

# The House of Bernarda Alba

## Education Resource 2017



**GRAEae**



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## Cast and Creative Team

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### Creative Team

**Director** Jenny Sealey

**Adapter** Jo Clifford

**Assistant Director** Nicola Miles-Wildin

**Designer** Liz Ascroft

**Lighting** Johanna Town

**Sound Designer** Carolyn Downing

**Movement Director** Lucy Hind

**Voice coach** Frankie Armstrong

**Company Manager** Lee Drinkwater

**Deputy Stage Manager** Rosie Giarratana

**Stage Manager** Patricia Davenport

**Assistant Stage Manager** Amber Chapell

### Cast

**Bernarda Alba** Kathryn Hunter

**Maria Josefa** Paddy Glynn

**Angustias** Nadia Nadarajah

**Magdalena** Chloë Clarke

**Ameila** Philippa Cole

**Martirio** Kellan Frankland

**Adela** Hermon Berhane

**Signer Maid** EJ Raymond

**Speaker Maid** Natalie Amber

**La Poncia** Alison Halstead

**Prudencia and voice of the Beggar Woman** Freddie Stabb

## About The Production

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*The cast in rehearsals (images by Becky Bailey)*

*By Jenny Sealey, Director:*

Kathryn Hunter [Bernarda Alba] and I ran a workshop week exploring *The House of Bernarda Alba* 17 or 18 years ago along with 20 other D/deaf and disabled women. During the week we talked endlessly about being daughters, about being women and about the lack of women – especially women like us – being represented on stage.

After that it became my mission not only to direct this play, but to create more opportunities to put D/deaf and disabled women centre stage.

In my frustration with other companies doing productions of *The House of Bernarda Alba* before I could find my opportunity, I instead directed Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*; it was extraordinary to see 38 D/deaf and disabled women on the Cochrane Theatre stage and this only fuelled my passion. Years passed and I have directed many plays with a glorious diversity of actors but I have always been yearning to do my Bernarda. You can imagine my delight when Sarah Frankcom [Artistic Director, Royal Exchange Theatre] said, 'Okay Jenny, yes, you can do it!' I immediately asked Kathryn [Hunter] to play the title role and then set about the wonderful process of finding the rest of my girls.

I am one of four daughters and I am always intrigued by the similarities, differences and quirks we share with each other and our mother. Being the only Deaf daughter in an all-hearing family meant I had to work out my own unique coping strategies for family life, just like the daughters in our production. Throughout the play Adela and Angustias use being Deaf to connect or disconnect with their other family members (I know if I close my eyes I shut down all communication – which is deeply, deeply irritating for people who want to have an argument with me!). Each of the actors who portray the daughters have their own coping mechanisms as Deaf and disabled actors and they bring this experience to the creation of their characters.

This production is dedicated to a young disabled woman, Caitlin Ronan, who sadly passed away last year. She was passionate about performing and outraged by the lack of representation of disabled people in theatre. She would have loved seeing so many women gracing the beautiful space here at the Royal Exchange Theatre.

I think that Graeae's version of *The House of Bernarda Alba* will be like no other, but Jo Clifford [Translator] assures me Lorca would not mind as he also spent his life battling and celebrating being different.

## Biography of Lorca

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Federico García Lorca was born near Granada, Spain in 1898 to a prosperous farmer and a pianist. He was particularly influenced by his mother and followed in her footsteps to become a musician. His love of music and song were prominent in many of his early poems, especially a collection of Gypsy ballads (1928), which were influenced by the old folk songs and Gypsy myths, which had always intrigued him since childhood.

He studied law at Granada University, but left and moved to Madrid in 1919 in order to concentrate on his writing. During the 1920s, he developed close relationships with prominent members of the Surrealist movement, including Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. While Lorca was not officially a Surrealist, many of the Surrealist values and ideas such as freedom of expression without inhibitions, the richness of the imagination, and a fascination with the unconscious mind influenced many of his poems and plays, as well as his personal and political life.

Many of his plays, especially *Blood Wedding* (1933), *Yerma* (1934) and *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1936) focused on forbidden subjects, such as infidelity, suicide and murder, and explored the danger of people repressing their deepest feelings and desires, and how these thoughts remained in the unconscious minds of the protagonists and influenced the way they lived their lives.

Lorca's plays and poems were not overtly political, yet they expressed leftist, liberal views which contrasted with the Spanish government, who were becoming increasingly fascist. Lorca also refused to hide his homosexuality, which was frowned upon in Spanish society at the time, and he explored sexual love between men in many of his poems. He was therefore seen as a threat by the Spanish Government and was arrested and charged with Liberalism. He was executed by Francisco Franco's soldiers in August 1936, before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and his literature was forbidden in Spain until Franco's death in 1975.



## Synopsis

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Bernarda's husband is dead. Now she alone rules her household and the lives of her five daughters. A period of eight years mourning will be observed without contact with the outside world and the men who might bring them ruin.

That is except for Angustias, whose inheritance has attracted a wealthy local suitor. As the wedding approaches, Bernarda struggles to retain her suffocating grip on the family and on these women whose appetite for defiance is growing.



*The cast in rehearsals (image by Tracey Anderson)*

## Easy Read Synopsis: the full story

### About The Play



The House of Bernarda Alba is a play.  
This is a story told by people acting on stage.



Blood Wedding was written by a man called  
**Federico Garcia Lorca** who was from Spain.



Jo Clifford has changed the Spanish words into  
English words.



Sometimes the actors will use sign language.  
Sometimes the actors will describe what can be seen  
on stage. This is so everyone can understand the  
story.

### The Story: Act One

Bernarda's husband has just died. The play takes place in her house. The weather is very hot.

La Poncia and the maids complain about Bernarda. They think she should pay more attention to her daughters instead of how clean her house is.

The maids and La Poncia talk about how Pepe is going to marry Angustias because she has a lot of money.

On returning from her husband's funeral, Bernarda says everyone in her house has to go into mourning for eight years. This means they won't see anyone outside the house and will always have to wear black.



Bernarda gets angry with Angustias because she has been looking at the men outside. The daughters leave the room.

Bernarda and La Poncia talk about Angustias

Amelia, Martirio and Magdalena talk about men. Magdalena tells Martirio and Amelia that Pepe is going to marry Angustias. Adela is seen wearing a green dress and becomes upset when she finds out that Angustias will marry Pepe.

Bernarda gets very angry with Angustias because she has put make up on.

Bernarda and Angustias are interrupted by Maria Josefa, who arrives yelling that she wants to get married and run away. Bernarda and her daughters lock Maria Josefa up in her room.

## **Act Two**

The daughters are sewing and talking about Pepe. Adela is in her bedroom.

Angustias says she was talking to Pepe until one in the morning but La Poncia says she heard him outside the window at four in the morning.

Angustias says that Adela is jealous of her.

Everybody leaves except Adela and La Poncia.

La Poncia says she knows Adela is having an affair with Pepe.

Angustias says someone has taken her picture of Pepe. The sisters argue. Martirio stole the photograph.

La Poncia tells Bernarda to pay more attention to what her daughters are up to.

## Act Three

Bernarda talks to her friend Prudencia.

La Poncia and Bernarda argue again.

It is night time. Angustias tells Bernarda she is worried that Pepe is hiding something from her.

La Poncia and the Maids say they are worried about what is going to happen between the daughters and Pepe.

Maria Josefa enters. She sings a song. Martirio sends her to bed.

Adela and Martirio have an argument. They both love Pepe. Everybody arrives. Adela says she will be with Pepe no matter what.

Pepe arrives. Adela tries to get to him but Martirio stops her.

Bernarda gets her gun and goes outside. She shoots at Pepe but he gallops off on his horse.

Adela thinks Pepe is dead. She kills herself.

The play is finished. The actors will take a bow.

## About the Characters: names and their meanings

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### **Bernarda Alba**

From the Latin for "white": often a symbol of purity that reflects Bernarda's thinking that she is above everyone else

### **Amelia**

From Latin and Old German for "industrious": Hebrew: "labor of God"

### **Martirio**

Meaning "martyrdom"

### **Angustias**

Meaning "anguishes" or "torments"

### **Adela**

From the Spanish verb "adelantar" meaning "to go forward" or "to overtake". Adela is the character in the story fighting to move forward in life and overcome the oppression she is faced with

### **Magdalena**

The Spanish name of Mary Magdalene. Also believed by some to be the woman in the bible who was an adulteress who was saved by Jesus

### **María Josefa**

From the names of Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph Prudencia. Suggesting the virtue of prudence

### **La Poncia**

It may be a reference to Pontius Pilate, as she simply observes and does nothing to stop the unfairness in the household.

## Being a Daughter: by the cast and creative team

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### **Kathryn Hunter – Bernarda Alba**

When my mother died, I woke up the next day and thought 'Now it's time to begin Kathryn, putting in the enormous debt of gratitude to my mother; everything she taught me about principles, honesty; generosity; fighting spirit.' A year later, in a troubled time, I found myself exclaiming: 'Where are you? Help me! Oh mum, what the hell should I do?' And a voice that was silent, but as clear as a bell said 'But I'm always here, Kathryn, always. Just tell me what you need.'



### **Paddy Glynn – Maria Josefa**

I didn't realise how easy being a daughter had been until I became a mother. Sometimes, we learn things too late for gratitude.



### **Nadia Nadarajah - Angustias**

Thousands miles away, where we live. Questions, we always ask. FaceTime, we communicate. I miss you.



### **Chloë Clarke – Magdalena**

To make them proud. To honour and to thank them. To love, be loved, and belong, with a lot of laughs along the way.



### **Philippa Cole – Amelia**

Being a friend. Belly laughter. Making them proud.  
Honesty. Support. Strength. Crying until your soul hurts.  
Picking myself up and getting on with it.



### **Kellan Frankland – Martirio**

Being a daughter is something I take for granted,  
something that means I have support from my parents but  
also embarrassment. Their opinions are something I value  
and their views I want to be the complete opposite on yet  
similar at the same time. And something I don't want to  
explore now because I will probably have to do a play  
about my parents like they did for theirs.



### **EJ Raymond – Signer Maid**

From the beginning of the chapter to the end of the  
chapter everyday - be wild, be protective, love and have  
stories to share. You must give and receive each other no  
matter what. And overall you will end up beautiful, with  
tears, and with the appreciation of a lifetime.



### **Alison Halstead – Poncia**

Mum shared that she had been talking to her friend,  
and during the conversation she told her friend that  
she 'wishes she could give me some inches.'  
My mum has always said that to me, 'I wish I could give  
you 6 inches.' My mum's friend said, 'God gives us all  
something.' During their conversation, she brought up,  
again, the day we all drove me to college, and they  
dropped me off. Me, by myself, and how brave she  
thought I was. Brave and courageous and that I never,  
ever came home. The friend always recounts that  
story/moment to mum...  
I told mum that I remembered that day, going to  
college, and that I didn't feel brave.  
To learn that my mum's friend continues to speak so  
highly of me brings tears to my eyes.



**Hermon Berhane – Adela**

Daughter means precious gift, unconditional love and to bond with, before the pain will come in the future.



**Natalie Amber – Speaker Maid**

Being a daughter is having that unconditional bond and unspoken feeling of love that rides you through, despite times of anger or resentment.



**Freddie Stabb – Prudencia and voice of the Beggar Woman**

To be loving, honest and caring, making your parents proud. Never forget they gave you life, so make the most of your life and your relationship with them before it's too late.

**Jenny Sealey – Director**

I love knowing how very much I was wanted and this is the cement that binds my mum and I together. Being a daughter is a profound and painful and joyous relationship one where I know I have all of her irritating habits I also hope I have her endearing ones

**Jo Clifford – Translator**

Thinking about this makes me want to cry. It was so hard trying to be a son. And eventually I couldn't do it anymore. So I became the daughter my mum always wanted all along. It wasn't too late for me; and now I'm so much happier in my skin. But it was too late for her: she died before we could even talk about it.

**Nicola Miles- Wildin – Assistant Director**

I'm the middle child, the pacifier, the one who speaks her mind. I'm the one who stands up for and against her siblings.

As a kid I loved the film Annie and having to spend time in hospital I imagined that I was adopted - being the only disabled child. When I asked my parents they said 'no, you're the *adapted* one.' And that still stands thirty years later. I feel loved, supported, independent, sometimes distant but always a text or phone call away. I know never to call during NCIS.

To be a daughter makes me feel proud.

**Liz Ashcroft – Designer**

It was an insightful move on my mother's part to name me after Eliza, my maternal great grandmother. It has given me a focus; I love my mum and accept that she was given a raw deal as a daughter herself. I have tried to live up to my namesake.

I am a cocktail of the good and bad passed down from my maternal and paternal line, and my job has been to focus on the best. To ensure that the life I was given is fully lived and to display to my daughter that our collective female line is safe, strong, independent, open and capable of offering unconditional love.

If I meet my mother in my head and we are both 12 year old girls I would give her a big hug and say 'well done, you are doing great, and everything is going to be alright'.

We shouldn't hold our mothers responsible for our self-perceived difficulties; we should defend them, learn from them and move forward.

**Johanna Town – Lighting Designer**

Being my mother's daughter is to be able to walk tall and proud - knowing I am simply loved.

Being my mother's daughter gave me the freedom to be - just me and no one else.

I have always felt the luckiest person in the world - thanks to being one of my mother's daughters.



**Carolyn Downing – Sound Designer**

I didn't realise what a worry I was as a young thing. I was nonstop, always on the go. Still am. Completely understand now I have one of my own to worry about. Especially as it's like looking in my own reflection. Hopefully I managed to make mum and dad proud along the way regardless and the worry was worth it. I can appreciate them better now thankfully. Hindsight and perspective are wonderful things!

**Lucy Hind – Movement Director**

My mother was fierce, yet gentle; brave and headstrong, but never held back her tears. She raised four of us. I'm second youngest. I loved being her daughter, thick as thieves. When she got sick it redefined our relationship, what being a daughter meant. I held her hand; I told her stories to pass the time. She smiled until she took her last breath, her daughters by her side. I am still her daughter. I catch glimpses of her in the reflection of shop windows, the veins on the back of hands, the button nose on my son's face. She's in my head kicking my backside when I'm lazy. I hear her in the start up of the orchestra in an overture, I see her in the darkness of the auditorium. She's still smiling.

**Frankie Armstrong – Voice Coach**

I must have been about 14 and was sat in the sun with Mum on deck chairs in front of our house. Mum and I often talked a good deal, but I've no idea how we got onto this subject. "If I had to make the terrible choice between your Dad or you and your brother, I would have to choose your Dad". She explained that she felt her commitment to Dad was unshakeable and that my brother and I were already mature enough to know what we wanted and were on our unique journeys and would be OK. It made me think, but didn't in any way devastate me. I knew I was loved, valued and encouraged, so it was a statement of trust in me. So it isn't surprising that finding my own voice and helping others to find theirs has indeed become my journey.

**Rosie Giarratana – Deputy Stage Manager**

I am definitely my mother's daughter and part of her is in me - like it or not! I associate it differently from being the daughter that belongs to my dad. I imagine it is the same for sons and their fathers sharing more than mothers and sons? I want to make her proud and hope that all the good things she sees in me, she will know have come from her and that is why I have the positive traits that I do - because she has been the best role model. There's a shared understanding and solidarity. An unbreakable bond. Love you, Mum.

## The Set: an insight from the designer



The design consists of seven chairs sat in a seven sided circle- a heptagon, centre stage. These are character chairs. I studied each woman and asked myself, 'if they were a chair, what chair would they be?'

They are a disparate bunch; some face into the circle, some face outwards and some are sideways on to the circle. Bernarda Alba's chair is placed on guard, at the mouth of the door which leads to the outside world. The angles of the other chairs are determined by their relationship to Bernarda Alba's chair. Adela's chair faces outside of the circle.

They are fixed to the ground like individual little prisons, bound by a continuous line that connects them. An illuminated line on the floor links all of the chairs together, like a closed circle. The light in that line on the floor also continues up and into each chair leg that it connects to. The light acts like blood in a vein that they all share.

The floor boards are painted: a merged moon and cloudscape, pale in the centre, darker on the outskirts. There is then a larger circle of intricate off-white lace, broken up in places and fading in and out. Painted over this, on the floor, are the words 'DOOR, THE DOOR, FRONT DOOR. The entrance that Bernarda Alba guards bears the words DOORWAY TO THE YARD'.

At the entrance into the rest of the house are the words: BERNARDA ALBA'S HOUSE, GLASS CUPBOARD, IT IS SUMMER, THE WALLS ARE THICK and LOW SEAT.

In the other entrances the words say ANOTHER DOOR.

The words are in a STENCIL font, originally created in the 1930s and used by the military and others to give information. It is functional and instructive, using only capital letters.

The words continue on the face of the second gallery in the same style. Around 360 degrees it says: THE WALLS ARE WHITE, DECOR UTTERLY SIMPLE and PICTURES OF UNLIKELY LANDSCAPES, NYMPHS OR LEGENDARY KINGS.

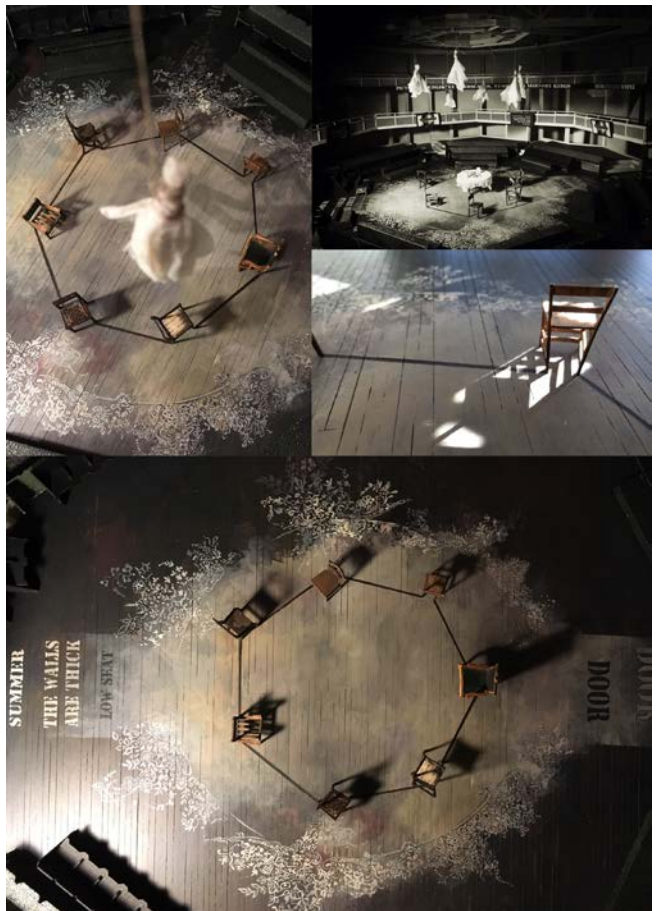
All of these words are Lorca's stage directions to the director, actors, and designer.

There are seven screens on the first gallery for captioning the show. These are controlled by the actors.

There are seven pieces of cloth bound by rope which hang over the heads of each family member's chair.

There is a wooden table with the word TABLE stencilled on it and a tray with the word TRAY stencilled on it. There is a low stool.

At the point when Adela hangs herself her chair falls over by itself and the cloth above her chair drops, like a 'hung body'. It stays there until the end of the show. I hoped that this would be a two-fold shock.



The set for the play is based around eight chairs- one for each of the family and one for La Poncia. Each chair reflects the character's personality.



#### BERNARDA ALBA

A straight backed wooden chair with arms. It has an inset leather seat the colour of old blood. It's commanding and has no frills.

#### ANGUSTIAS

A delicate and refined chair, that requires careful handling. Intricate workmanship has gone into all of its parts. Its legs are turned, it has a fine carved back and a cane seat, but there is some damage, a part of its back has been broken and is missing.



#### MAGDALENA

It's a dark wood corner chair, which means it has a back on two adjacent sides, like as if it is confused about which way to face. It has a rush seat, it is plain but contradictory.

#### MARIA JOSEFA

Her chair is almost Arts and Crafts in style, with some carved surface decoration. It's got a few scratches and bumps which add character. It has arms, and a dipped wooden seat which is very low, so there's no chance of sitting formally in it. I'll bet it was used to house quite the perfect cushion.





### AMELIA

Rustic in style with a cut out pattern in the back rest. One of its back legs morphs into a crutch - it's fixed position makes it useless as a walking aid.

Restriction guaranteed - no freedom of movement gained from it at all.



### MARTIRIO

The 'two faced' chair. It is literally two different chairs merged together. Both wooden - one Bentwood with a round seat, the other one square. Two distinct identities forged, as a deception. It's a contradiction of a chair with five legs.



### ADELA

A country farmhouse- style ladder-backed chair with a secret drawer under the seat, well not very secret, quite open in fact - if you look closely.

### LA PONCIA

A lowly, untreated, rough-hewn wooden stool. Rural, provincial and primitive in style, hard wearing and strong.





## Costumes

Below are some example of how designer, Liz Ascroft, presented her costume vision.

### ADELA

*twenty years old,*

She's gone and put on her green dress.

The one she was going to wear on her birthday, and she's run out into the henrun and is yelling: 'Hens! Hello, hens! Look at me! Look at me!' I had to laugh!

Poor soul! She is the youngest of us and still has dreams!

I love this dress. I was going to wear it the day we went to the river. We were going to sit by the water mill and eat melons, and I was going to wear it. It would be the most beautiful dress in the world.

It really suits me too. It's the best one Magdalena has ever made me.

I'm thinking this is the worst time in my life for me to have to go into mourning.

No I won't get used to it! I

refuse to get used to it! I don't want to be shut up in here. I don't want to go stale. I don't want to be like you! I don't want my flesh to go off! I'll get up tomorrow and put on my green dress and walk out the front door. I want out of here! I want out!

She hardly ever sleeps!

She's eaten up by envy.

She's starting to look a bit mad.

What I do with my body is up to me!

I wish I was invisible, so

I could walk through this house without anyone asking me where I was going!

I'll give my body to whoever I please!

Why did you stand at the window the last time Pepe came? Why did you open the window and turn on the light? Why did you take off your clothes?

Don't be like a baby! Leave your sister alone and if you fancy Pepe then it's just too bad. You'll have to put up with it.

he'll marry the youngest and most beautiful sister. And that's you.

I'll push

you in the dirt and walk right over you. And I'll do the same to my mother. Anything to quench this fire that burns between my legs and in my mouth. But you've got nothing on me. What can you say against me? That I lock myself in my room and won't open the door? Nothing wrong with that! That I don't sleep? I'm not the only one!

I'm cleverer than you! You'll see. I'm quick as a hare. Quicker! Just you see! I'll slip between your fingers!

Oh, I wish I could go out to the fields! I'd like to be a reaper. To be free to come and go.

Adela. Now there's the proper wife for Pepe!

I'll have him all to myself! He wants me to live with him!

I didn't want to. Not at first! I just felt tied to him. At the end of a chain! And he just dragged me towards him. I couldn't help it!

I love them. Just think of it: a desolate patch of sky, where everything's been quiet and dead for millions and millions of years and then suddenly — phweeeeee! A shooting star.

Things have gone too far. Adela's got her mind set on something and the others watch and watch and never rest.

Her hair is loose. I've had the loosest

push forward. The energy and the guts that you don't possess. I've seen death. Here, in these rooms. And now I'm leaving them to take what's mine.

He just came for the money, but his eyes were always fixed on me.

He loves me. He loves me!

There's nothing to be done. Pepe's mine. Choke on it if you like. It can't be helped. We'll go off to the banks of the river and make love amongst the reeds.

There is so much horror in this house. I can't bear it any more. Not now when I've tasted his kisses. Now I'll be whatever he wants me to be. Even if all the village turn against me. Even if all the village point at me, point at me with their fingers of fire and try to burn me. Even if all the so called respectable people in this so called respectable village pursue me and hunt me down, I'll still stand by him. Openly and without shame. And I'll gladly wear my crown of thorns.

I'll go off to a lonely little house and live there so he can see me whenever he wants to. Whenever he needs to. I could bring a stallion to his knees, with all the power inside me. Inside my little finger.

You've no right to condemn me any more! This is when your judgements end! (Seizes her mother's stick and breaks it.) So much for the oppressor's stick! Don't you dare come close to me. No one has any power over me now. No one but Pepe!

I'm his wife now. Do you understand? None of you will have power over me!



HERMON  
BERHANE





# MARIA JOSEFA

*eighty years old.*

Have you got her well locked up?

That old dear can pick locks with her fingers.

Bernarda, let me out!

It was hard work holding her down. She may be eighty, but she's as strong as an ox.

I had to gag her this morning. I stuffed an old sack in her mouth to stop her shouting

She insisted on opening her old trunk and getting out all her jewels. Now she's put them all on and she says she's going to get married

*She is incredibly old, garlanded with flowers on her head and on breast.*

She managed to escape!

I escaped because I want to get married. I

want to get married to a beautiful man. I'm going to get married to a beautiful man and live by the shores of the sea. By the sea.

No, I won't be quiet. I want to go back to my village, back to where I belong. I want a man to marry and be happy!

Don't lock me up, Bernarda! Don't lock

me up! Let me go!

I've got white hairs you think I can't have a baby. But you're wrong there. I'll have baby after baby after baby.

One baby will have white hair and then it'll have another baby and another and another. We'll all have babies and snow-white hair and we'll be like the waves of the sea:

I'm afraid of the dogs. They might bite me. Will you help me? I want to leave the country. I hate country. I want houses with windows and open doors. All the women lie in big brass beds with their babies and the men sit outside on wooden benches

**BRIDGET SOJOURNER**

**DAPHNE SELFÉ**

**LIONA ROYCE**

**JEAN WOODS**

**JACQUI TAJAH MURDOCK**



**PADDY GLYNN**



**IRIS APFEL**



## More from the Creative Team

### By Lyn Gardner – The Guardian

“Right,” says director Jenny Sealey, an eye-catching figure dressed in blue tartan pyjamas, one of eight pairs she favours for rehearsals. “Let’s go from the fanny-grabbing moment.”

“Fanny grabbing?” repeats writer Jo Clifford in mock horror. “My god, this is a great Spanish classic we’re talking about.”

“What would you suggest I call it?” inquires Sealey. Clifford gives an impish grin. “Fanny grabbing is perfect.”

Sealey and Clifford are in rehearsals for Federico García Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba*, which opens next month at the Royal Exchange in Manchester. Kathryn Hunter is playing the widow who rules over her household and her five unmarried daughters with a rod of iron. Sitting in a chair, a silver-topped cane in hand, Hunter’s Bernarda Alba may look tiny and frail but she exudes dominance. She makes you think of a deceptively lazy tigress, ready to pounce.



*The cast in rehearsals (image by Becky Bailey)*

Hunter has been learning British Sign Language for the show, which casts her alongside Deaf and disabled actors. This is a co-production with Graeae, the disabled-led company of which Sealey is the artistic director, and is an all-female one in terms of creatives and cast. BSL, captions and audio description – which each come with their own unique poetry – are not just added extras tacked on at the end of the process. They are fully incorporated into the action from the first day of rehearsal, adding layer after layer of meaning to Lorca’s text. Which sister signs for which sister, when Bernarda Alba does sign or refuses to sign for her two Deaf daughters, and which characters can and can’t see all become meaningful. Such creative decisions underline the themes of power, status, punishment, intimacy and blindness that haunt Lorca’s original text, which was finished just a few weeks before he was executed by a fascist firing squad in Spain in 1936.

“It’s so much more complicated doing it like this, and it makes great demands on everyone, including me as the writer, but it’s potentially so much richer too,” says Clifford. “You have to think of text in a different way when you know that different members of the audience will all receive it in different ways.”

Hunter agrees: “It’s a very different process and it’s truly collaborative because everything has to be translated into BSL and audio-described, so everything has to be examined, prodded and agreed. It’s very delightful, like arriving in a new country that you’ve heard about but have never previously visited.”

The rehearsal I watch is distinctive for the sheer amount of laughter, but also because it feels like a genuine exploration of the play in which everyone – including Sealey – is willing to express their uncertainty and say, “I don’t know. Let’s try it this way and see.”

“I don’t have all the answers and I never pretend that I do,” says Sealey. “I couldn’t work any other way. It’s about trying to create a rehearsal room that is a proper process of discovery and I just have to hope that I’ve built a relationship with the actors so they trust me enough to know that eventually from those discoveries I will make the right choices.”

Sealey had always thought that *The House of Bernarda Alba* would mark her swansong for Graeae, the company she has led for the past 20 years. She has not only transformed Graeae artistically through developing a distinctive aesthetic in which signing and action are fully integrated, but she has also pushed it into the vanguard of campaigns for disability arts and greater diversity in British theatre.

“I wish I had never said that I’d leave after I did *Bernarda Alba*. I’m definitely not leaving: there is still far too much to do, and sometimes I feel as if I have barely begun. We’ve got so much planned over the next four years. This is a play I have always longed to do, but the time never seemed right, or other people were reviving it or we were focused on doing something else. But it was always there in the back of my mind as a play I really wanted to do. Maybe because I was one of four girls in my family, so I’ve always been aware of the complexities of relationships with sisters, how we do or don’t communicate, and how as sisters we all had to find different ways to navigate our way around the dynamics of family life. Maybe part of wanting to do this play is a cathartic thing.”

Hunter has always wanted to work with Sealey and Graeae, and 17 years or so ago they spent a week workshopping the play with an eye to a full production. So she didn't hesitate when over a year ago Sealey asked her to play Bernarda Alba. But when she picked up the play to re-read it she was taken back by her own response.



*Kathryn Hunter (image by Beckv Bailev)*

“When I read it again my first thought was: how awful that this is a play about women oppressing women. But as I’ve worked on it and started digging around I’ve realised that it’s about a circle of oppression. It doesn’t make it any less grim or more joyful to do but it does make it more understandable. I think that Bernarda Alba is looking to be free herself and that’s what makes her so cruel to her daughters. She’s a deeply frustrated woman.” Like Sealey, Hunter has looked to her own – in her case, Greek – family background to try to understand the play.

“My parents had an arranged marriage. My mother was nothing like Bernarda Alba but she had a rage born of a vigorous intellect constrained by her situation. I see that in Bernarda Alba too and connect to it. She’s no psychopath but a woman maddened by repression who represses others in turn. It’s as if she’s caught in a vicious circle that can’t be broken.”

This production matches disability politics with Lorca’s story about a woman and her daughters, which operated as a political metaphor about repression. “Lorca,” says Clifford, “wrote under the shadow of fascism and we are producing this at a time when the shadow of the right looms ever larger in Europe. Lorca was under pressure to suppress his sexuality and for me as a trans woman this story of someone trying to repress female energy feels very autobiographical. It’s an incredibly powerful cry for human rights.”

[www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jan/24/kathryn-hunter-lorca-the-house-of-bernarda-alba-graeae-royal-exchange-manchester](http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jan/24/kathryn-hunter-lorca-the-house-of-bernarda-alba-graeae-royal-exchange-manchester)

## A Love Affair with Lorca

By Jo Clifford

I fell in love with Lorca when I was 15.

At the time I didn't really know why I loved him. I was just beginning to learn Spanish, and could barely understand him.

But strangely enough that didn't seem to matter. The amazing music of his poetry seemed enough to draw me towards him.

But there was a deeper connection I didn't understand at the time.

In those days I was known as 'John Clifford' and was still being forced to live as a boy; and it was about then that I also discovered acting and realised that there was, after all, a place for me in the world.

I was always asked to play women's parts, and loved it. And that also meant I had to confront the knowledge that I so wanted to live as a girl.

In the ferociously repressive culture of those days, I had no choice but to try to repress this. And in the process, theatre itself became a place of fear and shame.

I lost my vocation for the theatre too. Almost as soon as I had found it.

It took me 20 years to recover from this and find my voice as a playwright; and another 20 years to find the strength, the pride and the courage to live openly as a woman and in the process re-discover the joy of performing too.

All this time I was still in love with Lorca, and I somehow think that helped me.

This was long before the invention of the internet, and so when I first got to know his work, the knowledge of his homosexuality could still be thoroughly suppressed.



*The cast in rehearsals (image by Tracey Anderson)*

It was only much later that I understood how much his art had been formed by his struggle to be true to himself in a culture that so fiercely prevented it.

That helped me understand that there was a parallel between his struggle to be open about his homosexuality and my struggle to live openly as a trans woman in a world that, when I was young, so pitilessly prohibited it.

When I was in my 20s, I firmly believed that 'the personal is political'. I think I still do. What's for sure is that there is a political dimension to both our struggles.

Like us, Lorca was living under the shadow of fascism. One way of understanding this play is to see Bernarda as the embodiment of the brutal right-wing patriarchy that was prevailing in his time; and that now seems to be in the ascendant in ours.

So in giving voice to Bernarda, Lorca was personifying the inner demon and the social prejudice against which he had to struggle to assert his right to love and happiness.

That was how I understood the play when I first translated it, back in 1988... what I didn't expect now when I revisited the play with Graeae was that this encounter would transform my experience of the play - and open up a huge range of new possibilities for creating theatre.



*The cast in rehearsals (image by Tracey Anderson)*

I should have known better, really, because the main purpose of Graeae is transformation: transformation of ideas and transformation of perception through the very simple, but profoundly revolutionary, act of placing Deaf and disabled actors centre stage; and through integrating sign language, captioning and audio description from the very beginnings of the creative process to make

theatre that is inclusive for everybody.

I've come to writing this programme note just after adapting a scene of the play so it can be performed by a Deaf actor who communicates through sign language and a hearing actor who communicates through the spoken word.

And the task of making sure that these two amazing actors can communicate with an audience as they communicate with each other, and that they can do so in a way that is absolutely accessible to a hearing and D/deaf audience, and a seeing and blind audience alike... it all asks profound questions as to what communication truly involves, and demands the creation of a new theatrical language in the process.

To work on this with an all-female cast and all-female creative team, too, moves me so very profoundly. It empowers me to accept an identity that for most of my life the world has denied me and that I worked so misguidedly hard to deny in myself.

And I begin to understand that Bernarda is more than the embodiment of a profound and important idea; that Lorca's theatrical genius has created the portrait of a fully rounded human being who, like all of us, deserves compassion and respect. I begin to understand that, however disastrously she treats her daughters, she loves them and is doing what she thinks is best for them. I begin to think of my own parents, who in so many ways treated me in a way that was so profoundly damaging for the very best of reasons and with what they thought were my best interests at heart.

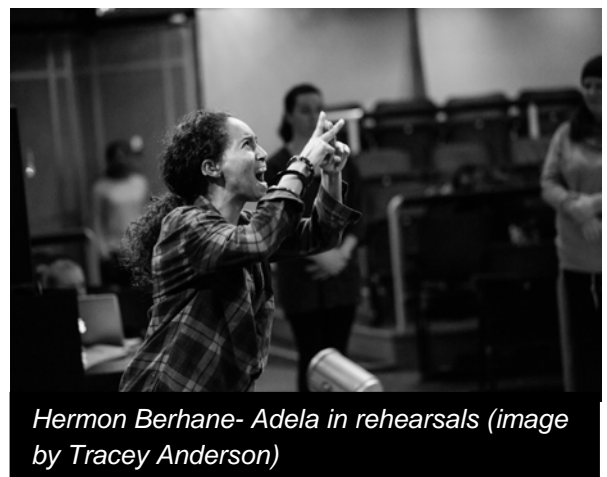
Then I understand that I, too, have had my own Bernarda inside me, who for so many years struggled with every ounce of strength and determination to suppress the female energy and identity within me.

That whatever our gender or our sexuality or our identity we all have our Bernardas within us whose misguided sense of duty and obligations demands the suppression of what is most vital within us. That is somehow how it is to live in a patriarchal world.

But even though we live in such reactionary times, we are also caught up in times of profound and unstoppable change.

In the play, Adela breaks the oppressor's stick, and Bernarda herself understands the coming of a new order of things, a time when men will no longer have all the power:

"Pepe you're riding home, galloping through the olive groves, knowing that



*Hermon Berhane- Adela in rehearsals (image by Tracey Anderson)*

no one will harm you. But another day will come, and that day you will fall...”

I used to think that Bernarda’s final call for silence, for silencing the truth about her daughter, represented a chilling confirmation of the triumph of oppression over love. That it foreshadowed the triumph of the fascists in the Spanish Civil War that broke out only weeks after Lorca had finished writing the play. The outbreak of the war that so quickly led to his own murder.

But now I’m not so sure. Every artist involved in the creation of this production has had to fight their own battle against the obstacles that would silence us. We have all had to struggle against the stigma of disability or the weight of prejudice.

A hard struggle, and a never-ending one. But all of us are here. All of us have won. So that by the end of this performance, what we all will have witnessed, creators and audience alike, is that silence does not prevail.

What prevails is love.



## Activities: themes and symbols

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Below are some of the themes and symbols used in the play. Many of these themes are prevalent throughout Lorca's further work. These can be used as a starting point for discussion and creative exercises.

### Themes

- Oppression and liberation
- Entrapment
- Isolation
- Societal pressures
- Gender (stereotypes and representation)
- Feminism and treatment of women
- Sexuality
- Consequences

### Symbols

- Weather: linked to shifts in mood and events
- The sound of bells: linked to death
- Sisterly relationships: love, jealousy and protection
- Animals: lizards, frogs, horses
- Pepe: we never see him but his impact is huge
- Colour: green symbolises unrequited or illicit love
- Bernarda's stick: commanding

## Games and Exercises

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### Introduction

The following games and exercises can be made accessible to participants with a range of access needs and learning and communication styles. The exercises are delivered in the knowledge that people express themselves in many different ways. We recommend encouraging responses through a range of different presentation styles and languages, including movement, tactile object manipulation, drawings, images, and written, spoken and sign language.

Offer a safe and supportive environment for participants to explore the following respectfully and honestly, but develop a set of ground rules. One ground rule may be to ensure discussions remain in the context of the play and our present, broader society's perceptions, values, morals and responsibilities.

Many of the following exercises rely on an understanding of the term **audio description**. Audio description is a verbal commentary to enable blind and visually-impaired people to access visual imagery. For e.g. 'Bernarda stands and moves slowly towards La Poncia'. Graeae embeds audio description creatively into its productions and learning programmes, forming part of what Graeae refers to as the Aesthetics Of Access.

Rhythmic call and response games support groups to work as a team, whilst generating high and focused energy. An example of this is a popular game a few of us in the outreach team learned from a workshop with Mark Bishop, Participation Manager at The Naturals Theatre company (<http://naturaltheatre.co.uk/>). We then add levels as appropriate to the theme. (SEE OVER PAGE)

## Venga Venga

The point of this game is also about intention and emotion. Appreciate that people move and communicate in different ways.

“If I (add an action) and call *High*

You (add an action) and call *Low* “

(*and reverse*)

“If I clap once

You slap twice”

(*and reverse*)

“If I (motion like a zombie) and call *Venga Venga*

You say *Hula Hula* and wiggle in a circular motion”

(*and reverse*)

And now you can begin to add levels by adding statements about the characters, the plot, or dialogue from *The House of Bernarda Alba*. For e.g

“If I (add an action) and call *Silence!*

You (add an action) and call *We will brick up the doors and board up the windows!*”

## Twos (partner work)

Participants split into twos. The pairs introduce themselves to each other and tell each other the following:

- Your favourite thing ever.
- Your favourite character in the play.
- The thing that stood out most for you in this play.

Participants feed back their partner's answers to the rest of the group.

Participants then have five minutes to prepare a creative response to something their partner said. This could include using lines from the play, drawing a picture, writing a short poem or making a model. Participants share their creative responses with the group, incorporating audio description where appropriate.

Discuss the responses, paying particular attention to what was understood and not clear about the play and which themes engaged the participants the most. This could also be a time to talk about how differently people express themselves and how this makes for richer and more vibrant stories.

### **Names (individual work/small group work)**

Talk about the meanings of the names in the play. Participants then work individually or in small groups to write or discuss the following:

- What does your name mean?
- What does your name mean to you?
- What does your name not stand for?
- My name is... (insert a sight, a smell, a taste, a sound, a texture)

### Extension of exercise

Participants choose an object in the room/draw a picture/make a model to articulate something about what they have written.

This can feed into further discussion around words, labels and meanings. The group could discuss the way sign language translation and audio description require decisions to be made which might affect the meaning of the words or actions.

### Shift Left (large group work)

Four participants stand in a square, facing each other. The other participants form the audience and watching suggest the following:

- A place
- A relationship
- An object
- A job

The pair at the front improvise on their subject until the workshop leader says 'shift left' and all the four participants shift one place left. Once they have got the hang of it, swap the participants around and do a Bernarda Alba version with the watchers choosing:

- A character
- A theme
- An object
- A relationship

Encourage feedback and discussion from the audience members, and swap participants in and out as required.

### **Scene/Still/Word (small group work)**

In groups of 3-5, participants have five minutes to create a piece with three very short scenes on a given theme. Themes could include:

- escaping isolation
- relief from a certain pressure of being a woman
- relief from a certain pressure of being a man
- ways in which we find a sense of liberation

Participants perform their scenes to each other.

The groups then repeat the same piece but this time with a still image for each scene.

Finally, participants repeat the same piece with only one word for each scene.

Discuss the pieces with participants. What is good/bad about being concise? What were the challenges? You could repeat this exercise incorporating audio description and discuss what this adds to the scenes.

### Love (individual/small group work)

Participants can work in pairs, in threes or alone.

*Bernarda shows love for her daughters in a way that isn't the straight forward kind.*

Ask participants to think of a time when they have given or received love. Participants render this creatively using still image, improvisation, audio description, writing or storytelling.

Participants share their pieces, remembering to audio describe visual information.

### Revolving Donuts (large group work)

Participants stand in two circles - an inner circle and an outer circle. Each person in the inner circle stands directly opposite someone in the outer circle.

Call out a theme from the play. Pairs have one minute to discuss the theme before the circles revolve, creating a new pair. Call out a new theme for each revolution.

### Spectrum of Difference (large group work)

Participants individually consider the characters and devise a bold and telling statement for each character which sums up their inner feelings and motivations (e.g. Bernarda is fearful of losing control).

Collect and read out the statements. Participants move to different areas in the space to indicate Agree, Disagree and Neutral. Discuss their responses.

### Past and Future 1 (pair work)

Participants get into pairs and create a scene from the past or future between two characters

Participants consider:

- Who are you?
- Where are you?
- How do you feel about each other?
- What is the conflict or event transpiring?
- What do each of you want?

### **Past and Future 2 (small group or pair work)**

In pairs or threes, participants choose a theme and characters and create a scene relevant to the present day. Follow this up with discussion to examine the impact of the political and social contexts.

Both Past and Future exercises could be extended by asking participants to repeat their scenes using only signs/gestures, or joining pairs to build audio description into the pieces (one pair performs whilst the other describes).

### **Forum Theatre (large group work)**

The workshop leader selects key scenes from the play for small groups to perform chronologically.

From here, set up a forum theatre model where a group performs a scene and audience members feed into changes in behaviour, conflicts and resolutions, based on the audience's opinion, morals and values. Each group will need to respond to the changes made in each scene, to play out the impact on their own scene.

Ask groups to each prepare an audio described preamble, to set up each scene to describe the environment/setting, position of the characters in the space and what they are wearing. The audio describer for each scene could also provide context to tell the audience what happens before and after this scene in the play.



## Activities: discussion points

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### Bernarda

- How can we empathise with Bernarda? She is a one-sided straw man of a character. Why does she behave as she does?
- Is Bernarda a feminist? What do we understand feminism to be?
- Strength, control, identity. Who is she without her daughters, her family, and what do these habits and responses tell us about her?
- Bernarda – losing control and how she asserts it, burying truth
- What are Bernarda's fears?
- Is Bernarda selfish or protective or fearful?
- What happens when your children don't need you anymore?
- What would happen without Bernarda?

### Relationships

- Relationships between sisters – ambition versus competition.
- Maria Josefa's relationship with her granddaughters. Who has the higher status? How do they behave towards each other and why?
- Have we actually moved on so far from when this play was written in terms of women's rights, equality, gender stereotypes, and societal constructs? Thinking within and also beyond just our bubbles/circles/UK/European and western cultures.
- Cycles of abuse – cause and impact

### Oppression, Gender, Perception and Social Constructs

- What oppression do we still have?
- Adela wants to be touched – is it still objectifying women if it's what we want?
- Perception of expectation: "she's an invalid, she can't have children"
- Female sexuality – what is being said about it?

### Lorca

- Lorca's repressed sexuality and need for love
- Is Lorca good at writing about women?
- Is this an accurate representation of women's sexuality?

### Identity

- What IS your identity if you lose an element of yourself?
- At what point do you stop reinventing yourself?

### Consequences

- What are the long term consequences of oppression, isolation and liberation?
- What does the world look like after the play ends?

## About the Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability is a way of understanding how people become disabled by inaccessible surroundings and attitudes, rather than by impairments or conditions.

For example, a train station with information boards but no audio announcements will stop a blind passenger from receiving information that everyone else can access. This is what disables that passenger—not the fact that they're blind.

The Social Model is an alternative to the Medical Model, which works on the idea that it is people's impairments or conditions that disable them, and the answer is to "fix" disabled people so they are no longer disabled.

People can be disabled in a range of ways – by inaccessible environments, by people's attitudes and behaviours, and by the way society is set up.

Understanding this helps work out ways to change things to be more accessible.

The Social Model is also part of what language is used. Rather than a person "having a disability", a person is disabled. This reflects how disability is a result of outside influence.



## Social Model Language

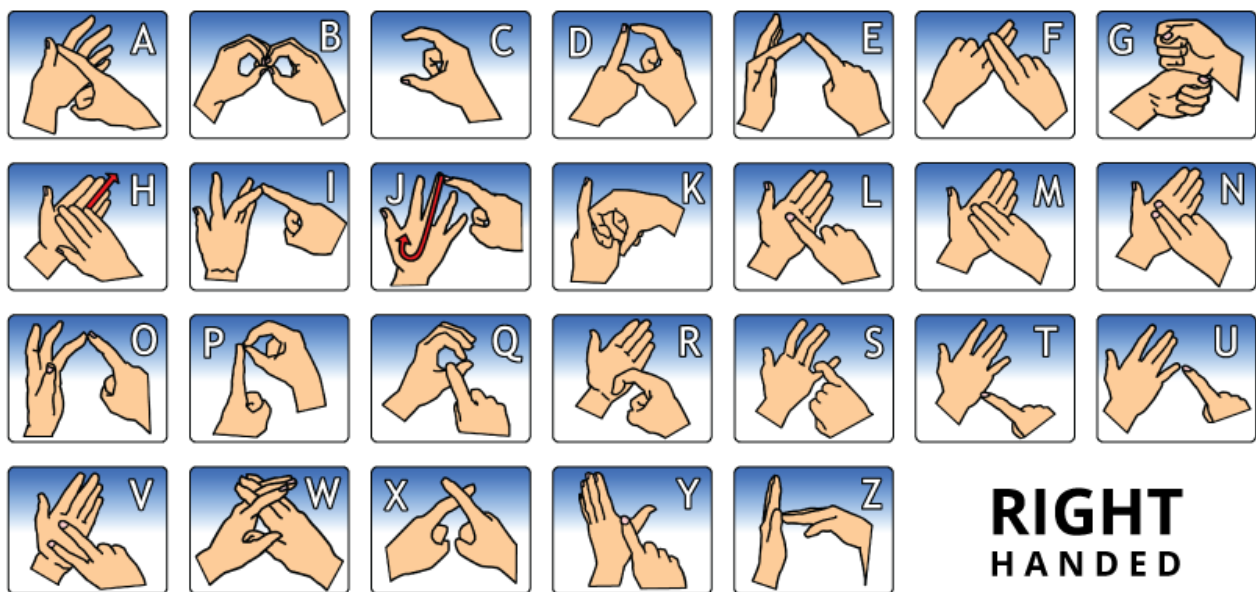
It is essential to recognise that being disabled impacts hugely on who someone is but it is not the only thing that defines them. Disabled people's understanding of their own impairment will inform their performance style but it is their creativity and passion to be an actor which brings them to the training arena. Here are some basic guidelines of acceptable language to use:

✓	X
disabled	handicapped, cripple, invalid
disabled people	the disabled
has ... (an impairment)	suffers from..., victim of ...
non-disabled	able bodied, normal, healthy
has learning difficulties/ is learning disabled	mentally disabled, retarded, backward
wheelchair user	wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, in a wheelchair
Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing people	the deaf
Deaf sign language user, BSL user	deaf and dumb, deaf mute
blind or partially sighted people, visually impaired people (VIP)	the blind
has mental health issues is a mental health system user or survivor	mentally ill, insane, mad, crazy
has cerebral palsy	spastic
person of short stature	dwarf, midget

## British Sign Language

British Sign Language (BSL) is used throughout the production. The chart below shows the fingerspelling alphabet.

### BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE - FINGERSPELLING



[british-sign.co.uk](http://british-sign.co.uk)

LEARN BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE ONLINE  
AT [WWW.BRITISH-SIGN.CO.UK](http://WWW.BRITISH-SIGN.CO.UK)

## Media and Resources

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### Rehearsal Blogs

**Chloë Clarke (Magdalena)**

<http://graeae.org/week-one-bernarda-alba>

**Kellan Frankland (Martirio)**

<http://graeae.org/manchester-royal-exchange>

**Mandy Redvers-Rowe - audio description consultant**

<http://graeae.org/audio-description-house-bernarda-alba>

### Further Resources

- *A Guide to Inclusive Teaching Practice in Theatre* (Graeae Theatre Company, 2009): [download](#) (includes definitions of terms and demystifying creative access roles)
- *Acting and Auditioning: A Practical Guide* (Graeae Theatre Company, 2013): [download](#)



*The cast in rehearsals (image by Becky Bailey)*

## About us

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[Graeae](#) is a force for change in world-class theatre, boldly placing D/deaf and disabled actors centre stage and challenging preconceptions.

Graeae presents a unique approach which:

- Boldly places D/deaf and disabled artists centre-stage in a diversity of new and existing plays
- Pioneers a radical dramatic language by exploring the Aesthetics Of Access, creatively embedding a range of tools such as audio description and sign language from the very beginning of the artistic process
- Explores new territory and theatrical genres – from contemporary classics to musicals, to outdoor circuit... with sway poles and giant puppets!

Graeae champions the inclusion of D/deaf and disabled people in the arts through:

- Intensive actor and writer training initiatives
- Access support for creative and learning situations
- Empowering workshops and training programmes for young artists, led by inspiring role models
- A range of training models for the creative sector – from inclusive practice for drama schools, through to accessible e-marketing for theatre venues

[The Royal Exchange Theatre](#) is Regional Theatre of the year 2016 (The Stage), it is a leading producing theatre situated in the heart of Manchester showcasing an ambitious programme inspired by the world's greatest stories: stories that have the power to change the way we see the world.

Taking artistic risks, working as part of exciting partnerships, championing new talent and seeking out bold collaborations as key to the Royal Exchange Theatre's vision. The company continues to broaden its output on and off the stage to speak to the most diverse audiences in Manchester and beyond.



## Creative Learning Team

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### Workshop Facilitators

Jodi-Alissa Bickerton, Jackie Hagan, Melissa Johns and Nicola Miles-Wildin

### For Graeae

**Creative Learning Director** Jodi-Alissa Bickerton

**Access & Learning Coordinator** Helen Jackson-Lyall

**Marketing & Development Manager** Richard Matthews

**Administrative Assistant** Charlotte McCabe

Graeae champions creative platforms for D/deaf and disabled artists, children and young people through our productions, training and creative learning projects.

We have a commitment to ensure full access to high-quality training which supports the next generation of world class artists and creative teams.

### For Royal Exchange Theatre

**Head of Participation** Sarah Lovell

**Schools Programme Leader** Chelsea Morgan

With thanks also to the entire Participation & Learning and Marketing Teams.

**GRAEae**

