

Pilot Theatre presents

ASONG FOR ELLAGREY

RESOURCE PACK B

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A SONG FOR ELLA GREY

By David Almond
Adapted for the stage by Zoe Cooper
Directed by Esther Richardson
Pilot Theatre in association with Northern Stage and York Theatre Royal

"A darkly romantic tale that sings of the madness of youth, the ache of love, and the near-impossibility of grasping death"

This new production, from the company that brought you *Noughts* & *Crosses*, is a magical retelling of the Orpheus myth, full of music, sound and storytelling.

Claire and her best friend, Ella Grey, are ordinary kids from ordinary families in an ordinary world. They and their friends fall in and out of love, play music and dance, stare at the stars, yearn for excitement, and have parties on the beautiful beaches of Northumberland. One day a stranger, a musician called Orpheus, appears on the beach, and entrances them all but particularly Ella. Where has Orpheus come from and what path will Ella follow? A tale of modern teenagers and ancient forces, a tale told since the dawn of time and told again today.

"After our success with our recent adaptations of young adult fiction for mid-scale, it is an honour to be working with David Almond and Zoe Cooper on a new version of David's masterpiece, A Song for Ella Grey. After the huge upheaval and change of the last few years there isn't a more apposite moment for Pilot to present this mighty story of teenage love and loss, set in the extraordinary landscapes of Northern England. As always this work will introduce audiences to thrilling new talent and open rich conversations and reflections about what it means to come of age in 2024." Esther Richardson, Artistic Director

Age suitability 13+

TOUR DATES

Northern Stage, Newcastle 1 – 15 February 2024

> York Theatre Royal 20 – 24 February 2024

Theatre Peckham

27 February – 2 March 2024

Hull Truck Theatre 5 – 9 March 2024

Liverpool Playhouse 13 - 16 March 2024

ABOUT THIS PACK

Resource pack by Carolyn Bradley
Edited by Oliver O'Shea
Designed by Sam Johnson
Filming by Ed Sunman
Audio Description by Alice Gilmour
British Sign Language Interpretation by Jay Thomas-Morton, of CommPlus
Rehearsal Photographs by Topher McGrillis

This resource pack accompanies the touring theatre production of *A Song for Ella Grey* and is aimed at teachers and educators within Drama curricula at KS3, KS4 and KS5 levels.

This pack can be used to help students understand the stage adaptation and prepare them for watching the theatre production. There are suggested activities and prompt questions to help engage students.

Resource Pack Part A is also available, which is aimed at those who are exploring the novel by David Almond, and supports reading-groups, literacy programmes, and library services.

From March 2024, Resource Pack Part C will be published, which will include filmed extracts from the production, ideal for students focusing on this production for the Live Theatre component of their Drama exams.

We are not responsible for the content of external links, and we strongly recommend checking the suitability of external content before sharing with your students.

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If you have any questions about this resource pack or how to use it, please contact: education@pilot-theatre.com

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INTERVIEW WITH ZOE COOPER PLAYWRIGHT

What attracted you to this project and to adapting David's novel for the stage?

When I first read David
Almond's novel, what most
struck me was that in using a
classical myth to tell the story
of teenage loss, he took his
young protagonists and their
emotions really seriously. I
thought that was such a brilliant
meeting of story, theme,
characters and form.

I also live in the North East, and the way that he evokes the landscape is beautiful. He has really captured the rugged beauty of where I live.



Photo by Mark Savage

Finally, as a queer woman I was delighted to see queer love as a central theme in a book for young people. I did not have anything like this when I was growing up. I am so glad books like this exist now, and are part of the mainstream.

What were the challenges of adapting the novel for the stage?

There is so much to choose from! The novel is so rich. It was initially tricky to know what to cut and what to keep.

I was also aware that depicting a mythical figure on stage is really tricky. How do you make that work on stage, when human bodies are required to play those parts? In general, finding a dramatic language for the mythical and magical elements of the text was really challenging – and exciting!





How did you decide what to keep, what to cut and what to change in the text?

When adapting, I tend to first read the book and then try to recall the characters, story, scenes and especially stage images that I have read. I ask myself: what has stuck with me? What is central to this story? Who do I need to bring on stage to tell this story? What theatrical images am I working towards? From there I develop a scene structure, and after that point I write the play.

How have you embedded the North East setting into your writing of the play?

I always try to work with contrasts. We find ourselves in Claire's private bedroom, and the noisy public classroom. We are on an urban canal, and we are standing by a great, big, wild sea. I think that the North East has so many different aspects to it, and I was eager that we explored a range of settings to reflect that. This is a play as much about urban Newcastle as it is about the wild Northumbrian coastline. And that can be really helpful in writing scenes. Each space has its own rules, expectations and so on, and it is helpful to have these to guide the scenes.

From your adaptation, what main themes jump out to an audience?

Of course, I hope that audiences bring their own perspectives, and it is not really for me to say! However, some of the things I was thinking about when I read the book and when writing the play were: the nature of different kinds of love, death, storytelling, gender, class, community, growing up and leaving home.

What is the significance of music and song in the telling of the story?

I think that song is what helps us to create and understand Orpheus. Who they are and how they change the course of the characters' lives. Emily Levy, the composer, has created something that lifts us from the everyday, gives weight, expresses beauty, underscores what the rest of the play is trying to do. It's magical!

Could you tell us about your decisions for how you represent Orpheus on the stage?

I think that Orpheus is an expression of grief. What they represent is loss in all its many forms. And so, to represent them as one singular human form felt wrong.

Did you have a clear performance style in mind when writing the play?

I did not. I knew that the characters would tell their story themselves, that the play was a kind of ritual between them; that by the end of it, I wanted them to cast off their grief. I suppose that also gives permission for those mythical and magical elements I mention.

How does the rehearsal process influence the development of the script?

I think each development and rehearsal process is different. In this process, I have been very fortunate to have some Research and Development days before we went into rehearsals. Those allowed me to hear the script, to ask the director and actors for their thoughts, allow the whole creative team to reflect on the play and ask questions.

I also think that other creatives have had a big influence on the play as they have come on board and developed their aspect of the production. For example, Verity Quinn, the Designer, picked up on the way that the characters refer back to childhood stories, and that emboldened me to go further with that idea. Making work for the stage is a real team effort in that sense, and that is why I prefer playwriting to any other sort of writing!

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR



<u>Audio described version of the interview</u> <u>British Sign Language version of the interview</u>

- 1. What first drew you to the novel and wanting to direct it for the stage?
- 2. How is the Orpheus myth represented in this contemporary story?
- 3. What themes and issues does the play explore?
- 4. How would you describe the style of the production?
- 5. How will the North East be presented on stage?

CREATIVE TEAM

Novel by David Almond
Adapted for the stage by Zoe Cooper
Director - Esther Richardson
Designer - Verity Quinn
Composer, Lyricist and Musical Director - Emily Levy
Lighting Designer - Chris Davey
Sound Designer - Adam P McCready
Movement Director - Ayesha Fazal
Projection Designer - Si Cole
Casting Associate - Shannon David of Elise Casting
Assistant Director - Eliza Beth Stevens

Production Team

Tour Production Manager – Luke James Company Stage Manager – Sarah Goodyear Deputy Stage Manager – Gabriela Oliver Assistant Stage Manager – Lizzie Hayward Technical Stage Manager - Miles Cruden Smith Relighter – David Phillips Wardrobe Supervisor – Naomi Daley Costume Assistant - Maddy Williamson Set Construction – The Yorkshire Workshop

Musicians (recorded)

Guitar, Bass - Mark Creswell Drums, Recording, Production - Sam Hobbs Clarinet, Saxophone - Richard Ormrod Harp - Eleanor Turner Viola - Aby Vuilliamy

CAST



Amonik Melaco as Sam

Training: Laine Theatre Arts.

Theatre credits include: The Nutcracker in Drew McOnie's Nutcracker (Southbank Centre); Evita In Concert (Theatre Royal Drury Lane); U/S Ram Sweeney in Heathers the Musical (The Other Palace); Singin' In The Rain (Sadlers Wells, UK and International Tour); Rafe in Matthew Bourne's Romeo and Juliet (Norwich Theatre Royal); Tommy in Matthew Bourne's Lord of the Flies (Newcastle Theatre Royal); The Best of... Rock Musicals (Hammersmith Apollo); Time Flies: 100 Years of the RAF (Theatre Royal Drury Lane)

Television credits include: Mamma Mia! I Have a Dream (ITV); All Star Musicals (ITV); Kenny in Writing the Century: Stannington (BBC); Vera (ITV) and The Dumping Ground (BBC).



Beth Crame as Angeline

Training includes: Guildford School of Acting BA Hons Class of 2021 and Newcastle College.

Theatre credits include: Louise Bigelow, Carousel: A Concert (Cadogan Hall) Hatty Rabbit, The Sorcerer's Apprentice (Northern Stage) Sally, Lasagna Live Tour (Open Clasp) Alice, Alice in Wonderland (Gala Durham).

Workshops include: Maxine, *Like a Virgin* (Dir. Mark Hedges) Katie, *I, Daniel Blake* R&D (Northern Stage).

Credits whilst training include: Kate, *The Wild Party* (GSA), Julia, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (GSA), Martha, *Spring Awakening* (GSA).

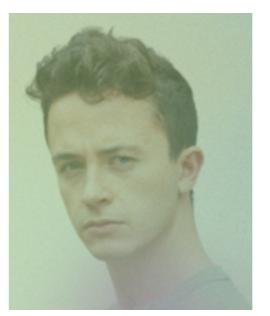


Grace Long as Ella Grey

Grace is an actress and writer from Cumbria who trained at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts.

Grace has performed in and been a part of the writers' room for *Breeders* on Sky/FX and can be seen in the feature film *Three Day Millionaire* in the lead role of 'Queenie', currently on Netflix.

Grace is also known for her online comedy sketches with a 700k+ following on TikTok.



Jonathan Iceton as Jay

Jonathan read Music at the University of Cambridge, performing with the Marlowe Society and Cambridge Footlights, before training on the MA Acting course at Mountview.

Recent credits include his portrayal of Liam in Sandcastle Theatre's Some Boy You Are, the role of Miles in Down the Lines at the Customs House, as well as the villain David in Molly O'Gorman's new musical Ghost Light. Most recently, he brought his voiceover talent to Lois-Amber Toole's Post-Traumatic Slay Disorder.



Olivia Onyehara as Claire

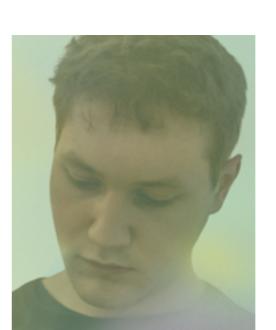
Theatre Includes:

All's Well that Ends Well/ Richard III (RSC), The 39 Steps (SJT Scarborough/Theatre by the Lake), Nothing in a Butterfly (Synergy Theatre), Shuck n Jive (Soho Theatre), Twelfth Night, A Midsummer Night's Dream, & Macbeth (Shakespeare's Rose Theatre York), Jack Lear (Hull Truck), Pride & Prejudice, Our American Cousin (Finborough Theatre), The Watchers & Tanzi Libre (Southwark Playhouse), Time and the Conways (Nottingham Playhouse), All Our Daughters (New Vic Theatre).

TV includes: Casualty

Film includes: Locked Down (Paramount) and In the Dark (short)

Radio includes: Braids, Consider the Lilies, The White North Has Thy Bones, Beyond the Grey Towers, Something Understood Made By Hand all for BBC Radio 4.



Zak Younger Banks, Musician

Zak Younger Banks is a singer-songwriter, guitarist and producer based in Glasgow and Newcastle who combines emotionally raw vocals and poetic songwriting with an inventive and original DIY production style and affecting electronic soundscapes. Between studying traditional Scottish music and exploring the vast music scenes in Glasgow and Newcastle, his unique sound has picked up influence from electronic music, grunge, jazz and folk.















SUSTAINABILITY

Now more than ever, it is important that we make every effort to reduce our carbon footprint, as the world tries to become more carbon neutral and aim for net zero.

What does carbon footprint mean?

The carbon footprint of a company, country, or activity is the amount of carbon emissions created by the activity or group, usually measured in tonnes of carbon emissions. The bigger a carbon footprint, the more damaging for the environment.

What does carbon neutral mean?

You are carbon neutral if you are able to balance the amount of carbon dioxide released through emissions related to your activities, with the amount of carbon removed from the atmosphere. It is also called carbon "offsetting" – where you change your activities or make a positive action to 'offset' the damage being done to the environment.

What is net zero?

Net-zero emissions means no greenhouse gases are being released into the atmosphere. The Paris Climate Agreement in 2015 was an international treaty where countries agreed to reduce their carbon emissions and aim for 'net zero'. The UK's net zero target is to have reduced carbon emissions by100% from 1999 levels by the year 2050.

At Pilot Theatre, like many other organisations, we are trying to reduce our carbon footprint and make our work more sustainable, in light of the climate crisis. Here are three examples of how environmental sustainability underpins Pilot's approach as a theatre company: in our office, onstage, and what happens after our tours finish.

Sustainable Energy

Pilot Theatre's offices are based in York at The Guildhall, where a heat pump has recently been installed as part of the building renovations. The water source heat pump takes water from the River Ouse near the offices and extracts heat from it, before returning the water to the river.

Large parts of the building are heated through underfloor heating from the heat pump, with further rooms being heated through FCUs – fan coil units taking heat from the water source heat pump, which use heated and cooling coils, providing warm air in winter and cool air in the summer months.

The water source heat pump is a low-carbon energy source, significantly reducing the carbon footprint of The Guildhall.

Creating A Song for Ella Grey

In creating our production of A Song for Ella Grey, we are following an industry guide called The Theatre Greenbook, which aims to reduce the environmental impact of making theatre.

We will achieve this by setting ourselves a series of targets; as a minimum, we are aiming for:

- 50% of all the materials for the set, costume, and props to come from reused or recycled sources.
- 65% of these materials to go on to future lives, through storage, re-use or being recycled

Re-using scenery

After our productions have finished touring, we sometimes store the scenery to be used again in the future, or we consider carefully how we could dispose the materials in a sustainable way.

In 2021, Pilot produced the world premiere of *The Bone Sparrow*, with a set design by Miriam Nabarro, which toured to theatres across England. The final place in which we presented this production was at Theatre Peckham, and the set was stored there after the final performance.

Theatre Peckham has since re-used the materials of the set and adapted them for further productions including: the festive performance of *Scroogealicious* in 2022, and a new play called *Sunny Side Up* in 2023.

How can you explore this further with students?

To think about this further with students, you could consider the following activities:

- Students could research the climate crisis, global warming, and what a carbon footprint means, and could present their ideas back to each other.
- Students could discuss in groups the carbon footprint of their school, or their drama class, and could come up with a list of ways this could be reduced.
- For their next class performance or school production, students could try to make their performance sustainable ideas are provided below to do this.
- Students could use 'sustainability' as a stimulus for devising.

How can you make your school productions and performances more sustainable?

- Source costume second-hand from charity shops or from a costume store or use your own clothes. A local theatre or theatre group may be able to lend or hire out costume items.
- Source props and set second-hand, avoid buying or making new
- If you have to buy or make new props, set or costume, try to ensure they are reused again they could be passed on to another school or theatre group
- In the performance itself, think about 'doing more with less' locations can be created through physical theatre or soundscapes without the need for elaborate set
- Make an e-programme, this could be sent by email to the audience, it could be on a website, or you could set up a QR code to be scanned on the night
- Don't print physical tickets ask audience members to show a screenshot of their ticket confirmation
- If you offer refreshments, try to ensure they are in recyclable or compostable containers and advertise opportunities for audience members to recycle their rubbish
- Ban single-use plastics ensure cast and crew all have refillable water bottles, and instead of selling water bottles, provide jugs of water or access to a tap which can use used to refill audience members' water bottles

- Ask audience members to consider travelling by public transport to your production where appropriate
- Consider ways to reduce the use of energy for example, ensuring everything is switched off at the end of a performance, and ensuring dressing room lights are switched off when not in use.
- For more information and ideas, <u>The Theatre Green Book</u> has a fantastic Education Section on its websites for schools.

PRE-SHOW WORKSHOP & EXERCISES

These exercises can be used to introduce students to the themes and narrative of *A Song for Ella Grey* before they watch the performance. You could pick and choose from these activities or put them together for a longer workshop. Some activities are suitable for all key stages and some activities are more challenging and designed for KS5.

Research tasks

- 1. Researching the Orpheus Myth set students the task of researching the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, which A Song for Ella Grey is based on. When students have done this, ask them to dramatise this they can create a series of still images which can be naturalistic or abstract. They could then add dialogue into this to tell the story of Eurydice's death and Orpheus going into the underworld to try and rescue her.
- 2. Location setting The novel and play are set against a backdrop of Newcastle upon Tyne and the North East. In his original novel, David Almond uses precise description to set the scenes firmly in the local area where he grew up. Ask students to research the setting of the play and create a mood board of the locations mentioned in the play (both real and fictional) so that they can visualise the geography and landscapes, and also start to think about design:
- Newcastle upon Tyne
- Sacred Heart School and Sixth Form College (a school located in Newcastle upon Tyne)
- The Cluny (a live music venue in Newcastle upon Tyne)
- The Ouseburn River (a small river, which joins the larger River Tyne in Newcastle upon Tyne)
- A river outpipe
- Bamburgh Beach (a sandy beach with dunes in Northumberland)
- The Cheviots (a range of hills between Northumberland and Scotland)
- Mouth of the Tyne (where the River Tyne meets the ocean)
- South Shields (a coastal town on the south bank of the Mouth of the Tyne)
- Durham Hills (part of the Durham Dales)
- The North Sea (the ocean to the east of the North East region)

Practical tasks

- 1.Put students into groups and ask them to create still images based on each of the following words and phrases which relate to the themes of the play: love, family, friendship, jealousy, growing up, grief, self-discovery, belonging, the Underworld, and acceptance. Their still images could be literal or abstract. Encourage students to experiment with levels, physicality, and contact work. The images could be performed to music to create an emotive piece of physical theatre.
- 2. Performance task: Using their research on the original Orpheus myth, ask students to devise a performance of this story. They can follow the narrative of the traditional Greek myths, or make this a more creative adaptation, as David Almond and Zoe Cooper have done. Encourage students to think creatively about how they stage dramatic moments, such as the wedding, Eurydice's death, Orpheus' descent into the Underworld, and the moment when Orpheus turns and loses Eurydice.

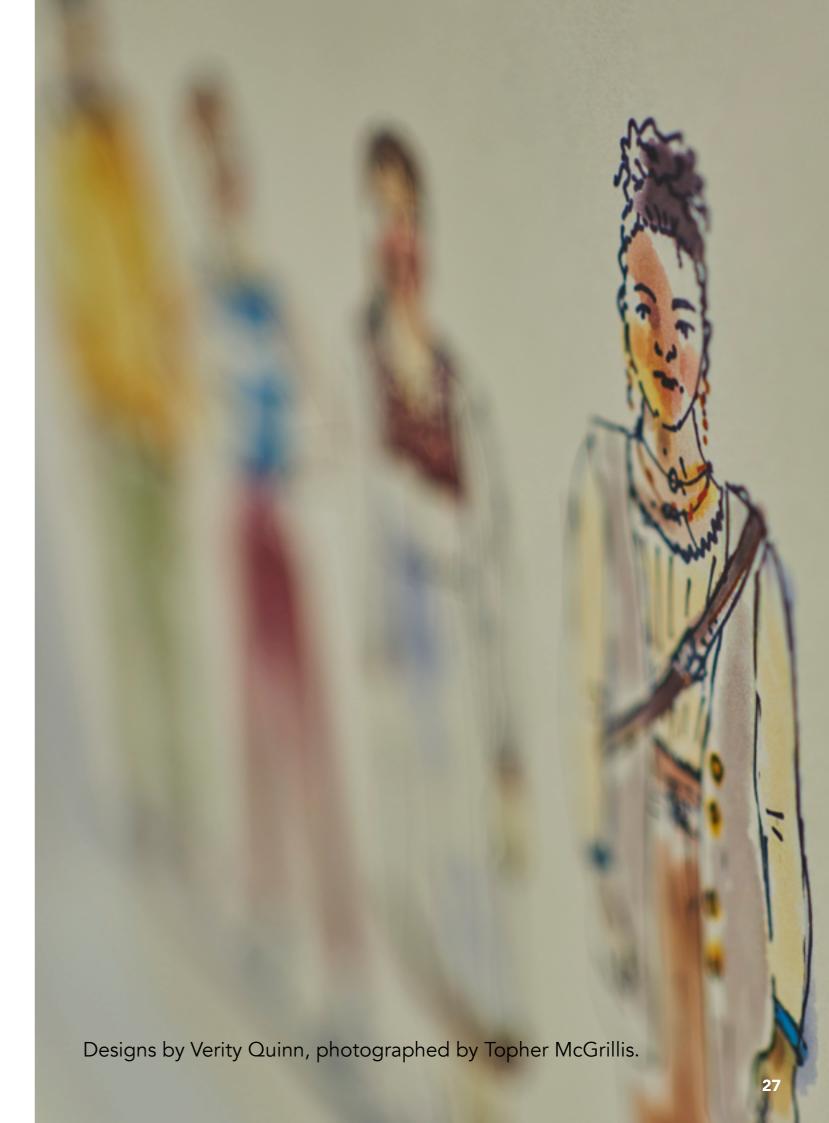
KS5 extension: As an extension, Performing Arts students could add choreography and music or song to use all three elements of music, drama and dance in an interpretation of the myth. A level Drama students could consider how sound effects and lighting could be used to mark the transitions and mark dramatic moments.

Design tasks

- 1. Setting the scene (KS5) In the play, Claire/Orpheus go into the supernatural Underworld and encounter various beasts and Death, in an attempt to get Ella back. Ask students to come up with a design concept for how the Underworld could be interpreted and designed. Ask students to consider how they would use set, lighting, sound, or projection to create this, and how this could transition from a natural setting in the previous scene.
- 2. Designing Orpheus Orpheus is a mythical, mysterious character in the play. Ask students to research various interpretations of Orpheus throughout history, in both art and performance, and compile a mood board. Then, ask students to design what they imagine Orpheus to look like in this contemporary play. They should consider costume, hair and make-up, and produce a design of this. Some discussion questions follow to prepare students for watching the play.

Discussion prompts:

- What impression do you get about the character of Orpheus from your research?
- What led you to make the design choices for your interpretation?
- In the play, Orpheus is referred to using she/he/they pronouns why do you think this is?
- Could Orpheus be a gender fluid character, or do they appear differently to each character?
- In this adaptation, Orpheus is portrayed by all the other characters, as a memory. What effect do you think this will have on the audience?



What To Look for When Watching the Production

We don't recommend that students make notes during the production, it may spoil their experience and they might miss something! They should give the performance their full attention. Instead, use this pack to prepare students before they see the production, and you could give them pointers about what to look out for.

If you are preparing students for the Live Theatre section of the GCSE or A level Drama written exam, you could put students into groups and give them one area of responsibility each to pay particular attention to during the production, such as:

- Lighting
- Sound Design and Music
- Projection
- Set
- Costume
- Key acting moments

Alternatively, if you want to focus on acting, give students one of the major characters to focus on:

- Claire
- Ella
- Angeline
- Sam
- Jay

GCSE students may want to look out for the following elements of the performance:

- The development of Claire's character throughout the play
- How the actors use their skills to engage you as an audience member
- How the actors use their skills to convey different emotions
- How design elements are used to bring particular moments to life, such as when Orpheus plays music, or the creation of the Underworld

A level students may also want to look out for the following more complex aspects of the performance to analyse:

- Actors using their skills to portray multiple characters
- The portrayal of Orpheus in the play through collective character and multi-roling
- The key relationship in the play between Claire and Ella
- The depiction of the family relationship between Claire and her parents and comparing this to the relationship between Ella and her parents
- How design elements work together in particular moments
- How folk songs are incorporated into the production
- How the themes are conveyed through the production family, love, friendship, grief and bereavement, myth, storytelling and folklore

Encourage students to make notes immediately after the production, or as soon as possible.

We have provided a notes template here which can be used by students to help focus their note-taking.

A SONG FOR ELLA GREYLIVE THEATRE NOTES AND MEMORY AID

Make notes on the production details so you can remember them for the exam:
Date you saw the production:
Venue:
Director:
Designers:
Cast:
Memorable moments
Describe three moments in the production which really stood out to you as an audience member. Try to describe what happened on stage in as much detail as possible.

Use of Lighting

Can you remember three moments when the lighting was used effectively to create specific effects? Describe them here, be detailed	
about colour, intensity, direction, and focus.	
effects at particular moments in the production. Focu characters. Try to be as detailed as you can.	s on one or two

Sketch the set

Use this space to sketch the set of A Song for Ella Grey, label it with details of colour, materials, fabric, size etc

Costume Sketches:

Sketch the costumes of one or two major characters. Label your sketches with details of colour, shape, fit, and fabric.

FURTHER RESOURCES

UPCOMING RESOURCE PACKS

Resource Pack – Part A: available to download from the Pilot Theatre website

This resource introduces students to the Orpheus myth, along with exploring the themes of David Almond's novel. It also outlines creative exercises inspired by the story, which could be used alongside reading the novel in lessons, for whole school literacy programmes, or to support extra-curricular book clubs.

Resource Pack - Part C: available from March 2024

Ideal for students preparing for the Live Theatre component of their GCSE / A-level Drama exams, this resource will include filmed scene extracts from the live performance, allowing students to watch key scenes again, with accompanying analysis.

FREE CPD SESSION

Monday 11 March 2024, 6pm - 7.30pm (online)

In this interactive CPD session aimed at secondary Drama teachers, Pilot will advise how to use our education resources to enrich classroom learning, and how best to support students in writing about A Song for Ella Grey for the Live Theatre component of their GCSE and A-level exams.

The online session will look at key extracts from the production, and moments of acting and design in detail. In addition, the CPD will give practical teaching strategies for studying the performance of A Song for Ella Grey.

Reserve your place on the session

WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE

A practical creative session exploring the play, production, characters, and themes delivered by a Pilot artist. The workshop can be tailored to using A *Song for Ella Grey* as a creative stimulus for theatre devising, exploring issues related to the play, or to focus on aspects of the production, such as music.

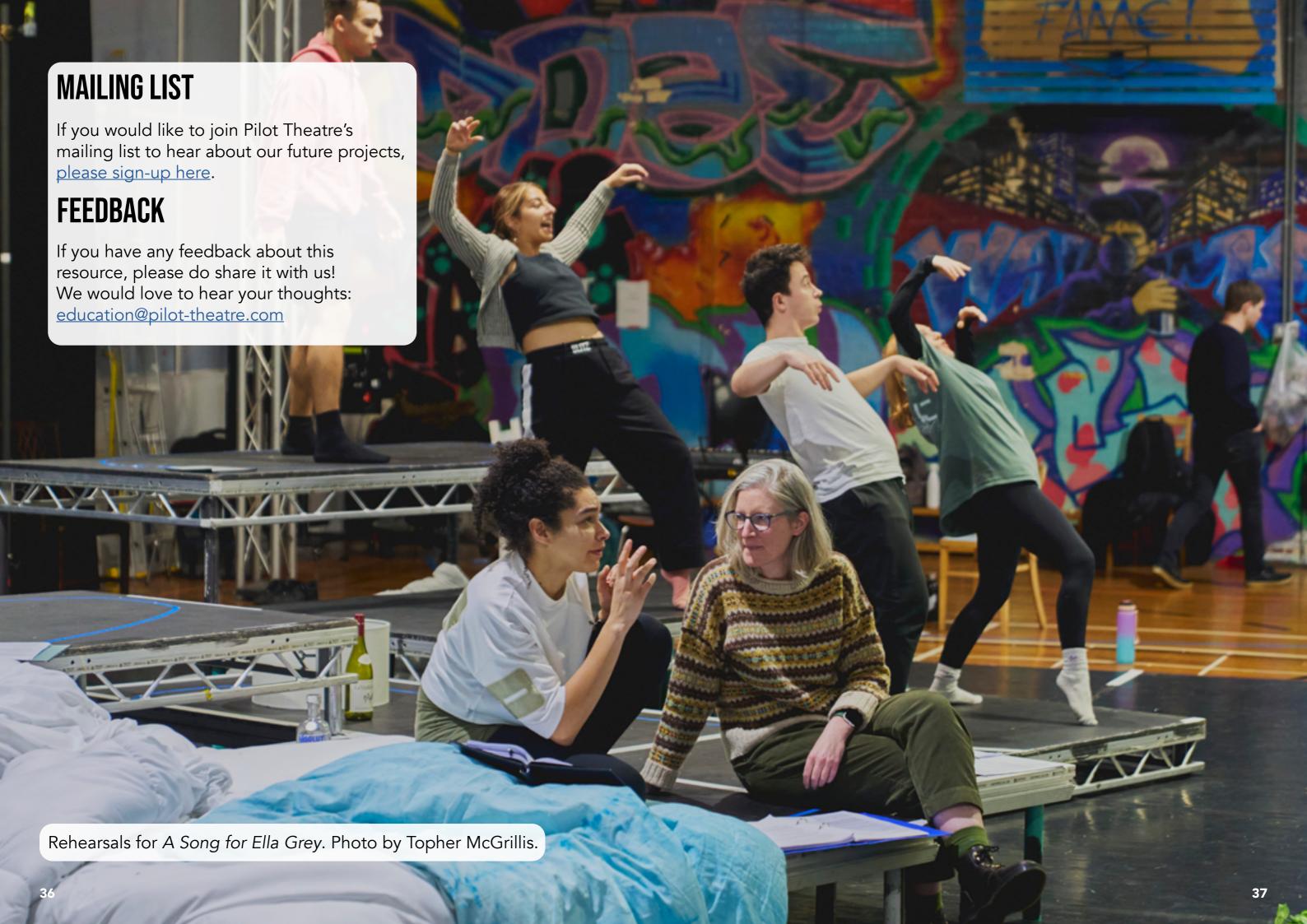
All workshops are bespoke and tailored to the needs of your students, and can be scheduled pre- or post-performance at your school, college or university. To arrange a workshop, please email us directly: education@pilot-theatre.com

For state schools: 2 sessions or a full day: £325 + VAT

1 session (up to 2 hours): £250 + VAT

For private schools: 2 sessions or a full day: £475 + VAT

1 session (up to 2 hours): £400 + VAT



TOUR DATES

Northern Stage, Newcastle 1 – 15 February 2024

York Theatre Royal 20 – 24 February 2024

Theatre Peckham27 February – 2 March 2024

Hull Truck Theatre 5 – 9 March 2024

Liverpool Playhouse 13-16 March 2024





