

How did the idea of the play come about?

- **Julia:** I was born in Manchester and I am the daughter of Isabel and the granddaughter of Esther Jacobs, so it's the story of my grandparents and my mother and her two sisters. And I'm very interested in telling the stories of women's lives, which I feel are very rarely heard. It's my way of changing the landscape, the dramatic landscape, by putting women's voices on stage and reflecting the political and personal stories of the twentieth century obviously. But I heard their voices all through my life because I grew up here, my very early years were in Prestwich. And so these women were so much part of my life, and Pearl later in my life in America. As I got older they told me stories which they didn't censor, so it's great of course, and I absorb them like a sponge. They're all dead now so they can't be furious with me! The complexity and the textures of their lives I hope is reflected in the play and the contradictions, and the dreams, and the unfulfilled educational and intellectual possibilities which strikes me every time I see it—the loss of potential of these women strikes me very hard when I watch it. I am trying to show that because I think it has a universal element, about women's expectations and ambitions and the permission they have to fulfill their potential. All those questions, which yes they're of the history, but I think they're still very present. That was my aim in writing it, but to be particular because I knew these voices, and to tell that story through their mouths. That's the beginning of it, that's why.

For those of you that aren't Jewish, did you do a lot of research into Jewish history to help prepare for the part?

- **Eoin:** I was lucky enough last December, Julia was kind enough to give me a part in another play of hers 12-37, and I was playing Cecil in that play.

Julia and I had some chats before we started rehearsals and she gave me some books and I did a lot of research then into Jewish history, and particularly Irish-Jewish history because that was something I had never thought about at all, about Irish Jews at all, and so I had that background that I worked on before starting this one. And so I kind of looked into Jewish history a bit, which helped with this because we had a very short rehearsal time and I couldn't, I wouldn't, I didn't have the same amount of time to go and research Jewish history . . .

- **Amanda:** Well I have done a few projects with Julia, and have played Jewish a few times. For the first incarnation of this I did a lot of research, but I did a lot of research on the family and how their specific—there's some amazing pictures of Pearl, I mean all these women were stunning—and also, you could just see the life bursting out of the photos. But, we recently did something about Eleanor Marx, and doing a show with Julia means you do your research. And as I said I spent a lot of time in New York, lower East side, I lived in Williamsburg for a long time—Williamsburg Brooklyn, it's very close to a very big Hasidic community—I now live in Stanton Hill in London, so it's like I never left. So, I would say I have a familiarity with a lot of the traditions, and a Jewish friend of mine said I speak more Yiddish than he does.

It was brilliantly directed, there was so much to do with the movement . . . It was very ambitious with the movement . . . truly, physically challenging.

- **Julia:** Thank you, it helps having such a gifted ensemble I have to say—singing, dancing, and everything else. And just to say, a lot of that is rooted in Yiddish theatre, which I didn't see because it was a generation before mine. And I did a lot of research on it, and I met some Yiddish performers as

they were old in New York, and I became very aware of the Northern English tradition and the crossover between Yiddish theatre—the vaudeville, the humour, the musicale—and I began to think about what happens when you put those two together, and that’s very much the creating of the work. Thinking about Yiddish theatre and the jokes—women telling jokes, which is not in my family, it always seems the men just don’t communicate, but they do tell jokes—so there’s that kind of reclamation that I wanted to do. My interesting Yiddish thing which was in Romania in Iasi when my grandfather came it was considered the best, but to draw on that and make those references, to me, but added to the English vaudeville—Manchester was my background—to put those two together became interesting to me. What am I doing, how do I do it, what’s what construct, do they work? George Formby, Charlie Cairoli, the Hornby orchestra, Myra Hess, all those references of my childhood, and suddenly by just touching them I’m dropping them in and finding “Yes, that’s right, that’s the right symphony pieces.”

How has performing in this venue tonight in north Manchester affected you Julia, and affected the actors, because this is where the play is set?

- **Julia:** As I walked over to the Ibis Hotel near Portland Street, I had to hold myself together. I thought, “Edith, I brought you home.” And I just held it, and when I watch it quite often I have to hold myself tight, because many of the things she said to me in particular, where everybody’s voice is a reflection of what I’ve heard. Obviously, you edit, and you construct, that’s what you have to do, but the words they said to me from my childhood onwards, suddenly to hear them it’s very strange. I don’t know how it is for the cast because they didn’t know them. But the grandmother, the

education—the uneducated grandmother, who was kept a prisoner in the house because my grandfather wouldn't let her meet men. The Jews would learn English in night school, but she wasn't allowed to, and as she got older she forgot her English and she spoke only Yiddish and she became alive when she spoke Yiddish, and I saw that and I thought, "This woman's imprisoned because she wasn't allowed to learn English" and it drives me crazy when I see women from other cultures not allowed to learn English today It jars on me. When I watch it of course all of that percolates.

- It resonates with me because my grandmother was married here in this synagogue in 1911, so a similar time, and she left from Syria for an arranged marriage, and she was actually only fifteen. And she had no education, she could only speak Arabic, and she had no idea what sort of life . . .

I wanted to say something similar to what that lady was saying, which is your voices are fab, and your dancing. And I know it's all been arranged, but you were just—you grabbed me—and I thought I had come to a musical. Well done!

- **Amanda:** I just wanted to say something about the space. It's so evocative, and actually makes our job a lot easier because you know something's going to happen here. There's so much energy and magic, sorry don't mean to use that word, but there's so much focus and intensity in the place itself that everyone—us, you, everyone—feels like "Okay, here we go."
- **Rosie:** Certain phrases land in such a different way, it's just really powerful. The things like "Dirty Jews"—
- **Amanda:** That was tough.

- **Rosie:**--In here. The way that that lands in a space like this, and even telling these stories, you know—I grew up Modern Orthodox—and telling Esther’s story, you know, “You can’t go out because what if men see you,” and telling that kind of story in a space like this felt kind of redemptive for me. Just like, “Yeah, you know what, I’m glad no one’s sitting up there.”
- **Giselle:** It’s also, it’s really interesting to play with you, because we didn’t know if the audience—to be in your face like that—and some people aren’t comfortable, you have to know it. But everybody was just so open.
- **Rosie:** Thank you for playing with us!
- **Giselle:** You became part of the moment for us, and it made it easier to bounce off. I didn’t know where to look with all these wonderful faces, it’s really lovely. That was magic—so thank you!

I’ve seen a few plays here, and I have to say nothing’s impacted me as much as tonight has because it felt so real in the space. From the minute you started to sing it was just fantastic. What sorts of backgrounds have you come from as far as performing, and getting to various places by having to train? Is it going on tour this production?

- **Giselle:** You are our tour. We had one night last Thursday in Blackpool, and then we restaged it yesterday—we restaged the whole production for this space . . . We were here tonight, and we’re going to London. We’ve got three performances at JW3 in London. Which is a stage with a proscenium arch, which is very different because we’re not going to be interacting with the audience. And one night in Burgh House, where we haven’t got that much space so it will be interesting.

- [Later] **Giselle:** Pascal Theatre Company is a charity, and Julia had no funding for this—none—this has come from her. And I'm not begging, I'm just saying it seems so unfair when something so rich, something so beautiful can be shared and we can't do it because there's no funding for it. We're professional actors, we need to be paid. We're paid minimum here and we do it—yes for love, but you can't do it for love when you're professional.
- **Eoin:** It's just a shame that it's not funded because I think Julia—I've got so much respect and love for Julia. I would just love to see even a small bit of money behind her work.
- **Rosie:** It deserves to be seen.
- **Giselle:** And there's other pieces as well that she can't explore, can't do because there's no funding, that belong in bigger spaces and belong with bigger audiences, that can't be shared. She has some amazing stories to tell, and it's a privilege to be an actor and work with her.