

GODBER: So we may as well kick this off and get this going. I know that it is quite daunting to put your hand up and ask a question but if there is anything that you feel that you want to express or ask about this play or the theatre generally, whatever, why we have done it in two auditoria. I noticed that there were some students; you might want to ask a number of GCSE type questions. Fire away! I'll think I'll be able to answer most of them.

ACTOR: I have a question. Whose nicked my underpants? They have gone out of the dressing room!

GODBER: Nobody leave the building! Steve \*\*\*\*'s underpants have gone missing and its not the first time!

ACTRESS: But you don't need them - we've already seen it before in another film!

GODBER: Any questions?

AUDIENCE: I actually sell houses for a living and I can absolutely vouchsafe that buying and selling property brings out the worst aspects in human personality. Was this play based on your own experience or your parents or anything like that? Where did you gather all the information from?

GODBER: A lot of the things that happen in the play are absolute fact. I've just moved my mum from her house, because the neighbours were heroin addicts, and it was something that had effected me for a long time, and I wanted to investigate ... without going into it, I got the magic wand and I magiced them from one place to another and that's exactly what happened. My parents have got heart conditions, the neighbours were crazy, the working-class mining estate that I was brought up on as a kid since the miner's strike degenerated into a sink estate and a lot of the things that the play touches on are real incidents; a lot of the things in the play aren't real incidents as well, my dad's alive, he's coming on Friday, I've never left my wife, my agent's a man, I don't know what department thirteen in Wakefield Hospital is, I've know idea about anything like that! So some of it's - you know - I think the best kind of writing is something that comes out of yourself, there's no point writing anything unless it's felt; otherwise I'd still be doing *Brookside*. So a lot of the actual difficulty and the pain of your parents getting older, obviously that is a personal thing -that's really what writing is.

AUDIENCE: We're from South Elmsall, Upton, all that area, and you know, you really catch the problems that area has. I'm a landlord actually and I face this kind of thing on a daily basis, we have a huge drug problem; anti-social problem, that's the point of having landlord's associations and things like that but I don't want to go into that, what I want to say is, I come and I've seen a lot of your plays and I've met you personally at a mate of yours wedding, but I think you catch the humour as well,

because there's humour but you get the social meaning as well, you try to address those problems through humour sometime and I just want to say how much we enjoy that.

GODBER: I appreciate that -- (INTERRUPTED BY SPONTANEOUS ROUND OF APPLAUSE) -- I think if you can tell a story on one level and it be about a play on morality at another level - I don't have a panacea for all these ills I think good theatre scratches us and makes us feel human in a way that television quite often doesn't; you know, whenever we watch telly, if it's owt like me I plug into it and it's a passive experience and I've got a piece of cheese and a bottle of Fleure EE? at the side of me and I don't have a think. The thing about theatre if it works is that it makes you feel - society desensitises the human soul, art and theatre re-sensitises you and makes you feel uncomfortable and essentially we are all on the same journey, whether your neighbours are Les and Sonya or they're doctors or whatever, we have to interface and we have to get on with each other and in this play I wanted to ... in a sense it is a very non-PC play because at the end you fight fire with fire, what do you do if your neighbours are like this, well you sell it to a six foot nine snake-handler. When I was at University, in philosophy sessions, we couldn't reconcile that view; however, when it is actually you that are facing the problem, you just want to get rid of the house and my mum's house, if you know Upton, Rose Avenue, we had to get rid of the house and we just let it go and my mum's actually flit a hundred yards from Rose Avenue across to a private bungalow. She should have done it years ago but what happened is of course after the miner's strike Thatcher allowed people to buy their houses cheaply so they bought their house for next to nothing in the belief that everybody would buy their house for next to nothing and they didn't so it became a social problem also exacerbated by the fact that on the one hand you've got characters who are twenty-five and on the other hand you've got characters who are seventy one and there is some kind of ... and the polemic in that is .. that's always going to be the case and what I try to do in the theatre is just prick the moral conscience and if you laugh that's great because as a teacher, you know, if you don't laugh in lessons, lessons can be dull and Bertholt Brecht said that a theatre that can't be laughed in is a theatre that to be laughed at - and he's a big fan of mine, any other - no, I'm a big fan of his - he's dead now any way. Any other questions?

AUDIENCE: It's nice to see that whenever we come to see your plays you have your regular cast, when you are actually writing a play do you have an actor in mind, an actress in mind when you are actually writing a particular part.

GODBER: Over the last two years certainly and this play definitely I cast the play before the play was written so none of the cast saw any text until four weeks ago yesterday and I made seven phone calls and a visit to see Steve who I'd met before and I just simply said, I'm doing this play - I

can't guarantee because I've written thirty-five doesn't mean to say that this is going to be any good but this is the story would you like to be in it and each of them said "yeah, we'll be in it." That is a huge risk for an actor; it is a huge pressure on me to have to write for people but it is the way that I function - I don't know anybody else that does that, it sounds like a crazy notion but once I've got the actors in my head, kind of cast, then I've got to write the play and quite often I've got to write the play because I've seen the poster (LAUGHTER) I'm writing a play that opens on the third September at the Lyceum Theatre in Sheffield and I know because I've seen the poster. the play's not written but it will be cast first and not everybody does this and that is the way that I work so I can people I've got a very good recall so I meet the actors and I think five out of the seven I've worked with before so I can have them in my head and when I'm sat at the typewriter awaiting the kids going like crazy at four o'clock in the morning I hear these people in my head and that helps inform the dialogue and what we tried to do with this play because we've got two auditoria was make the dialogue in the other auditoria extremely real because as an actor you can't be less real than grass; if you're acting on real grass, everything else has to be real, there are of course levels of reality and we all have different levels of reality but in there we've pared back the language as much as we possibly could so the thing felt like conversations in the street, because I hate going to the theatre to watch acting, I can have that at home I've got two little girls. I go to the theatre to see real people not to see actors fanny about and be histrionic, I want to see real life and I've changed because those of you who might have seen my earlier plays like *Bouncers* and *Teechers* and *Shakers* and *Up'n'Under* they're quite physical plays, they're quite stylised plays but as I've got older I'm getting a lot more sitting down acting - I condemned sitting down acting as a young fella because I didn't sit down a lot and now at forty-five I sit down a lot so I think sitting down is great. (LAUGHTER)

AUDIENCE: I notice in this production, we come from the South Elmsall area, you use a lot of our area's names in it, more so than some of the others do you do that consciously or just because you lived in that area - you've taught in that area.

GODBER: Yes - absolutely. I called it Park Avenue, I could have called it Park Estate - I could have called it Rose Avenue. There's a sense where you've just got to separate yourself a bit, I could have called Jack, John, I could have called Ted and May, Dot and Harry, which is my mum and dad's names but there has to be a safety valve where you just step outside of it and go "hang on a minute, it's a play and if it bears reality to life then that's great but it isn't a social document; it isn't a documentary, it's a piece of art. If it touches you, then great and if those references like Rogerthorpe and Babsworth and those kind of things they are from my own experience. It's a bit of a risk writing this play for Hull because obviously there aren't that many pits in Hull - not many pits in Upton now, there are even fewer pits in Hull and as a

thirtieth anniversary production one might have written a play about the docks or trawlers or containerisation or whatever but that's not my background and I wanted to both celebrate a working class culture and also there are ominous signs - you don't have to look too far into West Yorkshire to see where they are - of society becoming unstuck, the glue of society just slightly elasticating and that's what I think the play is about, as much as it is about motherly love and growing old and filial relationships and rites of passage, all those kinds of things, it's also about a kind of moral decline but it is a comedy. I thought the audience were very good tonight; they understood the ride, I think they understood the morality of what was going on and at the same time you were, particularly the students, you were an absolutely crucial part of the experience, because we rehearsed for a month to nobody, to me and I've seen it, well I've written it, I've lived it so when the audience are brought in they are a huge character, hugely important so when you're writing your GCSE's don't forget that the audience is absolutely crucial, that interface between what's happening up here (INDICATES HEAD) without an audience forget it, you may as well not do it.

AUDIENCE: We're very lucky in Hull I think to have this theatre in particular, New Theatre as well, and I know that you take your plays around different parts of the world but what is the attraction for you ...

GODBER: To Hull?

AUDIENCE: To Hull.

GODBER: Well I live here now! (LAUGHTER)

AUDIENCE: But to come here, it's so good, it could so easily be poached and taken elsewhere and that would be a great loss to the city.

GODBER: Well it nearly did. A couple of years ago we nearly lost the whole thing. Briefly, for those of you who don't know, Hull Truck tours and actually Hull Truck is more well know outside Hull than it is in Hull. We play at the Crucible to one thousand people, at Darlington Civic to twelve hundred people or Bath Theatre Royal, fifteen hundred people. A play that started here is currently on in French, in Montreal, is in Antwerp in Flemish, there's a play in Dubai, even as I speak, probably finished now. So plays that start here go on all over the world, it was just a quirk of fate. I applied for a job here in 1984, the bloke who went in for the job before me was Danny Boyle who went on to direct *Trainspotting* and *Shallow Grave* and *The Beach* and he went to Hollywood and I came to Hull. (LAUGHTER) Tough call on him. It absolutely suited me because my mam lives thirty-five minutes down the road and she spends a lot of time in Ponty Hospital so I can get on the motorway, I live out in Ferriby, I can get to the motorway very quickly and get to Ponty very quickly. It's very difficult and dangerous to blow your own trumpet but this is a special theatre space, and there

is a sense of enclosure in this theatre space that you don't get in a lot of other spaces. I'm told by Peter Brook's designer who was over here last week that it is because its a low roof and its like being in a room and if we do get this new theatre designed by Lord Foster then it will have a low roof and it will have this configuration.

AUDIENCE: How many people will it seat? Will it lose ...

GODBER: Four hundred and fifty.

AUDIENCE: I don't know how many this seats?

GODBER: Two hundred and eighty three.

AUDIENCE: But we'll lose something I think.

GODBER: Hopefully the city will gain what it deserves which is a purpose-built, all-singing, all-dancing theatre, and it's my job to make sure that the intimacy that you feel in here, and I know that sometimes its very hot, but this is the height of sophistication; Brecht talked about epic smoke theatre, this is good for the GCSE kids, Brecht talked about epic smoke theatre, a theatre where you could go and smoke and drinks and completely relax, for me this is the height of sophistication, you can take your drink into a theatre. We need to keep that, we need to keep the de-mystification and I don't think Hull needs an art house, Hull needs something that is very pragmatic, that people feel connected with, that you're not made to feel unintelligent when you go to the theatre and you're not made to feel that you've got to dress up or whatever but that it is a special community event and that's obviously what we'd be fighting for in the thing.

AUDIENCE: Is there any intention for it to be truly in the round or similar ...

GODBER: Exactly like this; this configuration came out of a quirk because when I came here, I don't know if you know the history but this was opened by Bob Hoskins and Alan Plater and Richard Beckinsale and the first director here was a fellow called Barry Hanson who went on to direct a very well known film called *The Long Good Friday* so lots of famous people have been, through the years, to this little shed down by the morgue. It was something Alan Ayckbourn said in a conversation when he was talking about Hull Truck recently, he said you can't decide where centres of excellence are, you can't say we'll have one in Bradford and then we'll have one in Sheffield - they just happen. When I came here just eighteen years ago now I thought if I stayed here three years and got a job in the university, I'd have done well. The audience's here are very honest, they tell you, if they like it, they tell you, if they don't like it, they tell you, if there's too much swearing they tell you in the grocers or in the off licence or wherever, but that is really, really unique. You don't get that if you get a show on in the

West End; I had *Up'n'Under* on in the West End for two years, I remember watching it with five hundred Japanese people and there wasn't one laugh in it - in Hull there was a lot of laughs in it, so that kind of shared cultural identity is very, very important for a theatre.

AUDIENCE: Can I just ask the cast, John, how do you feel, coming from a conventional theatre to one where you are literally stood at the side of your audience - you're actually stood with your audience aren't you, you're not on stage above them?

CAST: I only came into this theatre for the first time a few weeks ago when *Perfect Pitch* was on, I came along to see that, just to see how it worked, how the rapport was with the audience and what was going on on-stage and the first thing that struck me was that it was like a cabaret; it's got the atmosphere of a cabaret because of this thrusting stage and you get here and you can feel the audience breathing, its like John said before, you deliver a laugh line and the audience is straight on to it and its that rapid fire whereas in a bigger space then you're waiting a lot longer, it slows down, it slows the pace down. This has a real intimacy to it and going back to what was said before and the architects that are designing the next theatre, I don't know about the rest of the cast, but they actually spent time the other week when they were wandering round they had a word with me about what I thought about this theatre and I told them the qualities in the little experience that I'd had of being in here, the qualities that it has so they are obviously taking those kind of things on board and hopefully they will plan it into what they are going to do - hopefully.

AUDIENCE: But it works though, doesn't it, when we first came here and we sat down near the front - so near the stage, feet on the stage, and when the actors and actresses come up to you - incredible - you were actually stood next to them.

GODBER: I think it's even more telling next door, if I can be a slight academic for half a minute, I saw a production that Peter Stein did in Germany in the early seventies of *As You Like It* and a production at the Edinburgh festival of George Kaiser's *From Morn 'til Midnight*; this was when I was into being a doctor and all that kind of stuff and I was absolutely mesmerised by the fact that plays were just happening there, in there we've got a warehouse and some real grass and we're asking you to believe and that is a very, very sophisticated notion for a group of people - the lights don't go down so you're not into that that kind of middle-class "the lights go down so get the "Milk Tray" out" and all that kind of stuff. It's absolutely stark and that reality is quite something and you have to concentrate in there to keep up with what's happening, there's nowhere for the actors to hide and there's nowhere for the audience to hide either, so you can have a look - you are completely conjoined.

- CAST: It's not so difficult to believe the reality when you end up with tea on your feet - so whoever got that I'm very sorry (LAUGHTER)
- CAST: It's also about the roof, isn't it and tavern yards where it all started and all this electric light and milk tray and stuff is only the last two hundred years of the history of theatre so by creating spaces like that and the feeling of intimacy and togetherness that this theatre has ...
- GODBER: In a way it is only what I was doing at Minsthorpe when I was teaching Drama.
- AUDIENCE: You're going back to basics.
- GODBER: You're in a school hall with some chairs, and its about the quality of the performance, its about the quality of the feeling of the actors, its about that quality of humanity. I'm always concerned when I go to the theatre when people clap wood, because in the six years that I taught, I never clapped a chair or a desk but there are those shows that you go and see where the curtain goes up and people applaud the set. (LAUGHTER) I've always found that strange.
- AUDIENCE: John, you spoke about pre-casting; when do you actually start directing? Whilst you're writing ....
- GODBER: Yes - Writing for me is a disease, I'm trying to shake it off - it's a disease. (LAUGHTER)
- AUDIENCE: I'd like to make a brief comment and then ask a question. The ending may not be PC but it is absolutely true to life as I know it; I was born in Hull, spent most of my childhood in Wakefield, grew up in California. My Aunt Pat and Uncle Ron live on Kettlethorpe Estate.
- GODBER: I know that estate.
- AUDIENCE: They live on Kettlethorpe Estate and I lived with them for about a year after I got out of the US army and I came back. Now my Aunt Pat and Uncle Ron were very happy on that estate, my Uncle Pat was a miner but open-cast, he drove a bulldozer. But after privatisation they sold off a lot of council houses, my Aunt Pat and Uncle Ron got a new neighbour, the new neighbour was terrible and she and my Auntie Pat got into fights and she broke my Auntie Pat's nose! So Pat and Ron moved. It seemed to me that what was happening on the stage like that is that the bottom feeders are devouring one another - that's what's happened. It's no longer a community and so to me the presentation cannot be wrong because this is what happened to my aunt and uncle. The question I have is this - did this happen to you? Did you have someone who was talked to? (NEIGHBOUR IN AUDIENCE REMINDS SPEAKER THAT PLAY CONCERNS GODBER'S

MOTHER) Do you have anything being optioned – something that is somewhere in development that you decided you wanted to write about?

GODBER: The whole thing about developing films – several years ago I made a film that I wanted to make in Hull – *Up'n'Under* – which is based on a stage play that I wrote fourteen years ago and I couldn't get the money to make the film. And endlessly – I mean Steve and I have been involved in the project where you would have thought somebody who had been in *The Full Monty* would be able to raise – between us would be able to raise the money to make another film, but it's not the case. You are forever coming across people, development officers or script editors who are saying it's not funny enough and it's not this or it's not that or it's not the other – everybody is looking for something but nobody knows what they are looking for. So that element of the narrative is true also.

AUDIENCE: I was going to ask the cast, does he let you embellish bits and pieces? Are you allowed a bit of a free rein? I mean, I have to say I thought that you were all completely brilliant tonight; are there any bits that you thought, “We could tickle this up a bit?” Are you allowed to do that (LAUGHTER) or is he quite authoritarian?

CAST: We're not allowed to do but we do! (LAUGHTER)

AUDIENCE: Do you ever get to a point where you can say, this is going really well, we can ad lib some of this or do you just follow the script all the time?

CAST: No, the thing about a beautifully written script is that all the best work has been done already – there's no way you could possibly add to that.

AUDIENCE: Did the laughs come where you thought they were going to come, when you read it, did we laugh where you thought we were going to laugh?

CAST: Sometimes and sometimes not and every night audiences are slightly different – there are some laughs that seem to come every night but that's why it is such an adventure always and some audiences take a different view of the material and find it extremely funny from start to finish or find it extremely painful as they watch it; so it is a constant dialogue really and I think embellishment would ... it is terribly well-crafted, you don't write a play just to be funny, it is all about rhythm – I'm sure John would agree with this, it's all about rhythm and finding moments and crafting them so that they happen in front of your eyes in the way that they do. If you start to embellish them; lengthen them, shorten them, all the rhythm starts to droop and then you lose them and you wouldn't have as many laughs nor as many moving moments, nor as much entertainment, you really wouldn't so ..

CAST: You end up getting individual performances then rather than what we try to get is ... we're trying to work as an ensemble because we're all back there, if we're not getting changed, doing quick costume changes then we're trying to get right on the moment - you can't just hang around and think, Oh I'll go on now, I'll do my bit.

AUDIENCE: It was so fluent tonight it was excellent; the way it flowed was absolutely spot-on. It was brilliant the way you came on and off, it was excellent.

CAST: There were a couple of hiccoughs tonight ...

GODBER: Yes, there were funnily enough.

CAST: That's because we've had a new black curtain put behind and we weren't quite ... in the house, in the first set there's been a new black curtain put up - none of us had rehearsed it until ... that slowed a few entrances down tonight. You know, it is technical things like that that can ... for us will throw the pace out.

AUDIENCE: There was a technical pigeon wasn't there! (LAUGHTER)

GODBER: That's an Equity pigeon!! (LOUDER LAUGHTER)

CAST: It's theatrical pigeon shit!

AUDIENCE: With your characters, obviously they are being informed by the script but do you, especially with characters like Sonya and Les, have you had experience of people like that? In class we are always told whenever we play a character that you've got to write your life story and that. Do you do that as well? Do you build a whole character on the experiences you have had?

CAST: I think it's a mixture of everything - we all know a Sonya, we all know a Les, we all know a May, a Ted; that's the thing about John's writing, he writes about real people that we can all identify with and that's what we do because we can't escape from that because you see them everyday, you see Sonia's, walking down the streets slapping their kids screaming at them so that does inform your judgement on the character somewhat but then you have to take from the dialogue and make that person into a new character like that Sonya that you see down the street, so make it individual but obviously your life experience is informing it - and I've seen a lot of Sonia's (LAUGHTER) I'm sure we all have.

CAST: Also as well, I don't think that we sit in rehearsals going "oh I must really find my character" We're employed, well I work from this basis anyway, that character is an extension of yourself; there's a lot of this character that I relate to because it is very similar to my life. There's a

line in it where the Dad says, “Oh you know me, I could live on tinned ham, which is straight from my own dad, my own dad would have said that, so it’s an extension of one’s own self I think, there’s no point in, you know it would be silly to cast somebody like Donald Sinden to play Ted.

GODBER: Oh, I don’t know! (LAUGHTER) One night only!

CAST: There’s not a lot of searching for character, in fact, what was unique in the rehearsal process of this, often with commercial theatre is that you get in there and you are expected to read the script, in fact you’ve read the script before you turn up for the first rehearsal, you read the script and you are expected to have a good understanding of the character and hopefully “find” the character within the first week of rehearsal and with this there was none of that, what we learned was that, what we worked on for three and a half weeks was the craft of getting this script on, the craft of the delivery, of relationships, and the timing and the pace and through that you find after a couple of weeks that you think “Oh - right, I understand this character now” without having to do any of this Stanislavski kind of, how would my character cut a slice of bread! (SHRUGS) Forget it! (LAUGHTER)

GODBER: They’ve just failed all their GCSE’s (MORE LAUGHTER)

CAST: Go from the Brechtian angle!

AUDIENCE: Mine’s not a question John. I just want to thank you for the hours of pleasure that we have had in this theatre and I hope that you go on as long as you possibly can.

MANY SHOUTS OF “HERE - HERE” AND MUCH APPLAUSE

GODBER: Thank you very much indeed

AUDIENCE: How do you rehearse? How do you plan your day? If you come to work do you start at nine and finish at five? When you start a play how do you begin the rehearsal process?

GODBER: What’s happened with this – what’s become a little bit of a ritual is that we meet up at ten o’clock for a coffee and a croissant (LAUGHTER) I come in looking like death warmed up having just been to orthographic were I’ve photocopied the play so the play is literally hot off the press of orthographic down George Street. We all leg it into the back, I’m like a nervous wreck – no matter how many plays you’ve written you ...(INTERRUPTED BY CAST)

CAST: We’re all nervous.

GODBER: Everybody's nervous; people are acting out of their accents, I've written some of it phonetically, (EXAMPLES) 't, we're tha' goin' , what tha' doin, some say (IN POSH ENGLISH ACCENT) Oh I couldn't possibly say that and all that kind of stuff goes on and then we just start building up – building a house. We slowly work through digging a foundation, working out how the play works. We don't sit around for long talking about it because ...

CAST: We talk about a lot of other things ...

GODBER: We talk about loads of stuff, we're very forthcoming, play table tennis, you know and things like that. The serious side of it is the discovery is done on its feet – so immediately we kind of get the play up on its feet so that I can see if it will work and if it doesn't work – one of the great things about directing your own work first is that you go away and change it. And I am quite ruthless as a director with the writer and I am quite ruthless as a writer with the director so whilst I'm writing it I think I hope the director makes a bloody good job of this, because I think this is good. And then when I actually start to direct it I think, well the writer is saying too much here. And the other thing about this audience, which is not a typical theatre audience is that you only have to say things once and a lot of plays that you may see, the point is made over and over and over ad nauseam and the audience sag at that. I think modern theatre audiences are quite sophisticated; they watch lots of videos, they watch films, they watch telly, they watch adverts – information comes very, very quickly. In the theatre we have to be aware of that, we have to be aware that brevity is the soul of wit kind of notion that – just say it and get on with it; the audience will come with you – but in terms of time, ten o'clock while six o'clock every day and not Saturdays if there's rugby on.

AUDIENCE: Do you find that's different? You know, you were saying that you go on tour to different places – This is an unusual layout for a theatre. Do you find that the audiences are different in different places, because when I come here there are people who come with me and somebody came a little while ago that had never been to a theatre and couldn't believe it but he said he wouldn't go to a "real" theatre, you know, he was quite – you know it was a big thing for him to come to a theatre at all, and when he came he was really comfortable and would be happy to come again but he wouldn't chose to go to another "real" theatre. Do you find that when you transfer your plays to somewhere different that you get a different sort of audience and a different reaction?

GODBER: It's very bizarre and it's a very good question. For a long time people have argued that there is a "John Godber audience" and they're all people that don't go to the theatre and they're all first-time theatre-goers and they're all, you know, dripping and flat-caps. At the Theatre Royal, it's generally full of ... the ticket prices are different any way. To be quite honest with you, any audience is a good audience.

Obviously this work would be picked up stronger here in the North and possibly even stronger in the West Yorkshire Playhouse because the “ear” is West Yorkshire; having said that, Arthur Miller’s plays travel all over the world and it’s because he has captured a kind of particularism; a kind of reality in those plays. The plays of mine that have gone on all over the world, have captured –almost photographed – a kind of reality, and that’s inescapable because we’re not that different as people. When I came here seventeen years ago, what I wanted to do was to fill the theatre with people who were theatre-goers and with people who were not theatre-goers and that’s why I did plays like *Up’n’Under*, why I did *Bouncers* – endlessly – *Blood, Sweat and Tears*, which I wrote about Karen Briggs, and we had a theatre full of judo black-belts. Now, they wanted to see judo done properly, so the actors couldn’t skimp. In that play you couldn’t have somebody go ohh, ohh (EFFEMINATE GESTURES MADE) they had to go bang, judo, woff! Bang! Down! Woff! (FIST SMACKS INTO HAND) Because you had two hundred people who all did judo. Now, my experience has been that if you give those people who aren’t theatre-goers a palpable experience and they say, actually, I respect that, they’ll come back. If we’d have gone soft on them, given them something that wasn’t what they responded to, or a cheat, or a kind of illusion, then they’d have said, “oh, theatre, it’s namby-pamby.” I think this is a very workman-like outfit, and I think people respect the honesty and the audiences respect the integrity and, you know, audiences know quality when they see it. I’m astonished and delighted that so many of you have stayed behind tonight which is testament to the fact that... Hull quite often has bad press; I’ve been here seventeen years – I’ve no intention of going anywhere else, this play will be sold out everyday for the next three weeks. Now, there aren’t a lot of theatres up and down the country, in the middle of summer, without air conditioning, that can say we’re sold out everyday. There is a real sense of ownership that we feel as Hull Truck from the local audience. Whether or not it is a first time theatre-goer who comes in and says, “oh, actually, I enjoyed it, I’ll go again. Oh, you can take your beer in, it’s not bad” What we can’t do is bore the audience, if you start to bore the audience you start to get indulgent, and as we get better and better and better and we stretch the audience emotionally we have to be more workman-like in taking the audience on different kinds of journeys. And I think between us we can do that and I certainly intend to push the envelope because I think the audience will go with it. Any other questions?

AUDIENCE: You’re remarkably candid about your evolution as a playwright John, and how you’re changing and this is obviously a crystallisation of change for you. I’m struck in the change of sympathies for your characters because you’ve got the neighbours from Hell over there, and they really are the neighbours from Hell. For me, they seem like characters in *Bouncers* ten or fifteen years on and in *Bouncers* they’re the heroes. Are you moving away from those... are you saying that those aren’t your heroes any more – you’re losing sympathy with those?

GODBER: Funnily enough, I think some of the most poignant moments in this play, for me, are the scenes between Les and Sonia, because I think Sonia is a victim (LOUD VOCAL ASSENT FROM AUDIENCE) One of the reasons why we asked Charlie to sing that song is because I didn't want them to be, oh, they're just creativeless, talentless, oiks who smoke a joint and turn Doctor Dre up loud. She has an outlet and it is her voice in the same way the Elvie has in "Little voice." And that poignant moment where he says, "you can't go out" is as painful, I think, as Ted and May saying "Keep the bloody noise down, it's driving us crackers." I know what you're talking about with regard to working-class heroes and caring and all the rest of it. The moral question is, where do you stand? What do you do if it is your parents? Certainly, in my case, the people who lived next door to my mam and dad, who were a nightmare – I didn't know what to do. I'm a seventeen-stone bloke, my instinct was to go around and burn their house down – and that would have got on "Calendar" (LOUD LAUGHTER) But I rationalised it, after having had eight years at university, I decided to maybe try to look for another house for my mam. And that's the moral dilemma, I think, in the play, that, Les and Sonia, they're only being Les and Sonia, they're not molesters – OK there's nappies in the garden and whatever and there is a social disintegration, but I don't think I'm saying ... I'm trying not to be completely pejorative about them. I think the interface between a couple in their seventies and ... what do you do? It is a reality that a lot of people have to deal with. I was very fortunate; I could buy my mum a house – what if he couldn't? What did she do? We didn't sell the house to a snake-handler but we sold the house to a bloke who breeds bull-terriers (LOUD LAUGHTER)

AUDIENCE: It would be interesting to see Sonia's story. It would be interesting to see the next door-neighbours story. We're left wanting it and that's good...We can make that up for ourselves.

GODBER: Yes. We're all kind of lost.

AUDIENCE: You get some of that in *Perfect Pitch* don't you; you get some of that relationship.

GODBER: I think what you're saying John, is that as I've got older I'm mellowing out and the characters that I championed in the early days are...obviously, they frighten me more. When I was unmarried and no kids they didn't frighten me and now I'm married with kids they frighten me.

AUDIENCE: It is an age thing, I think. I think your Chekhovian parallel is very strong as well.

GODBER: Yes, there's lots of Chekhov knocking about in this.

AUDIENCE: John, the play works absolutely fantastically in this space and it was great going into the shed and you were saying about how the interaction with the actors worked in there and came back in here. This has definitely got to go to Wakefield hasn't it, this play. How are you going to make it work in more of a fixed atmosphere? This play seems to fit this space really well.

GODBER: The discussions at the moment are to take it to the West Yorkshire Playhouse and the idea there would be to do it in the larger theatre, in the Quarry and to do the first half in a garden on a revolve then to turn the whole thing round so that you get this and then you literally get the front and the back of the house.

CAST: What if they clap as it is turning round though? (LOUD LAUGHTER)

GODBER: Can you see what I have got to put up with?

AUDIENCE: John, I think it was very innovative; it really was a great way of setting the scene and making it work for the different eras and different ages.

GODBER: It is an anniversary production so obviously we wanted to do something a little bit different, but my belief – and I might be completely off the mark here – to simply put a play on these days that is good is not enough, it has to be an event because that is when you are up against DVD and video and television, it has to have the feeling of an event. And I think that is the internet and IT and all the rest of it grow on me because I like it more, the theatre will become more important and a significant means of a direct interface and conjunction and communication, but it will also have to have a spring in its step – it will have to have that sense of wow! And we've thrown down a gauntlet to ourselves in many respects because we've built the space next door and it is a complete one-off because Yorkshire power were going to knock this down, the C.P.O.'s\* condemned this building, so this was going to go. And we have to re-invent the nature of performance every time we do it; that's a terrific challenge but that's what gets you up in the morning.

AUDIENCE: Do you have any sense of where you are going next or are you waiting for the next big event to ...

GODBER: Do you mean with the building or the play?

AUDIENCE: No. With your next play?

GODBER: Yeah, the next play is set in Dallas Airport and it's about dying. (PAUSE) It's a comedy (LAUGHTER) I hate flying – one of the reasons I stay in Hull; I get offers of work all over the shop and I can't fly, I have to be drunk or put in a box. And the next play is about the

fear of flying which is also about the fear of living which is that fear of dying and, obviously, I'm nearer fifty than I am thirty, so there are... I feel like I am growing up in public. And what's great about this actually tonight is that all those young people there (REFERENCE TO A LARGE SCHOOL PARTY THAT HAD TO LEAVE DISCUSSION EARLY) were very, very connected with the play and this theatre here; you go to Stratford or you go to the National – I've been to the R.S.C. where I've been the youngest member of the audience, and you have a young audience round here and that's a special thing as well. Nights like this are really, really important and very stimulating because they are a palpable indication that it matters, that people care – I tell you that is really, really, good. Final question.

AUDIENCE: John, I was interested in your writing process and whether or not you feel you have to show your work to somebody as you're working on it. How much confidence you have that you can actually get all the way through or is it a case of having to have it heard?

GODBER: What I do, which may or may not help people that want to write, is that I do anything other than write; so I cut the lawn, I go training, I emulsion the kids bedroom – I do anything other than write but when I do write, it's all got to come. It all comes out on the computer – this was written onto the computer without any notes; spew it onto the computer and then, using a completely different head, I edit as a script editor and I shape and obviously I've been doing this for a few years now and you kind of know ... It's interesting, actually, because we've said that we think that this is a good play because at some stage all of us have got emotionally upset. There are other plays that I have done that have been perfectly successful plays they haven't hit that kind of emotional button, that kind of – Oh Dear! That kind of twinge of humanity, and I'm clear now that the reason that I stopped doing Grange Hill and Brook side was because I wasn't able to express how I felt about the world and unless you're opening a vein with the writing there seems to be no point doing it, so it has to matter to you really emotionally. I don't show my work to anybody except the actors and that's why the relationship between the actors and myself is quite special. If it something doesn't work, we change it and I don't think I'm particularly precious but it has to work in the space; but the only way you get to know about writing is to write; there's that film, isn't there: *Throw Mama From the Train* Billy Crystal says, "A writer writes," and that's what you have to do. I know this sounds absolute balls, but I don't regard myself as a playwright – I used to be a teacher, I don't walk around Hull thinking, "Oh, I'm a playwright." I just go "Oh, I wouldn't mind writing a play." So it's always about going back to first principles all the time. There have been lots of success in this play, lots of things I have been happy with but already I'm thinking – "Oh, if I were to do that again, I'd change that and I'd change that." Yeah – Final question.

AUDIENCE: Have you ever come up with a character that you would like to play yourself?

GODBER: All of them! (LAUGHTER) Absolutely all of them. A couple of years ago we did a musical that Charlie was in and she was ill and I went on to play her part. So I wanted to play that part, I wanted to play his part, I wanted to play hers. You've got to do – funnily enough, earlier in the year I did *Bouncers* on the West End and it wasn't what I expected it to be; because I wanted to play all four parts – “Oh, I've only got one!” You've got to invest, you've really got to feel if... you've got to know inside them at any time. One final question.

AUDIENCE: Do you find it really hard handing your plays over to other people?

GODBER: Yes – that's why I don't let them do the first one; it would kill me. I always direct the first play and then people can do what they want. I was in Windsor last night watching *Perfect Pitch* which I directed for Alan Ayckbourn two years ago and it was a very long evening! And just at the end you have to say how much I enjoyed it. Thank you – I really appreciate you. Thank you very much.

\*C.P.O. Compulsory Purchase Order