

# The Events

by David Greig



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*The Events*, in a co-production by the Actors Touring Company, the Young Vic Theatre, Brageteatret and Schauspielhaus Wien, was first performed at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, on 4 August 2013.

**duration approx:** *1 hour & 10mins (no interval)*

**suitable for** *Years 11 - 12*

*DWS performance followed by a 20 - 30 min Q&A session*

**NOTE:** *While the play does not depict violent acts or condone violence, it does deal with themes, situations and language that may not be appropriate for young audiences.*

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# Synopsis

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Claire, an Anglican minister with a strong community agenda, is grappling with the unfathomable following a mass shooting. The events of an attack by a gunman on Claire's community church killing several members trigger a spiritual crisis for Claire, igniting a quest for meaning, in an attempt to understand – why?

The Boy is the perpetrator of the mass shooting - an isolated, troubled young man who throughout the play also becomes every other character that Claire encounters and questions on her quest.

Each night, a different Adelaide community choir is performing on stage. The songs performed by the choir on stage chart Claire's journey towards understanding.

## Prologue

While the choirs have rehearsed the music, they are only given the script moments before walking on stage evoking a genuine response to the events around them, building a sense of connectedness between the audience and the stage.



# Writer

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## DAVID GREIG

David is an acclaimed and award-winning playwright, whose plays include *The Events* (Traverse, Scotland, and Young Vic), *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart* (Tron, National Theatre of Scotland), *Midsummer* (Traverse, Soho and Tricycle), *Dunsinane* (Royal Shakespeare Company at Hampstead and National Theatre of Scotland), *Damascus* (Traverse and Tricycle), *Outlying Islands* (Traverse and Royal Court), *The American Pilot* (RSC), *Pyrenees* (Paines Plough), *The Cosmonaut's Last Message to the Woman He*

*Once Loved in the Former Soviet Union* (Donmar Warehouse and Paines Plough) and *The Architect and Europe* (Traverse).

His adaptations include *Creditors* (Donmar Warehouse), *The Bacchae* (Edinburgh International Festival), *Tintin in Tibet* (Barbican, Playhouse and UK tour), *When the Bulbul Stopped Singing* (Traverse Theatre – Amnesty International Award, TapWater Award and Herald Angel), *Caligula* (Donmar Warehouse) and *Peter Pan* (National Theatre of Scotland, Traverse and Barbican). David wrote the adaptation for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which opened in the West End in 2013. *Lanark* opened at the Edinburgh International Festival in summer 2015 and his adaptation of Dr Seuss' *The Lorax* opened at the Old Vic in December 2015.

David's work for children and young people includes *The Monster in the Hall* (TAG Theatre Co, Glasgow, 2010), *Yellow Moon* (TAG Theatre Co, 2006 – TMA Award for Best Show for Children and Young People 2007 and Brian Way Award for Best Children's Play 2007), *Gobbo* (National Theatre of Scotland, 2006), and *Dr Korczak's Example* (TAG Theatre Co, 2001). He has also written extensively for radio.

David is currently writing two screenplays for Hillbilly Films and the BBC. He is also under commission to the Royal Court Theatre and the National Theatre of Scotland. He became the Lyceum's Artistic Director in 2015.

## EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH DAVID GREIG

### 1. How does the play relate to the real life events surrounding the Anders Breivik shootings in Norway?

It's a fictional story which is entirely made up, my story is of a much more 'minor' event than the Breivik shootings. It was very important to me that I had a fictional story – '*Fiction is the lie that tells the truth*' as the saying goes. It seems to me that if I had tried to tell the story of Breivik, I would have got too caught up in it. I needed a fictional story to explore the truth of the questions it raised.

My story is set in Scotland and concerns an attack on a Community Choir. The survivor, Claire, tries to understand what has happened to her. That said, I did carry out an awful lot of research about Breivik, his psychological and political impulses and also other events including 7/7 and the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby. And these events keep happening, for example while the play was receiving its New York debut the California shootings by Elliott Rodger took place – there's no shortage of these tragic events to draw on.

## **2. What research did you carry out in Norway and what challenges and responsibilities did this present?**

I did a fair amount of research in Norway and with Norwegian friends. I have connections there and knew the country fairly well. I spent a week there initially with the director Ramin Gray and some Norwegian colleagues. I interviewed people who were involved, for example psychologists, sociologists, members of the police and journalists. I didn't however, interview survivors at that point as it was only three or four months after the shootings and it felt too raw and close. I was tremendously worried about it being seen as exploitative or voyeuristic so I shied away from interviewing survivors, as that was what everyone else was doing. I needed to get beyond that.

Much later I did speak to the survivor Bjorn Ihler, which informed the piece very deeply. His experience brought two surprising things. Bjorn and another boy had protected two ten-year olds at great risk of their own lives. His personal story was one of heroism and altruism and he said that was true of everyone involved. They were running towards danger to help each other and protect each other. This was both surprising and counterintuitive, that a story about evil actually showed the opposite: that people under pressure are altruistic and good. Also he said something that I later used in the play. At one moment Breivik's gun was pointed at him and he thought he was about to die. At this moment he felt a strange 'tearing sensation.' I asked him, 'What was that?' and he replied 'It was my soul leaving my body'. That was such a vivid and surprising thing. 'When did it come back?' I asked him, 'It hasn't yet', he replied. Subsequently Bjorn emailed to say that it would be a work of months or years to get his soul back.

Around this time I also went to an exhibition at the British Museum of Stone Age art by anonymous artists forty-thousand years ago, and it struck me that the men or women who had carved these little stones would understand what Bjorn had said, he had faced terrible danger and now felt he was on a quest to retrieve his soul. In the 21st century, we are stuck reading accounts of horrific events in the newspapers and can't really understand what has happened. I tried to reflect this search for a primal understanding of traumatic events.

## **3. What is it about drama that goes beyond documentary or news in relating tragic and emotive real-life events?**

I think that drama forces you to inhabit both sides of the story almost physically – literally walking in someone else's shoes. News allows you to look at events but with drama you are inside them.

## **4. How do you use humour in the play?**

I tried to let humour exist in the play, including the dark, sardonic humour of Claire the victim or that I was familiar with from friends who have had bad experiences. I felt it was important not to be artificially unctuous, but to let the story be the story. Sometimes you might want to laugh with The Boy at the ridiculousness of our society, or sometimes with Claire at the ridiculousness of her situation. Humour doesn't go away because of tragedy.

## **5. Which other dramas or writers have inspired you?**

Many and they change all the time! I've always been drawn to Brecht as he understands drama is drama and is not TV or film. It's a medium that knows the actor is on the stage and the audience are present in the audience. Cinema is more of a dream medium. Also I'll always tend to think, 'which Shakespeare play am I rewriting?' The Events shows the influence of the theatre of Ancient Greece with the choir acting as a kind of Greek chorus. Most Greek theatre will have only two people on stage at one time – Clare and The Boy are like the Greek protagonist and antagonist with the Greek chorus behind.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/writersroom/entries/43b12cea-daef-3dae-b90d-770e56aa209f>

# Composer

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## JOHN BROWNE

John is an Irish composer living in London. He studied with Gerald Barry in Ireland and at The Manhattan School of Music in New York with the assistance of a Fulbright Award. He composes music for opera companies, theatres, choirs and increasingly integrates all these into 'choral theatre'. Operas for the Royal Opera House in London include *Demon Juice*, a hip-hop opera in 2007; *Babette's Feast*, a chamber opera in 2002 (revived there in 2004); and *Bullman and the Moonsisters*, created with children to open the new Linbury Theatre. For English National Opera he composed *Midnight's Children* and a trilogy of operas, *The Early Earth Operas* in 2004.



John's theatre work includes many shows in Ireland, visiting Rwanda in 2006/2007 to create *The Mother's Ring*, a music-theatre piece with survivors of the genocide, and he is currently working on another piece of choral theatre, *The Suppliants* for Konzert Theater Bern (2016). His recent work for choirs includes *Small Selves* for Westminster Abbey, *In Tenebris* for the Choir of King's College London, *A Nightingale Sang*, a community cantata at the Southbank Centre 2011 and choral arrangements for the band Elbow. John's other work includes music for Aardman animations, the BAFTA award-winning *Itch of the Golden Nit* and *Royals, Rascals and Us* (2015); teaching the Write-An-Opera course at Dartington Summer School; and leading many music-theatre projects in China and India for the British Council, and in Norway and South Africa for the Royal Opera House. In 2009, John was appointed composer-in-residence at Florence Nightingale School of Nursing & Midwifery, King's College London.

# Director

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## CLARE WATSON

Clare is Artistic Director at St Martins in Melbourne where she is collaborating with children and teenagers to make works for the mainstage and festivals. Her recent work includes *I saw the second one hit* (Malthouse Theatre) and *Fitter. Faster. Better.* (Dance Massive, Junction Arts Festival, Malthouse Theatre). She directed the critically acclaimed *What Rhymes with Cars and Girls* for Melbourne Theatre Company in 2015, which received four Helpmann nominations including Best Director.

In 2014, Clare was Female Director-in-Residence at Malthouse Theatre and she is an MTC Women Directors Program alumna. Her stage credits also include *I Heart John McEnroe* (Uninvited Guests/Theatre Works – winner Green Room Award for Best Ensemble, and five nominations including Best Director); *The Man with the September Face* (Full Tilt/Arts Centre); *Smashed* (Stables); and *Hotel* (Melbourne Fringe Festival – winner Best Director). Clare is a graduate of Directing at the Victorian College of the Arts. In 2016, her mainstage work also includes *Lungs* by Duncan MacMillan at Melbourne Theatre Company and the devised work *Gonzo* at Malthouse Theatre.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Human behaviour is often unfathomable and violent actions leave in their wake sheer bewilderment, anger and grief. To be a good human being, as Martha Nussbaum puts it, is to have a kind of openness to the world, an ability to trust uncertain things beyond your own control that can lead you to be shattered in very extreme circumstances for which you were not to blame.

*The Events* by David Greig premiered in Edinburgh in 2013 and was a collaboration between The Actors Touring Company and Drammatikkenshus, Oslo. The play began as an investigation of the shattering events that took place in Norway perpetrated by Anders Breivik, who first planted a bomb in front of a government building and then, dressed as a police officer, he took a ferry to the idyllic island of Utoya where he shot dead 69 young people. During his court case, he claimed he was defending Norway from immigration and that multiculturalism had failed his country. Greig takes these events as a stepping off point for a fictionalised account of a mass shooting, set in a small town in Scotland.

We meet Claire, an Anglican minister, who is wrestling with the unfathomable following a mass shooting. She is on the quest for truth and reason, driven by a need to shed light on why an individual would create such cruel destruction.

The Boy is an antagonist we recognise from contemporary media; he is an isolated, troubled young man with a gun. In him, we see Anders Breivik, Dylann Storm Roof, Chris Harper Mercer, James Holmes and Martin Bryant, all outsiders. We also see glimpses of Camus' outsider, Meursault. The Boy becomes every other character that Claire encounters throughout the play; she is so obsessed in her search that everyone is filtered through the lens of her attacker.

And like the earliest theatre of ancient Greece, we are joined by a chorus. Each night, a community choir brings their songs to the stage, and it is through watching the choir watching *The Events* unfold that the most tantalising transaction is taking place. As the choir sings, the vibrations of their music move through us, and this has the capacity to sync up our collective heartbeats. Singing is a fundamental tool



of social inclusion across cultures. Herein lies the hope, that our connectedness to community promotes our capacity to be good human beings. To sit in an audience together, in this beautiful hall steeped in the history of two centuries of community events gives us the connectedness that can transcend the bewilderment.

*The Events* can be, as David Greig says himself “slippery and difficult”. It is a work that sets our moral compass swinging wildly. Tonight, we lay the puzzle pieces out before you, ready to assemble.

A special thanks to all of the community choirs that collaborated with us on this production, and to the community of Adelaide for so warmly welcoming us.

# Musical Director

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Luke Byrne was the Musical Director for the Sydney Festival and part of the creative team during rehearsals. Carol Young is the Musical Director for the Adelaide season.

## **CAROL YOUNG (Adelaide Season)**

Having previously collaborated with State Theatre Company as a vocal coach, Carol is really excited to be the Musical Director for the Adelaide season of *The Events*.

An accomplished piano accompanist, musical director and arranger, Carol's experience as a freelance artist comfortably spans many genres.

As a performing artist (singer, pianist, actor) Carol has appeared at the Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane Festivals, Adelaide & Perth Cabaret Festivals, Melbourne Comedy Festival and The Famous Spiegeltent, Adelaide Fringe and Adelaide Cabaret Fringe. She has performed with the State Opera of South Australia, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, the Adelaide Vocal Project, Leigh Warren and Dancers, the Adelaide Art Orchestra and the Adelaide Festival Centre.



Carol was a respected faculty member at Adelaide College of the Arts from 1994-2013 where she lectured in music and singing to both acting and dance students. She won the inaugural keyboard position with Band of the South Australia Police, which she held from 2012-2015.

Currently, Carol is focusing on a variety of undertakings as a freelance artist, including pianist/musical director for Adelaide cabaret performer Candy Chambers, conducting a "feel good" choir called La Land, and an upcoming collaboration with Flying Penguin Productions and the Zephyr Quartet.

## **QUESTIONS FOR MUSICAL DIRECTOR - Luke Byrne (Sydney Season)**

### **1. What attracted you to this piece?**

I'm always interested in ways for music and theatre to interact beyond what is generally conceived of as 'musical theatre'. The various songs in *The Events* function in different ways: some, like "I See a Boy" and "We're All Here" are descriptive of narrative elements, whereas "How Great Thou Art" or "The Norwegian Coffee Song" place us in that community hall looking at people just like us, which is heightened by our growing knowledge of what will happen to those choir members.

What I like most about *The Events* are the multiple echoes and threads between the text and the lyrics. Sometimes the music will take the lead, planting a motif that is then recalled in a later scene, and in other instances a song will take text that we have heard a character speak earlier and re-frame it in music. This fluid relationship between drama and music, much like the fluidity of scene and character in the play, still excite me as I hear it from the piano onstage every night, no matter how many times I've already heard it.

### **2. Why do you think different community choirs are used each night as opposed to one choir throughout?**

I've had this exact conversation with our choirs in Sydney. Firstly, if any given choir does many shows then the performance runs the risk of becoming too polished and fluent, thereby losing its authenticity. This is hard for me, because I naturally want to make any performance as polished and fluent as

possible! Secondly, the little nuances that each choir give the piece in performance - their accents in the spoken dialogue, their own song and so on - enhance the play and bring out different details each night.

### **3. What themes do you think the music addresses in terms of the play? And how are emotions portrayed through the music and choir?**

These two questions have overlapping answers. The choir will often function like a Greek Chorus, providing commentary as a collective voice but in a somewhat removed way. The emotion is not conveyed through an emotive delivery of any particular lyric or melody, but is created through the juxtaposition of the music with the dialogue or visual elements. The best instance of this is the juxtaposition of "How Great Thou Art" with the scene that immediately follows it, and if I say anything more it will be a spoiler!

In a similar way, the music does not directly address themes on its own but operates in tandem with the scenes, framing and colouring them in a multitude of ways. Sometimes a song will actually subvert a particular theme of the play through its musical style, such is in the song "Gavrilo Princip". The exception is the final song, which effectively sums the play up but does so in a way that is fittingly ordinary and every day, even mundane, which is also one of the things David Greig is saying about people who experience such "events". It would be disingenuous for this play to end with a rousing "gee we all got through it together!" sort of song, and what John Browne has written plays the emotion in a beautifully understated way which is more affecting.

### **4. Why do you think having a choir onstage is an important element of the play?**

There's something about the anonymity of mass shootings as we hear about them in the media, probably because the defining aspect is the number of deaths: "fourteen dead, twenty-two injured in San Bernadino". Even though we don't see violence depicted in *The Events*, having those faces on stage in the background the entire time creates an uneasiness - "are they the remnants of the choir after the shooting? Are they the old choir before it happened, and if so who's going to get shot?"

Choral singing brings back all sorts of memories for people - school, church, community groups - that are precious to us, and for those places to be threatened is almost unthinkable (but sadly all too true).

On a more basic and positive level, there really is nothing like being in a room with a whole bunch of people singing, whether you're listening or taking part. There is much research about the positive physical and psychological effects of group singing, but most people don't need evidence, it is something that is innately felt. This is why community choirs are so numerous and healthy, both here in Australia and in the UK where *The Events* is originally from, and the reactions of our choristers to being in this production have been immensely rewarding for us.

# Actors

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## **JOHNNY CARR - The Boy**

Johnny is a 2008 Victorian College of the Arts Acting graduate. His theatre credits include *What Rhymes with Cars and Girls* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *The Dream* (Bell Shakespeare); *The Boys* (Griffin Theatre); *M + M* (Daniel Schlusser Ensemble); *The Suicide* (The Hayloft Project); and *Leaves of Glass* and *The Rites of Evil* (Red Stitch Actors' Theatre). Johnny's screen credits include *Stories I Want to Tell You in Person*, *Rush*, *City Homicide*, *Sex: An Unnatural History*

and the web series *The Greatest Love of All*. In 2013, Johnny received the Marten Bequest Travel Scholarship for Acting. Johnny has been a proud member of Equity since 2008.

## **CATHERINE McCLEMENTS - Claire**

Catherine's stage credits for Belvoir include *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Macbeth*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *The Blind Giant is Dancing* and *It Just Stopped* (Belvoir/Malthouse). Her other stage credits, among many others, include *Phèdre* (Bell Shakespeare); *The Other Place*, *Cruel and Tender*, *Angels in America* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *The Crucible* (Sydney Theatre Company); and *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* (Malthouse Theatre).



Catherine received a Green Room Award nomination for Best Female Actor for *Angels in America* and a Helpmann Award nomination for Best Actress in a Play for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Catherine's most recent television credits include *The Beautiful Lie*, *Time of Our Lives*, *The Broken Shore*, *Wentworth*, *Rush* and *Tangle*. Her performance in *Tangle* earned her the AFI Award for Best Actress in a Television Drama, two ASTRA Awards for Most Outstanding Performance by an Actress, and a Silver Logie Award nomination for Most Outstanding Actress.

Catherine has also appeared in *The Pacific*, *Crashburn*, *The Secret Life of Us*, *Water Rats*, *Waiting at the Royals*, *Call Me Mum*, *GP* and *My Brother Tom*, and the telemovies *After the Deluge*, *Mary Bryant* and *The Falls*. Her performance in *Water Rats* earned her a Silver Logie Award for Most Outstanding Actress, while her guest role in *The Secret Life of Us* saw her awarded the AFI Award for Best Actress in a Guest Role in a TV Drama Series. Catherine received an AFI Award for Best Actress in her feature film debut *Weekend with Kate*. She has also appeared in *Floodhouse*, *Better Than Sex*, *The Right Hand Man*, *Struck By Lightning* and *Just Us*, for which she was voted Best Supporting Actress at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival in Japan. Catherine was recently seen in David Parker's feature film *The Menkoff Method*.

## **INTERVIEW WITH CATHERINE McCLEMENTS by Patrick McDonald**

### **1. What is it like having a community choir on-stage with you?**

It is a really wonderful experience for everyone involved. It's not like a narrative, where people are watching the story and go through some cathartic thing. It's like a contemplation that both the audience and the people on stage perform together.

Having the choir onstage opens up something in the audience - it's strangely uplifting, strangely emotional. It's just allowing everyone to open up. It wasn't until we got the choirs on stage and the audience there and we performed it that I suddenly understood what was going on.

The thing about the choir is that it is 'us' there, in all our different body shapes and sizes. Because the choir is always behind us on stage, the audience looks at the choir and the choir looks at the audience.

They act little scenes and sing songs that David Greig has written for the show, as well as sing their own music, so they are very 'alive' in the piece.

## **2. What is the play about?**

'How do we respond?' Intellectually, we want to understand – certainly Claire does, she wants to understand how a person can exist in our world, what makes such a person, why does it happen? But at the same time, emotionally she responds like any human being in a moment of terror, against someone threatening their life. It's the attempt to marry the two, to come out the other side with a certain compassion and love of life that allows you to keep going in a positive way.

There is a time when all people in religious orders question their faith and conversely, the play also questions the nature of evil. Evil exists as an idea and is certainly bandied around at times like this. She calls The Boy evil, but explores the idea of what evil is – it's not necessarily something you're born with.

It's also about forgiveness. That was the thing about Charleston – there were all those people in that church, one by one, who said 'I forgive you' to that boy. The extraordinary ability of people to forgive in those moments is really what we all, as human beings, respond to, and all see as the challenge that would face us in those times.

## **3. Something special happened at one of the performances, can you explain?**

I had a particularly touching moment where a lady came up to me who had a daughter on the island of Utoya, and a son who was a security guard at a building that was bombed. Both survived but she had a very close relationship to what happened. She said that up until now she thought she was weird because she had all these arguments going on in her head – and Claire had articulated all those things.

# Characters

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## CLAIRE

Claire is a liberal, enlightened and friendly Anglican priest who works in the community to bring them together and give them purpose. She leads a diverse, inclusive community choir. She's vegetarian, a little bit happyish and works with depressed people.

She is also a survivor, which leads to her to question 'why.' This obsessive need to understand mirrors the community's drive for closure after violent events. This need drives her to madness, rage, moments of mania and fantastical delusion, all the while trying to understand what happened and why she was spared.

## THE BOY

One person portrays the rest of the characters in the show:

- The shooter, identified only as 'The Boy'
- A grief counselor
- The Boy's father, a right-wing politician whose teachings The Boy followed
- A schoolmate of The Boy who remembers how The Boy was bullied and rejected
- Claire's lover
- As well as assorted local residents whom Claire interviews.

The characters are written to allow the audience to consider the ideas, without being swayed by the emotions of each character. This style reflects Brechtian distancing techniques, *"no matter to whom Claire looks to for explanation or comfort, she only and always sees the same face"* - Talya Kingston (*Theatre Journal*)

The Boy crystallizes so many of the dissociate young men who seem to perpetrate these violent events. He allows Claire to question human nature and the Evil that she has seen:

**The Boy** *Evil?*

**Claire** *Yes.*

*Evil is in the world, Catriona.*

*He brought it.*

*If I can find its cause and lay it to rest, I'll sleep.*

*Do you understand?*

**The Boy** *What if you can't find it, Claire?*

*What if bad things just happen?*

# Themes

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## **Why would David Greig want to write about such a horrible event?**

David is inquisitive about the world around him and is moved to write about it. He was very interested in how a community reacts to and survives after an act of violence – a theme we see regularly in newspapers and in media whether it is a high school shooting in the United States, a massacre of children in Norway, acts of civil war in the Middle East or a terrorist attack. The violent event is the catalyst for his exploration of how human beings respond and heal subsequently, rather than the act itself. Ultimately it's a story about people and their responses to something awful.

But the play that has resulted is quiet, compassionate and restrained. This is a mighty play about not just one lost soul, but many. It is about grief, anger and revenge, but also about the things that bind us together as a community, the things that drive us apart, and what it is that makes us human.

Throughout, the choir are present on stage, their voices soaring as they sing what cannot be said.

<http://artidea.org/theeventsfaq>

## **VIOLENCE**

*"How can I hate him if I don't understand him?"*

The story revolves around an act of violence, but the shooting is not represented realistically on stage. The play is not a piece of journalistic theatre, nor is it naturalistic in style. It is about the healing process that Claire goes through as she sets out on a quest to answer the most difficult question of all: 'Why?' Along the way she questions the idea of what evil is and whether people are born that way, or whether it is imprinted upon them.

## **COMMUNITY**

*The Events* is a play about community. Claire is not only a priest, but a community worker dealing with immigrants and community integration. She provides a safe place for them to come together and belong. As part of her work, she runs a choir.

*Come on in.*

*Don't be shy.*

*Everyone's welcome here.....*

*We're all a big crazy tribe here...*

*Why don't you sit with us and if you feel like singing – sing*

*And if you don't feel like singing.*

*Well that's ok too.*

*Nobody feels like singing all the time.*

This play takes place after the mass shooting of her choir in which she has narrowly survived. She has begun working with a new choir and through this begins the healing process for Claire and other characters in the play. It also shows the limits of empathy and how you can move on if you've been involved in something truly life changing.

Onstage, the choir represents the community in mourning and they also help Claire with her healing. Essentially the choir represent us – ordinary people, full of diversity and they have a commitment to a shared community experience, such as singing.

The final song, *We're All Here* talks about togetherness but acknowledges the fact that there are others that are not.

## **FAITH**

Being the only survivor of a mass shooting of her choir, Claire is left shocked and bereft. She begins to question her faith and starts to seek out reasons why someone could do something so terrible. This quest for understanding tears her own life apart. To her counselor she says that she hears nothing in her prayers, that she feels, *"That there is nothing. Nothing beyond. Nothing here."*

As a priest, she expected a visit from God to help her understand what happened, to remind her that there was something there. She hasn't had that connection and queries her faith.

The character Claire reflects on her feelings during the event;

*When I was hiding in the music room and the boy burst in and I knew I was going to die.*

*At that moment I felt something.*

*A feeling I've never had before, a feeling of tearing, of something pulling away from its moorings suddenly and in its wake – an overwhelming absence. It was a feeling as precise and as physical as any feeling I've ever had...*

*It was my soul leaving my body.*

## **FORGIVENESS IN THE FACE OF ATROCITY**

Families of the victims from the shooting at a church in Charleston, USA forgave the shooter.

*"Charleston is a very strong community. We have big hearts. We're a very loving community. We're going to reach out to everyone, all victims, and we will touch them."*

*"We welcomed you Wednesday night in our Bible study with open arms. You have killed some of the most beautiful people that I know. Every fiber in my body hurts ... and I'll never be the same. But as we said in Bible study, we enjoyed you but may God have mercy on you."*

Claire doesn't come to the point of forgiving the shooter, however, she visits him in jail to ask 'why.' His response doesn't give her closure, *"I was angry and I had a gun."* Enraged with the simplicity of his answer she wants to kill him, but in the end, can't bring herself to do it. Does she forgive him? It is ultimately unclear, but her life continues on regardless.

## **COMPREHENSION**

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*"Though we may never be able to understand why, we can at least try to examine how."*

*– Dan Hutton (A Young Theatre, 2013)*

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*The Events* shows Claire question why? Why now? Why me? Could things have been different? She is trying to understand why a boy walked into her community choir rehearsal and shot several members dead and left her alive. The emptiness she feels from not getting answers is eating her up with rage; this finds her questioning her faith. She becomes abrasive and irritating company, with others worried about her sanity. Her survivor's grief doesn't purify her, but contaminates and misshapes her.

But sometimes, the more information you gather, the further you are from finding the truth. She speaks to the boy's father; a right-wing politician whose teaching he followed; his friend, who remembers how The Boy was bullied and, eventually, The Boy himself. Yet each time, rather than piecing the story together, it becomes all the more difficult to understand that fundamental question of why?



Can an act like this be attributed to something a rational mind can grasp? Perhaps as The Boy hints, he was protecting his tribe from the perceived threat of multiculturalism and a modern world gone soft? Or was it something that happened in his childhood – bullying, or a parental absence? Is there a psychiatric label that might work – narcissism, repressed homosexuality, or a messiah complex? What if there were no adequate explanations? What if, in trying to make sense of such barbarity it was just, “*an endless throwing of yourself against a wall in the hope you’ll break it down, which you won’t.*”

The writer, David Greig wonders, “*Understanding would give the perpetrators some kind of victory. The play ends in an act of retribution, but it’s all a bit ambiguous at the moment, and we were just discussing whether any of us would kill the perpetrators of such a crime. Some would, some definitely wouldn’t, but what I think the play does look at is that this idea of understanding is kind of a shroud that’s put in front of you to avoid the darkness, when actually you need to face the darkness.*”



# Music

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One of the methods Claire has for coming to terms with what had happened is to lead a series of rehearsals with her choir of specially chosen music to aid the healing process. The songs in the play relate to those rehearsals and chart Claire's journey towards understanding.

The songs reference a range of spiritual music: traditional Christian hymns; contemporary spiritual minimalism; rave music (representing the spiritual experience that some people experience in the dance tent at Glastonbury); 'Om'; improvised keening; monkey chanting (related to Hinduism); and gospel music.

Each night a different community choir performs onstage. The first song is chosen by the choir as a way to introduce them. Next is a playful warm-up song led by Claire, *The Norwegian Coffee Song*. It is a folk song and relates to the village or community.

*Soul* underscores Claire discussing a deep sense of spiritual loss in an attempt to describe the universal quest for the spiritual, for the eternal and is tender and empathetic. Next Claire attempts to get inside the head of the perpetrator with a very haunting song. (Originally this piece was *Bonkers* by Dizze Rascal representing the spiritual experience that many people have during raves, although this has been changed for the Australian performances.)

Claire tries to seek comfort in the old familiar hymn, *How Great Thou Art* but has difficulty connecting with it and redirects the quality of the singing during the performance. Next comes a lullaby song by one lone member of the choir, whilst Claire fantasises about the perpetrator never having been born.

Then comes *Gavrilo Princip* in a display of rampant ego as the perpetrator has invaded Claire's head and her every thought has now usurped her choir. The style is gospel meets stadium rock.

The final piece, *We're All Here* brings forth the idea of being together and being separate. That some people are here and others didn't survive. The idea is to make the song an authentic human connection about overcoming trepidation and the difficulty of dropping one's guard, or being emotionally naked.

## THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY CHOIR

*The Events* features a different community choir at each performance. They play the Choir, the community and a Greek Chorus, questioning Claire's actions and warning her about her destructive path. They ask questions of The Boy, from what his favourite song is, to what he likes to eat, perhaps commenting on the banality of the media who often make celebrities and cult figures of people with deadly intentions.

One choir member also reads out a piece about the difference between chimps and bonobos and that humans share 98% of our DNA with each. Greig is asking us to consider which we'd like to relate ourselves to the most.

Each choir is unique and has their own individual style, but are united through their love of singing, their willingness to be part of something extraordinary and the community spirit found within all choirs. "*The choir is a way to connect more deeply with audiences and finding a way of representing a community accurately. Joining the cast onstage each night they experience the struggle to digest, but also embody what is at stake.*" – Ramin Gray (Artistic Director – Actors Touring Company)

# Interesting Reading

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David Greig's *The Events* used the Norwegian Massacre as a source of inspiration and attempts to interrogate many of the questions surrounding it, but never actively refers to its details. Instead, the piece is a fictionalized version of an 'event', and a look into the communities after these kind of atrocities occur.

When Anders Breivik killed 77 people in Norway in July 2011, his actions set out to destroy a community, whilst simultaneously and unintentionally galvanising other communities around the world. From simple outpourings of grief, through reams of testimony, heated debate, lengthy judicial process, psychiatric analysis and raw soul searching to the writing and performing of this play, it's clear that we need to churn over such events in an effort to understand. And, of course, the very best forum for those efforts remains the public, shared space of the theatre.

## 2011 NORWAY ATTACKS

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*"We are not going to be shocked and intimidated into silence. The bravery that these young people have shown is catching. We're going to answer hatred with love. We're going to honour our heroes forever." – Jens Stoltenberg (Norway's Prime Minister)*

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In 2011, two sequential attacks by lone terrorist Anders Behring Breivik were carried out in Norway, killing 77 people. The first attack was a car bomb in Oslo placed in front of an office housing the office of Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg. This explosion killed eight people and injured another 209 people.

The second attack occurred less than two hours later at a summer camp on the island of Utøya in Tyrifjorden (Lake Tyri) 40 kilometers northwest of Oslo. The annual youth camp was organised by the youth division of the ruling Norwegian Labour Party and was attended by approximately 600 teenagers. Entrance to the island is by boat or ferry.

Breivik dressed in a police uniform and showed false identification, before opening fire and killing 69 people and injuring another 110. The Norwegian Police arrested 32-year-old Anders Breivik, a right-wing extremist, and at trial he was sentenced to 21 years in prison. He claimed to have begun the planning of the attacks at the age of 23 and during this time had debates on Internet forums, had spoken against Islam and immigration for years. After failing to obtain weapons in Prague, Germany and Serbia, he bought his weapons legally in Norway claiming they were for deer hunting.

On the island, he claimed that he was checking on them after the Oslo explosion. He was met by the camp leader who contacted the security officer before he killed them both. From there, he started shooting indiscriminately. First, people on the island, and later, people who were trying to escape by swimming across the lake. One survivor described how several victims he wounded pretended to be dead to survive. Many hid in the undergrowth or in buildings under beds and in toilets. Some swam to the rocks around the shoreline and hid in the caves.

The mass shooting lasted for around an hour and a half, ending when a police special task force arrived and the gunman surrendered. Local residents sailed out to rescue the survivors who were in the freezing lake.

Norway's Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg in his address at the memorial service two days after the tragedy said, *"We are still shocked by what has happened, but we will never give up our values. Our response is more democracy, more openness, and more humanity."* He said that Norway would not seek vengeance as America had done after the 9/11 attacks. *"We will answer hatred with love,"* he said, *"I hope and also believe that the Norway we will see after will be more open, a more tolerant society than what we had before."*

## TRIBE

When Claire finally confronts The Boy in prison, the closest she gets to an answer from him is, *"I think I just got a bit obsessed with aborigines."* Norway's shooter Breivik infamously linked the struggle for Aboriginal land in Australia with the supposed entitlement of 'indigenous' populations in Europe.

Greig begins this play building on this connection with the Boy's prologue;

*Imagine a boy -*

*An aboriginal boy -*

*He's standing on the rocks above the Illawarra River just at the very moment three ships from England come sailing up the long grey waters of the cover.*

*Huge white sails -*

*These are craft unlike any he's ever seen - spacecraft almost -*

*And on these ships are convicts; a condition of personhood the boy does not know; on these ships are officers and ratings; conditions of personhood the boy does not know.*

*Carried on these ships are class and religion and disease and a multitude of other instruments of objectification and violence all of which are about to be unleashed upon his people.*

*But the boy does not know this yet; he doesn't know any of this yet.*

*The only things he knows are his land, his tribe, and the tribes beside.*

*And now these sails.*

*If you could go back in time and speak to that boy, what would you say?*

*You would stand on the rocks and you would point at the ship and you would say - 'Kill them. Kill them all.'*

This analogy can serve to legitimise The Boy's grievances - that the illusion of an 'indigenous' identity can be maintained, but Claire destroys it towards the end of the play by producing an alternative version of the imagined boy:

*Did you imagine asking him how he felt about those ships? What he thought? I mean I only wonder because... Isn't it possible, isn't it just possible that - after sixty thousand years of entirely unchanged culture - isn't it just possible that if you asked the aboriginal boy how he felt about seeing those ships in that moment that he must say - in an aboriginal language of course - something like, 'Thank f\*! Thanks F\* something interesting has finally happened around here. That's possible, isn't it?'*

Claire and The Boy also use the word 'tribe' in different ways. The Boy talks about the indigenous tribe above, but also comments in his defense, *"Blood must be shed in defence of the tribe."* Claire presents her own interpretation when she invites The Boy to join the choir: *"Everyone's welcome here. [...] We're all a big crazy tribe here."* The Boy's murderous act temporarily destroys the possibility of an 'open' tribe, but Claire concludes the play with the same choice of words, just before the final tune.

### **GREEK CHORUS**

The Choir fulfils their role representing the community, and at times at as a Greek chorus. A Greek chorus is a group of performers in the plays of classical Greece, who comment with a collective voice on the dramatic action. They represented the general population, instead of the heroes, gods and goddesses who were the main characters.

They danced, sang or spoke their lines, sometimes in unison and sometimes wearing masks. Plays of ancient Greek theatre always included a chorus because it offered a summary of the information to help the audience follow the performance. They would comment on themes, demonstrate how the audience might react, expressed the secrets or hidden fears of the main characters, or provide characters with insight.

*"The chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action."*

# Designer

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## GEOFF COBHAM

Geoff is State Theatre Company's Resident Designer and has worked as a Production Manager, Lighting Designer, Set Designer, Event Producer and Venue Designer.

His recent set & lighting design for State Theatre Company include *The Events* (Malthouse Theatre, Belvoir & State Theatre Company), *Betrayal*, *Little Bird*, *The Seagull*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *The Kruezer Sonata*. Other set & lighting design credits include *Nothing to Lose*, *Never Did Me Any Harm*, *Not In A Million Years*, *The Age I'm In*, *Already Elsewhere*, *Same but Different* (Force Majeure); *Construct* (Tanja Leidtke); *Ode to Nonsense*, *The Tragical Life of Cheeseboy*, *Wolf*, *Man Covets Bird* (Slingsby); *Fastest Boy*, *Emily Loves to Bounce*, *Me and My Shadow* (Patch Theatre); and *The Flying Dutchman* (State Opera of South Australia)

His recent lighting design credits for State Theatre Company include *Mortido*, *Volpone*, *Masquerade* (Griffin Theatre Company & State Theatre Company); *Madame* (Torque Show, Vitalstatistix, State Theatre Company); *Othello*, *Neighbourhood Watch*, *Babyteeth*, *Pinocchio* (Windmill Theatre and State Theatre Company); and *Speaking in Tongues*, *romeo&juliet*, *Attempts on Her Life*, *Metro Street*, *The Goat*, *Night Letters*. Other lighting design credits include *G*, *Vocabulary*, *Nothing* (Australian Dance Theatre); *Beetle Graduation*, *Skip Miller*, *The Hypochondriac*, *Drums in the Night*, *This Uncharted Hour*, *The Duckshooter* (Brink Productions); *Not according to plan*, *Impulse*, *Phillip Glass Trilogy*, *Quick Brown Fox* (Leigh Warren & Dancers); *Salt*, *Landmark*, *Rebel*, *Starry Eyed*, *In The Blood* (Restless Dance Theatre); and *Plop*, *The Wizard of Oz* (Windmill Theatre).

At the 2015 Helpmann Awards, Ceremony, Geoff received a Helpmann Award for Best Scenic Design for the STCSA production of *Little Bird*. He has also received the Ruby Award for Sustained Contribution, the Sydney Theatre Award Best Lighting Design for *Never Did Me Any Harm*, and the Green Room Award Best Lighting Design for *Night Letters*. He has produced many outdoor events and clubs for festivals and received a Churchill fellowship in 2010 to study outdoor theatre in Europe.

## DESIGNER'S NOTE

In designing *The Events*, the director and I explored a whole range of abstract possibilities but quickly returned to the reality of the play's setting; a church hall. Basically we tried to transport the audience to a space in which a choir might rehearse and then support the emotional narrative with the lighting. The challenge of the set design is that it tours to 4 very different venues, from an actual town hall in Granville to Her Majesty's Theatre and then to Malthouse and Belvoir. We chose to use a series of "work light" style fittings hanging over the stage and auditorium, as this is a set element that is possible to achieve in each venue and helps include the audience in the setting of the play.

The other set elements are an aged timber floor, wooden choir risers, a piano, a trestle table and 9 red stackable chairs.

In designing the lights, I tried to make it feel like the "work lights" were doing most of the lighting and kept the rest of the lighting to a minimum. 9 of the work lights have a sophisticated LED wash unit hidden within them; this allows me to provide coloured top-light to the more atmospheric parts of the show. 3 of the work lights also have circular fluorescent lights in them for the prison scene.



Instead of having lots of sidelight of different colours, I use 3 LED profiles per side that can be any of a million colours. Usually I would have to have 9 profiles per side to achieve the colour variations we require.

The difficult part of the design has been finding the right balance between the dramatic lighting and the more natural rehearsal room feeling.



# Essay Questions

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## ENGLISH QUESTIONS

1. Playwright David Greig said, 'Fiction is the lie that tells the truth.' Discuss this statement in regards to the play *The Events*.
2. Discuss the role of the choir and the elements that it introduced into the play.
3. The words, "*This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine*" – *The Tempest*. Discuss this statement in regards to *The Events*.
4. Does Claire forgive? Discuss.
5. Research some other violent events such as Sandy Hook, Columbine and Charleston (to name a few) and compare how the media view and report on the perpetrators.
6. Your thoughts: Are we born with evil, or is it imprinted on us?
7. Re-read the Norwegian Prime Minister's comment regarding the massacre, "*We will answer hatred with love.*" Are we as a community able to do this? Discuss.
8. Research the meaning of a 'tribe' and then discuss in relation to The Boy and Claire's view.
9. The play opens with The Boy's speech of an Aboriginal boy watching the English came sailing in. He comments, "*If you could go back in time and speak to that boy, what would you say?*" Discuss.

## DRAMA QUESTIONS

1. The choir have been likened to a Greek chorus, or being Brechtian. Choose one of these techniques and discuss how it worked in the play.
2. What is the main purpose of the play and how did they further the narrative?
3. The set design can be described as quite basic. Discuss how the design highlighted the themes and the dramatic elements of the play.
4. Discuss the lighting design and how it was used throughout the play.
5. How did the play represent violence without showing it?

## WRITING

Writers are often inspired by an 'event'. Choose a recent event and write a short monologue from one of the character's point of view. Really think about trying to convey the emotion that character is feeling through your words.



# Tables

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	production elements	performance elements
strengths		
impact on audiences		
weaknesses		

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design role	technique	What did this contribute to the performance?
lighting	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	
music	<i>one</i>	
	<i>two</i>	
	<i>three</i>	

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