinking or feeling?

I'd like them to feel reassured and empowered. There is something of Joe in all of us, even Megan has her fears and worries. I hope it will give young people the courage to talk about how they feel. When we are growing up, we all believe we are the only one having certain thoughts and ideas, and everyone else is just fine! We all have different stuff going on in our heads, and if it gets on top of people, I hope seeing this play will give them the confidence to share with someone they trust and work out how to make things better.



### Katie Posner

Associate Director at  
Pilot

Katie is an experienced director, teacher and actress and member of the Pilot Theatre staff team. She has recently completed the prestigious directing programme at the National Theatre. Visit Katie's blog:

<http://katieposnerdirector.wordpress.com/>

Left: Katie (foreground) and Jess in Rehearsal

# Meet the Sound Designer

## RJ McConnell

### **Tell us about your job as a sound designer**

A sound designer basically creates the soundtrack to a show, which can be anything from selecting or composing music to sourcing or recording sounds. It involves thinking about the sound language of a show and creating the world in which the story exists.

### **In this show, how will you do that?**

It's going to be a combination of two things: sound effects and music. Because the show is set on a beach, it's got a heavy, elemental presence. You'll hear the sounds that you find there, wind and sea, and then I think there'll also be a filmic style soundtrack mixed in.

### **Is it a different process if you are creating sound for a new piece of writing, compared to an existing play?**

It's different. If you're doing an already established piece of work, you will invariably look at what other people have done in the past, but with something like this, you get involved in devising and development work early on, and it's good because you have more of a blank canvas with a completely new piece.

### **How did you become a sound designer?**

My dad did amateur sound in Glasgow when I was young. He was mainly gathering sound effects from vinyl LPs and putting them on to tapes to play in shows, so that was something that was always going on in the house. I'm a big music fan and I did a placement at the Byre Theatre in St. Andrews. I knew I wanted to get into theatre but I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do. There I realised where the technical knowhow of sound and the creative side of it could come together. For me that was a perfect fit.

### **Did you get a formal qualification, or was experience more important?**

It was both. I did a stage management degree in which I specialised purely in sound design. I threw myself at every opportunity to do more sound design during my course.

### **What's the hardest thing you've ever had to design sound for?**

I think Dante's Inferno for The Arches, because of the blank canvas factor and because it was quite an unusual soundscape which involved going out and doing some interesting recordings.



# Meet RJ McConnell

## continued

**What would be the piece of advice you would give to a young person wanting to work in sound design?**

It might seem obvious, but listen very closely to everything. Sound is absolutely everywhere and if you're interested in sound, then next time you are anywhere outside the house, sit down and have a good listen to everything around you. There's constantly a whole universe of sounds going on and if you tune your ear to that, it will then inspire you in your work.

**Have you worked with Pilot or anyone involved in this show before?**

Katie and I worked together on *Running On the Cracks*. It's really good to be working with Katie again. *Running On The Cracks* was very sound heavy and the sound in the show became like an extra character. Katie and I have a way of working together on how we want to use sound, so I think this is going to be a very exciting collaboration.





# Meet Oliver O'Shea

## Assistant Director

### Tell us about your role on Ghost Town?

I'm assisting the director, Katie, and that involves being part of the development process of the play. When it goes on tour, I'll go along with the cast and stage manager, and I'll help maintain the show and keep it as fresh as it was at the end of the rehearsal process.

While I'm on tour I'll also be delivering workshops in schools, exploring the themes and issues of the play and drama techniques used in rehearsal and performance.

(For more information about workshops contact [mandy@pilot-theatre.com](mailto:mandy@pilot-theatre.com)).

### How has your career developed so far?

Before I went to university I was a member of York Theatre Royal Youth Theatre for about seven years, then I assisted with the Young Actors Company, which is a bridge between the Youth Theatre and drama school. Different things were instrumental in getting to me to this point, each experience builds on the last. I'm still at a fairly early stage, but I graduated about a year and a half ago from Cambridge University with an English degree and came back home to York, where Pilot Theatre is based. Doing a degree in English was very useful and it built on the practical experience of creating youth theatre productions. Since I've been back in York, I've done some assistant directing, and some directing for the Education Department at York Theatre Royal.

### Where do you see yourself in the future?

Definitely as a director. I'm still finding my own style and voice as a director, so to be an assistant is really valuable, because you can learn so much from an experienced director, and working on a new play demands different skills to working on a play which is already written and published.



Oliver (far right) talking through ideas with Katie and the rest of the company.

# Meet the Actors:

Jill McAusland, Sheila Atim, Damson Idris

Right: Jill McAusland



Above: Sheila Atim

Right: Damson Idris



# In the Research & Development Process

Before Jessica wrote the final draft of *Ghost Town*, she and Katie Posner got together with the actors, the sound designer, the lighting designer and the assistant director for two days R and D (research and development). Here are some quotes, taken from the **R and D process**.

**Katie:** We're going to explore as a company what the piece is, and give Jess time to write more, knowing who the cast is, but also bringing in the actors' interpretation.

**Jess:** It's great that we've got the luxury of the creative process starting here...

**The cast read the play through and discuss their feelings about it.**

**Jill:** Hearing it out loud makes it clearer and easier to sense the relationships between them.

**Sheila:** I'm looking forward to looking into the backstories of the characters, going back to what's happened to them, as we've landed in a certain moment, so we need to decide what's happened before.

**Damson:** I'm thinking about what Joe wants. What's his super-objective? Because he switches from talking to Megan, to talking to Keira.

**Jill:** I need to explore how I deal with the fact that I don't see Keira. What's my presence when Keira is present? How do I play that?

**Sheila:** Keira has many aspects, as both his pacifier and his ignition, and also appropriates his happier memories.

**Katie:** She connects him to his OCD, because she is the thing that instills these thoughts, but she also calms him – how do you play that? We have to work that out.

**Damson:** She's my Tyler in *Fight Club*.

**RJ:** I'm enjoying listening and absorbing, thinking about different rhythms and paces, thinking about what kind of sound will suit each section.

Exploring physical relationships through the text



**Conversation with the Cast**

next page



# Conversation with the Cast

Jill McAusland, Sheila Atim, Damson Idris

**Tell us about how you got into acting professionally.**

**Damson:** Initially I wanted to be the next Cristiano Ronaldo but that didn't work out so I went to Brunel University, where I studied Drama with TV and Film Studies. I was lucky to meet a fantastic actress called Cathy Tyson, who introduced me to a director who was doing a reading and was looking for an actor. I did the reading, at the Arcola theatre, got paid a hundred pounds, and went home thinking, okay, that's my acting career finished! Then in about two months time they came back to me and said: 'we really enjoyed your reading, we'd like to use you in the part.' So I did the play, and I got signed to an agent. Then I went on to do the TV show *Miranda* and some radio work. Gradually more and more opportunities came through auditions, and now I'm here!

**Did you always know you wanted to be an actor?**

**Damson:** Not really, I knew I wanted to study drama and I thought I might become a drama teacher.

**Sheila:** I never planned to be an actor, I actually wanted to be a doctor, although when I was about eighteen I changed my mind and thought I'd like to be a musician. I went to university and studied a science degree and while I was doing that, I went to an arts college every week, on a Sunday, to keep my arts going. I initially studied singing and music, but then I went back to the drama classes. I'd done Drama A level, and I'd forgotten how much I enjoyed it. My drama teacher at the arts college was asking me to help with readings, and then I was in a play at the Globe. That was my first show and an agent saw me and signed me up, and now I'm here!

**Jill:** I think I always knew I wanted to perform and I've been dancing from the age of two! When it came to A levels and university choices, I knew that what my heart wanted was to try and get into drama school. I auditioned and luckily got into Rose Bruford, where I did a degree in acting. I got picked up by an agent from my third year showcase and I've been working since in theatre and in TV.

**Jill, you're a couple of years into your professional career now. What advice would you give to anyone new into the profession or interested in becoming an actor?**

I think you've just got to trust that it's something you're good at and that you enjoy, and that it will happen, but it can be hard to keep going. I've had real high points and real low points, and I'm sure all actors would say that. I've been lucky in the two and a bit years since I've been out of drama school that I've been in work a lot of that time. You have to remember in the downtimes, the times when you're doing your part-time job, that there's a reason you got into this, there's a little fire burning inside you. Don't let anyone else tell you that it's just a silly dream, because a lot of people might have questioned what I was doing and thought it was a bit up in the clouds, but when I got my first TV role, the response from those people was 'oh, so you've done it!'

**Do you think it's useful to have a degree?**

**Sheila:** I think it's really difficult, not just in the arts, but generally to be a young person now. You feel you have to have so much more to offer and even if you might not get that much back. I don't know if a degree is always necessary, but it's a good idea to be as qualified and experienced as you can be, to safeguard yourself in some way. If your degree is in the arts, then that's only going to add to your experience.

**Jill:** Even if you're not academic, it's important to work hard in whatever you're good at. If it's a sport, work at being good at that. It's important to have as many strings to your bow as possible. And if you do become an actor, that makes you a more sellable actor.

# Meet The Designer

## Gem Greaves

### **How did you come up with the design for Ghost Town?**

It is a very close collaborative process with the director. After initial readings of the script, director Katie Posner already had quite a clear vision of how she would like the set to appear. So I went away and sourced images, sketched drawings and created 3D experimentations of 1:25 scale models of the set so that we could play with the variations. We decided that stripping the set back of any very literal and physical elements would work best to create this eerie isolated feel. The different pieces that make up the set -the wood , the rock and sand- are all naturally formed adding to this idea of disconnection from civilisation.

### **What are the challenges of designing for a new play?**

I love the challenge! When a play hasn't been designed for before it cannot be compared to previous productions, which feels very freeing. It is also a really great privilege to be designing and creating for a play's very first staging.

### **What stimulates your creativity and where do you find inspiration?**

My creativity is inspired from a huge range of sources: art, history, fashion, music, architecture, music videos, nature, photography, something I see in the street, chance observations and discoveries... the list really is endless. It is important for me to experience as much as possible to create a bank of visual references in my mind that I can draw from, immersing myself in culture both high and low!

### **What advice would you give aspiring theatre designers?**

Gain as much experience as possible working for different theatre companies -for instance, over the summer break- and work as hard as possible, because these are the places who might offer you your first chance of employment once you have graduated. And perseverance is paramount!

*See next page for a model box image of Gem's design, and the set in rehearsal, built by scenic artist, Becky May.*



## The Model Box

The model box is prepared before rehearsals begin and shared with the director, scenic artist or set builder and lighting designer,. The actors also get a chance to see it, to help them imagine what surface they will be working on.



The actors working on the set in rehearsal.



# In rehearsal: Extracts from Oliver's blog

## Day Two

Following a warm-up with the cast, Katie asks the actors to explore the rehearsal space in character, finding the places where they feel the most powerful and vulnerable.

From this exercise, everyone begins to appreciate the possible spatial dynamics and the physical relationships between the characters. The set has a few finishing touches to do yet, so for the moment, a chair, a bench and a piece of metrodeck (a lightweight platform typically used in the theatre industry for rehearsals and scenic construction) stand-in for our beach and driftwood.

Throughout the day, Katie works with the company in finding basic blocking (stage positioning / stage pictures) as we work slowly through the text. Given that Ghost Town is a new play with a constantly evolving script, we also test out its dramaturgy as we block the play. Fortunately, the writer Jessica is with us for the whole of the first week, and she is able

to amend the script on her laptop as we work. She also makes suggestions about possible ways of restructuring the order of units, where it is felt something does not quite feel right.

The sound designer RJ McConnell is also with us throughout the first week and he explores different sound-textures for the play as we work through each section. Katie has worked with RJ before, and they have developed a shorthand about creating continual underscores – different textures bleed into other ones, so that a sound world is built-up from various layers.

The aim is that by the end of the week the play-text will have reached its final draft and that the sound-world of the production will be fleshed out. Of course, there will still be tweaks to make and further development for all aspects of the production throughout rehearsals, but Katie has clear goals to reach along the way.



Rehearsal photos by Ben Bentley



# In rehearsal: Extracts from Oliver's blog continued

## Week 2

The second week of rehearsals has been dedicated to developing the scenes of the play with the company further. Katie has also done some re-blocking, altering some of the broader choices that were outlined over the course of the first week. Now that we have the main components of our set to use in rehearsal (the driftwood and the rocks), this has allowed the cast to be more physically imaginative in their spatial relationships with each other. It has also encouraged us to make bolder stage images and find the most exciting visual representations possible. We had some play-time solely to explore the driftwood and how it feels to walk over its uneven, textured surface.

As well as blogging and taking on some administrative responsibilities, I feed in my thoughts and observations to Katie as we progress back through the play.

To help promote the show digitally, we film a rehearsal trailer with Ed Sunman from Fresh Label Ltd. Katie and the cast talk about the play and its characters to camera, and the actors perform scenes from the play that will be edited together. Ed is a busy man, filming another trailer for York Theatre Royal later on the same day.

We also have a visit from fight director Liam Evans-Ford during the week. Although there are not really any combat scenes in Ghost Town as such, there are a few scuffles, falls and other movement pieces which benefit from him checking that they are safe.

By the end of the week we manage two run-throughs – one of the actors is poorly on the last day, unfortunately, so I read in whilst she is absent. Next week we will work on the notes from the runs, and then this will lead into further refinement of the play.

*Ben Bentley's fantastic rehearsal shots can be seen on Pilot's Flickr. Can be reproduced for educational use only and must be credited.*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/pilottheatre/with/11996720083/>



# Background to the Play

## What is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder?

- **OCD**, or obsessive compulsive disorder, is an **anxiety disorder**
- It has two main parts: **obsession** (ie: preoccupation with a fixed idea or an unwanted feeling or emotion) and **compulsion** (ie: a strong and usually irresistible impulse to perform an act, especially one that is irrational.) Where both things come together, the obsession with a fixed idea can lead to the compulsive behaviour.
- Symptoms may include **repetitive behaviour**, such as counting and compulsive attention to certain numbers, or hand-washing and worrying about cleanliness. The obsession with a fear of infection, for example, may lead to a compulsion to continually wash. Often OCD is used as a throwaway term, but this does not mean that everyone with high standards of neatness or cleanliness has the disorder.
- A common feature of OCD, which is less visible, is the presence of **compulsive thoughts** and worries, which can be very disabling. This is the feature of **Joe's** OCD in the play, which leads him to believe he is responsible for doing terrible things. It can present as **mild, moderate or severe** but there are a number of ways people with OCD can get help: **self-help**, help from people around them, or **help through therapies** such as **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**. The first place to go for help is the **GP**.
- OCD can often present for the first time in **adolescence** or early adulthood
- About **1.6% of the population** develop OCD
- There may be an obvious **trigger** to OCD developing, or there may be a series of different triggers
- OCD may be related to a particular cause or earlier trauma, or it may be present without any obvious cause.

For more information go to: [http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-\(ocd\)/about-obsessive-compulsive-disorder/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-(ocd)/about-obsessive-compulsive-disorder/) or google Mind and put OCD into the search function on the site.

### OCD Action

tel. 0845 390 6232

web: [ocdaction.org.uk](http://ocdaction.org.uk)

Information and support for people with experience of OCD, and their friends, family and carers.

### Samaritans

Available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress, despair or suicidal thoughts.

helpline: 08457 90 90 90

email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)