

I'll Take You to Mrs Cole! is a single item practice research output including the creation and performances of children's theatre show *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* (2019), commissioned by Complicité and co-produced by Polka Theatre.

The research intervenes in making and research practices in children's theatre and articulates a new methodology and dramaturgy informed by Two Tone music (established in the 1970s and 1980s in Coventry). The Two Tone dramaturgy developed in the practice influences not only the aesthetic and sonic elements of the work, but also the wider dramaturgical and creative process, and it underscores the importance of inclusive and non-hierarchical devising processes. Dealing with narratives of race, class and community, *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* aims to stimulate inter-generational conversations amongst audiences around these issues.

The Two Tone dramaturgy enables the practice to foreground the relevance of the socio-economic and political context of Two Tone music under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in the late 1970s and 1980s to contemporary culture under a Conservative government in the late 2010s. And, in a context where children's theatre is often undervalued within the wider theatre ecology, contemporary dramaturgical practices of children's theatre are extended to present an innovative and challenging children's theatre production.

I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!

Catherine Alexander



Materials which comprise or support this submission can be found inside the box or on the USB drive  embedded in the box's interior lid. Within this publication, references for components of the submission are found in the right margin using a lettering system A–H. Items marked with an * are components of the output, all other items are contextual.

- A* Film of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* at Theatre Peckham 
- B* Trailer for *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* 
- C Montage video of developing *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* 
- D* Working script of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!*
- E Social Story Performance Pack
- F BBC Radio 4 interview as part of the documentary *Fence Me In* by Adam Fowler 
- G Audience Vox Pops 
- H Recordings of original songs 

Further information on these materials can be found on the reverse of the box's interior lid.

Catherine Alexander

I'LL TAKE YOU TO MRS COLE!

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Published by The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London

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www.cssd.ac.uk/research

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Images:
COVER: Publicity shot. Diana Yekinni, Barry Fitzgerald, Mae Munuo as band members of 'Dirty House';
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Design: Valle Walkley
Print: Push / Boss

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-8383967-1-8

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Acknowledgements: Barry Fitzgerald, Mae Munuo, Diana Yekinni, Ben Grant, Hayley Egan, Amber Cooper-Davies, Jai Morjaria, Clancy Flynn, Jessica Murrain, Oliver Grant, Keziah Joseph, Lucas Button, Sophie Jacobs, Josie Dexter, Michael Fox, Steve Tiplady, Clean Break Studio, The National Youth Theatre, Royal Central Bankside, Arts Admin, Theatre Peckham, Pleasance Theatre (Edinburgh), Gospel Oak Primary School.

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Overview

This single item output involves the creation and performances of children's theatre show *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* (see the film of the performance, the trailer and the working script). The output is further supported by a short montage video detailing the development of the work from a design perspective from workshops and rehearsal to final production, a printed Social Story Performance Pack for the performance, given to young audiences prior to the performances and audience vox pops. This work was disseminated through the performances, participation in a Radio 4 documentary during the process, and further through workshops and presentations detailed in the Findings section.

I'll Take You to Mrs Cole! is a theatre adaptation of a children's picture book exploring themes of race, class, immigration, identity and cultural difference, developed with Complicité and Polka Theatre. I have worked with Complicité for 25 years as a director, developing inventive performance practice alongside the company. My work with Complicité includes Associate Director on *The Elephant Vanishes* (2003), *A Disappearing Number* (2007) and *The Master and Margarita* (2012). Drawing on my extensive experience both with Complicité and my independent practice as a theatre director, researcher and teacher, in developing *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!*, I took the role of lead researcher. This is the first time I have created an adaptation from a children's picture book, and it was an opportunity to develop new dramaturgies in relation to this material and for a new audience, supported by the expertise of two internationally renowned theatre companies. Breaking new ground for Complicité (this was their first show aimed at primary school children), the production was performed at Theatre Peckham and Pleasance Edinburgh in 2019. Further planned developments of this practice research in 2020 and 2021 have been suspended owing to COVID-19. As lead researcher, I conceived the theatre project and was adaptor and director, with the creative freedom to structure the development process around the aims of the research and my research questions.

The setting of the performance had both personal and wider socio-political and cultural importance. I chose

to set the piece in Coventry in 1981, in order to underpin the performance and the dramaturgy with the music, culture and iconography of Jerry Dammer's 2 Tone Record label, which emerged out of Coventry in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as the broader influences of Black British music and culture in the UK. The performance included original ska and Two Tone songs, and vibrant animated video created through collaborative practice. The show makes a black family the protagonist of the story and a second single-parent family the antagonist. We are in a time when the Black Lives Matter movement is at the forefront of our thinking — not only in the theatre industry but in every sector of society — and when conversations about race, diversity and inclusion are central to theatre-making practices. A children's show that puts a Black family centre stage and explores histories of immigration and racism whilst also encouraging inter-generational and inter-community dialogue is timely and of vital importance. *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* also intervenes in industry and academic debates around the current provision for children's theatre in the UK, which is often lacking, and broader conversations about contemporary devising dramaturgies. At the same time, it foregrounds the relationship between socio-economic and political landscape of the performance setting and Two Tone's original emergence (in 1980s Britain under a Thatcher government) and contemporary socio-economic and political precarity. *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* takes children's theatre seriously by presenting a challenging and innovative story about diversity, difference and community.

This practice research takes its starting point from the Two Tone genre as an innovative and exciting set of practices and styles to bring to a children's theatre project in order to create challenging and high-quality children's theatre. In using this genre, it became clear that the non-hierarchical and inclusive practices of Two Tone, particularly its representation of Black and working-class subcultures in Britain, were not only important for the aesthetics of the work but also for the methodology of the practice itself. Therefore, this project innovated a Two Tone dramaturgy articulated as a strategy of inclusive creative practice by centring other creative voices, such as the animator and sound designer, within the devising process, extending contemporary conversations around dramaturgy and its development. Finally, through the Two Tone aesthetic and dramaturgy, this practice research aimed to stimulate inter-generational conversations by representing past forms (such as Two Tone) and highlighting how they relate to contemporary socio-economic and political issues.

I Overview

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The setting of the performance had both personal and wider socio-political and cultural importance. I chose

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FIG 1 Production shot. Star Wars play sequence. Barry Fitzgerald, Mae Munuo (at table), Diana Yekinni

The research was conducted in London and Edinburgh in a series of rehearsal and performance spaces (Clean Break Studio, The National Youth Theatre, Royal Central Bankside, Arts Admin, Theatre Peckham and Pleasance Theatre, Edinburgh). The piece was realised in collaboration with the producers, actors and the creative team. Barry Fitzgerald, Mae Munuo and Diana Yekinni (Actors), Ben Grant (Sound Designer), Hayley Egan (Video Designer), Amber Cooper-Davies (Animator), Jai Morjaria (Lighting Designer) and Clancy Flynn (Video Programmer) were directly involved with the core research questions. Early practical research weeks were conducted with actor/devisers Jessica Murrain, Oliver Grant, Keziah Joseph, Lucas Button, Sophie Jacobs, Josie Daxter, Sam Ross, Michael Fox and internationally recognised puppeteer Steve Tiplady.

The ongoing practice research has been disseminated through the performances at Theatre Peckham and at the Pleasance in Edinburgh, documented in the film of one performance and the *Social Story Performance Pack*. The methodology developed through workshops, focussed on diversity as core to the devising process, at Coventry University (2017), DAMU (The Academy of the Performing Arts in Prague Theatre Faculty, 2017) and the Shanghai Training Academy International Forum (2018). The research was disseminated via an interview for a *Radio 4* documentary and in a *Complicité Open Workshop* in London (2018), through workshops with film faculty and students at Aalto University in Helsinki (2019) and at *Serendipity Arts Festival*, Goa (2019).

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Aims

- 1 To use the Two Tone genre as a creative influence in devising a children's theatre performance, drawing on the music and aesthetic of Two Tone to create an innovative and challenging piece of work that is engaging for both young people and adult audiences.
- 2 Starting from this aesthetic and creative position, to develop a Two Tone dramaturgy as a way of reflecting the diversity and inclusivity of the Two Tone genre within the research and development of the project itself, with a particular focus on centring the sound design and animation within the process.
- 3 To catalyse inter-generational conversations about immigration, race, class and cultural difference, using the relevance of the performance's setting to stimulate conversations about society and politics today.

Research questions

- 1 *How can the cultural phenomenon of 1980s Two Tone music be used in a collaborative theatre-making process to create an innovative children's theatre production?*
- 2 *How can the differing temporalities and timescales of sound design, animation and open-ended devising be accommodated in a development and rehearsal process to inform alternative and non-hierarchical making practices underpinned by the aim to tell marginalised stories; and what does this do to the process?*
- 3 *How can the process and subsequent performances stimulate inter-generational conversations about race, class, immigration and cultural difference?*

II Questions, aims and objectives

This project was developed initially as a stage adaptation of the children's book *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!*, set in Bradford in 1981. It was influenced by Two Tone music which was treated initially as a set of aesthetic and creative decisions, whilst the wider ethos of Two Tone (as a genre) and politics influenced the aims of the project both in terms of innovating strategies to centre the sound design and animation process, thus reflecting the inclusiveness and diversity of Two Tone as a genre within the devising process itself, and facilitating the representation of Black, working-class British stories and identities. The research also aims to incite inter-generational conversations around these key issues.

The aim to represent diverse stories and voices through the content and form of the work informed the development of inclusive making strategies in which usually marginalised roles were placed front and centre. The work with the creative team to invent a new process of working collaboratively with video is necessary and important in a sector that usually sees designers working in solitary and parallel processes. Traditional processes lock visual design elements early, therefore these are not usually explored in collaboration with the work of the actors. To overturn the conventional order, *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* innovated techniques for improvisational video and developed knowledge and parameters that have the capacity to benefit future work in relation to a more integrated

approach (see the *Radio 4* interview and FIGS 2–3). This integrated approach, which I call ‘Two Tone dramaturgy’, extends the existing provision of devising methods and uses influences of inclusive and anti-racist practices from the Two Tone music genre to develop inclusive devising practices within the making process. Furthermore, this genre also instigates reflection on the relationship between the historical context of Two Tone and its relevance to today in a time of Conservative government and increased social and economic precarity. The aim of stimulating inter-generational conversations offers audiences of different generations a chance not only to learn from one another about different music and aesthetics, but also to engage with social and political ideas about and practices from the past and the present during increasingly precarious times.



III Context

In developing a Two Tone dramaturgy, drawing on Two Tone music and politics to create both the sonic and aesthetic qualities of the performance and inform the inclusive processes of the production, this practice research contributes to and extends wider academic and industry thinking and practices for devising dramaturgies for children’s theatre.

Matthew Reason’s *The Young Audience* (2010) argues that whilst the importance of children watching theatre has been central to debates surrounding cultural policy and arts education, there has been little critical research into children’s theatre as a form of performance. Since this publication a decade ago, making theatre for children has been explored in texts such as Tom Maguire and Karian Schuitema’s edited collection *Theatre for Young Audiences: A Critical Handbook* (2012), which brings together different authors who explore theories and strategies of making theatre for children; practical accounts of making theatre with and for children; and specific accounts, such as the work of Oily Cart with infants or companies engaging teenagers in Shakespeare. Additionally, Stuart Bennett’s edited collection *Theatre for Children and Young People: 50 years of professional theatre in the UK* (2005) offers historical analyses of the development of children’s theatre in the UK and beyond. These texts provide key insights into the challenges and developments of children’s theatre in the UK and internationally. Working *with* children has been



FIG 2 Rehearsal shot. Amber Cooper-Davies, animator, creating stop motion Mrs Cole shadow puppet

FIG 3 Research and Development shot. Animation/shadow puppet experiment using an overhead projector and props from the show (broccoli and cornflakes)

extensively explored within the context of applied theatre, however this practice research specifically articulates performance work made *for* children. It also contributes to the study of children's theatre by articulating the dramaturgical and socio-political impetus of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* which will benefit practitioners and academics alike in better understanding the devising processes necessary and the importance of children's theatre for creating complex and challenging stories for children and young people.

The industry context in terms of theatre made for children is highly significant for this practice research. The Children's Theatre in the UK research network note that 1% of funding goes to creating work specifically for children under 12 years old and that they form 15% of the population (Children's Theatre in the UK n.d.). Whilst there has been developing and prominent discussion about the financial and creative potential of children's theatre (Bowie-Sell 2018; Keating 2016, 2018; Todd 2010), it is clear there is a need for the development of inclusive and creatively risky children's theatre. Beyond pantomime and work in established theatres for children (Unicorn and Polka) and large-scale adaptations of best sellers (*Matilda* (2010), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (2012), *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016)), there is almost no original mid-scale work for the 7–11 year group that tours in the UK. This is the gap in provision that *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* aims to fill. As children's theatre writer Mike Kenny suggests "High profile work always emerges from a complex theatre ecology. Critical attention is the missing link in that ecology for children's theatre" (Kenny in Half Moon 2020).

Without funding, it is often difficult for children's theatre productions to develop the creative and politically challenging work that has been identified as vital to improving and diversifying the ecology of children's theatre in the UK. Fevered Sleep's *Future Play* (2015) research project responded to these key issues and opened up questions around creative integrity and models for touring original theatre for children. Although there is some quality work being produced for young audiences, this is often very small scale (for example, work by Fevered Sleep, Catherine Wheels and Tim Crouch) and for pre-school audiences. There is a professional gap between this considered and innovative work and the mid-scale commercial touring theatre for children. Simply put, children are not adequately provided for in the theatre ecology, a view articulated by other journalists and theatre critics (see, for example, Action for Children's Art 2019; Barraclough 2017; Gardner 2013, 2018; Half Moon 2020). Pointedly, journalist and theatre reviewer Susan Elkin asks "Why does the industry not take theatre for children and

young people seriously? Theatre and live performance is in my view essential — not some kind of expendable add on — to the education and development of children and young people" (Elkin in Half Moon 2020).

This practice research takes children's theatre seriously and aims to contribute to its ecology as a high-quality, aesthetically robust and politically challenging piece of work which pushes the limits of children's theatre whilst remaining accessible and mid-scale. To do this, a new dramaturgical process inspired by Two Tone music and its wider historical and socio-political implications was developed as a strategy for creating complex and engaging children's theatre with resonance between the setting of the piece and the contemporary cultural context of the production.

The source material for the performance, the children's book *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!*, was published by Nigel Gray in 1985. It tells the story of a young boy who, whenever they misbehave, is threatened with being sent to Mrs Cole, a disreputable and scary neighbour. On finally entering Mrs Cole's house after running away from home, the boy finds the house welcoming and warm, and they learn not to fear the strange lady, and to understand and celebrate difference. Written amidst the social, political and economic precarity, rising xenophobia and racism of Thatcher's Britain, the book foregrounds themes of tolerance, acceptance and community. As source material, the book offers clear parallels to contemporary Britain, which sees similar social and political unrest, and increasing xenophobia, racism and fear of the 'other'. To embed these socio-political issues within our performance and draw further parallels between the context of the 1980s and contemporary socio-political issues, I set the performance in Coventry in 1981 and focussed on this setting as the main point of emergence of Two Tone music in the UK.

The Two Tone genre includes bands and musicians such as The Specials (lead vocalists Terry Hall and Neville Staple and guitarist Lynval Golding), Rhoda Dakar, The Selecter (lead vocalist Pauline Black), The Beat, The Bodysnatchers and more. The genre, coming primarily from Jerry Dammer's 2 Tone Record label, innovated a new sound influenced by Black British music and punk. 2 Tone championed solidarity between left-wing artists and activists of all races in resistance to the conservatism and racism of Thatcher-era Britain (see BBC 1980; Bradley 2013; Channel 4 2004; Gilroy 1988; Hebdige 1983, 1987; Rachel 2016; Riley 2014; Russo 1980; Shabazz 2011; Wakeling 2016). This collaborative genre offers a strategy of theatre-making which is at once inclusive and grounded in a social and political context

which is relevant to contemporary audiences experiencing the social and economic precarity, racism and xenophobia in Britain in the late 2010s. Therefore, as well as using Two Tone-inspired music and aesthetics throughout the performance, I also drew on the inclusive and non-hierarchical working methods of Two Tone to inform the making and devising processes.

To develop a new dramaturgical process, the research draws from and contributes to wider conversations around devising dramaturgies in contemporary theatre and performance. There are a number of key texts that explore contemporary and classic devising histories, approaches and methodologies, primarily in the UK, Europe and the USA. There are also academic enquiries which explore the wider politics and practices of devising performance (see Govan, Nicholson and Normington 2007; Harvie and Lavender 2010; Heddon and Milling 2006; Oddey 1994). This wider field of historical and contemporary analyses of devising has informed the research. However, this research contributes further to the field by adding to existing explorations of specific devising practices around specific companies, such as Tim Etchell's *Certain Fragments* (1999), exploring the performance work and practices of Forced Entertainment; David Savran's examination of The Wooster Group *Breaking the Rules* (1988) and Matthew Goulish and Stephen Bottoms' edited collection *Small Acts of Repair* (2009), which articulates the work and practice of Goat Island.

In particular, this project sought non-hierarchical methodologies in order to consider the importance of decentring dominant voices and roles within the devising process, mirroring the inclusive practices and politics of Two Tone music. In the introduction of *Making Contemporary Theatre* (2010), Jen Harvie focuses on new trends in theatre-making that reveal a persistent questioning of some of the fundamental beliefs that underpin conventional practices of much twentieth- and twenty-first-century theatre-making. *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* sits within this lineage of practice and seeks to test assumptions and working practices to find a flatter hierarchy, a more collaborative and productive structure for integrating design and devising. Harvie notes that devising "often happens concurrently in a variety of creative areas so that theatre making is understood to be as plastic and time and space oriented as the medium of its output" (Harvie 2010: 2–3). This project extends this history of non-hierarchical making processes by grounding it within the Two Tone genre, echoing the inclusive practices which characterise Two Tone in the making process itself.

Extending such discussions by rooting its aesthetic and practical development in Two Tone music, the research

articulates a Two Tone dramaturgy as a key intervention into academic and industry debates in children's theatre. Through the Two Tone dramaturgy, I stress the importance of staging complex conversations around race, diversity and community within children's theatre and add to the developing ecology of children's theatre to both develop it and take it seriously.

IV

Methodology

A Two Tone dramaturgy

This practice research employed a Two Tone dramaturgy — so called to articulate the different methods that underpinned the project. The methodology consists of practices that respond to, variously, the need for new forms to represent Black British, working-class and other marginalised voices and narratives, and innovation in bringing different creative voices into a process as early as possible to facilitate creative development alongside technological expertise. These two driving impulses are brought together in relation to the methods developed through my practice with Complicité during extensive workshops with creative teams and relevant audiences (see the Radio 4 interview) in a process that extended over three years. Whilst the aesthetics, politics, narratives and forms are specific to this practice, I articulate a Two Tone dramaturgy both as a set of creative strategies that I have developed and as a set of political positions that harness the possibility of more formally and politically inclusive practices.

This Two Tone dramaturgy offers an example of how a devised process can use specific musical practices (here from Two Tone) to inform a creative process (in particular, one that seeks to represent marginalised voices and narratives). Further, it signals an intervention into the current landscape of children's theatre by offering strategies to present original, high-quality, complex and challenging forms and narratives (see the Social Story Performance Pack and audience vox pops). Finally, it offers new insights into devising methodologies and dramaturgies by foregrounding the importance of non-centralised voices and expertise in the creative process by bringing video design and animation alongside sound and music to the very centre of the devising process (see the Radio 4 interview).



FIG 4 Two Tone workshop at Gospel Oak School

I'LL TAKE YOU TO MRS COLE!

Specifically, for *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!*, the Two Tone dramaturgy uses the aesthetics and politics of Two Tone as a genre and highlights its resonance with the contemporary socio-political context in the UK in the late 2010s to incite and facilitate inter-generational conversations (audience vox pops). We considered how the historical and cultural context of parents and grandparents could be evoked and concretely referred to in the show in many ways: the accurate use of period props (a cornflakes box and an old-fashioned milk bottle, a record player, a Woolworths bag), in the script (the references to Thatcher and Coventry) and the music score, which was explicitly based on music from the late 1970s and early 1980s, as evidenced in the Radio 4 interview. We also chose a pre-digital animation aesthetic (see FIGS 2-3) so that things looked intentionally 'old-fashioned'. The naturalistic attention to detail as one layer of the dramaturgy was intended to stimulate concrete memories for adults and to enable them to come into dialogue with their children and grandchildren about their childhood. We developed much of this accuracy from a research trip to Coventry where we searched for key locations based on the story. This aspect of the creative process provided a realistic anchor in which to place the more fantastical play sequences, and, as can be seen in the audience vox pops, it led to young people understanding more about the Two Tone genre and its context, and its continued importance now.

Workshop and rehearsal development

I have been closely developing and disseminating Complicité's devising dramaturgies over 26 years of my professional and academic career (see Alexander 2016, 2018a, 2018b; Arden and Alexander 2017). This has been complemented by training for two years at L'École Jacques Lecoq (including two years in the Laboratory of Movement Studies LEM) and ongoing training and development, alongside theatre projects and working at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. The overall practice research methodology for *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* is developed from 25 years of embodied research practice as a Complicité Associate, working as a director and co-creator.

The key methodological shifts for *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* came out of preparing for practical workshops in a more structured way than previously and exploring how the creative process might be differently ordered. I undertook a number of preparatory workshops and presentations to contextualise refine the methodology;

these included 'Devising: The Future of Actor Training' at Coventry University (2017), 'Training to Transgress' at DAMU (The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague Theatre Faculty (2017)) and 'The Lecoq Legacy: Devising and Diversity' at the Shanghai Training Academy International Forum (2018), and all were strongly focussed on diversity as core in the devising process. Additional workshops enabled me to make and share further methodological developments, including the Complicité Open Workshop 'Making Space' (London, November 2018), working with film sound designers at Aalto University (Finland, January 2019) and at the Serendipity Arts Festival (India, December 2019).

I attempted to leave a great deal of space to allow the actors and creatives to continue to play and develop languages in the room (see the [Radio 4](#) interview). Indeed, Oliver Grant, Ben Grant and Mae Munuo described how the rhythms and atmosphere of the music propelled them as actors. These rhythms, developed through primary research into the Two Tone genre and workshops with creatives and children, informed the development of the show from the outset. Grant, Munuo and I facilitated the series of workshops with Year 6 students (aged 10–11) at Gospel Oak Primary school before we went into rehearsals. The group of children were at the upper end of our target audience, and we wanted to work with them to record sound effects (made by brass instruments), and to compose and record riffs for the songs that we had already written. It was reassuring that they all, without exception, loved reggae and Two Tone music and they also loved the original book of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!*. We read sections of the book together and looked at the pictures. Together, we used words to describe the atmospheres and physical spaces in the book and translate this into sound. Grant took this recorded source material and created motifs and underscoring all extrapolated from the children's work. The sound of brass created in these workshops permeated the whole show. We also gave the students one final challenge which was to create a brass riff from which we would write a song. This became the main character Ashley's skank in the final show as they express happiness in having made new friends.

From the workshops, we began to decide on precise sounds and sources, and began writing in 'homage' to that sound. The principles of Two Tone and wider reggae practices, including ideas around 'cut and mix' (where ownership of tracks is collaborative and developmental, and different versions of tracks are evolved), were central to how we developed the Two Tone sound and later influenced the Two Tone dramaturgy more wholly. The use of reggae



FIG 5 Rehearsal shot. Catherine Alexander, writer and director
 FIG 6 Production shot. Diana Yekinni as Mum singing 'Barbados' →



motifs and, in particular, the idea of 'off beat' and 'toasting' informed the work with the actors and the creation of anarchic and unpredictable performance texts. These motifs included references to lover's rock and ideas around how British reggae and Two Tone involved strong and detailed narrative threads in the music, the use of spoken word (for example, in Rhoda Dakar's *The Boiler* (1982)) and strong sense of characterisation and context (for example, in Neville Staple's Judge Roughneck character and The Specials' *Man At C&A* (1980)).

Whilst initially an aesthetic and sonic choice, the inclusion of Two Tone music and contextual research quickly allowed for us to ground the work within a wider politics of representing marginalised voices in the production. For example, Dick Hebdige writes about the links that can be made between rhythms and speech, and between cultures, histories and identities in his exploration of Caribbean music, collective voice and the rhythms and speech patterns used in different geographic and historical locations (Hebdige 1987: xii). This practice research has made it clear that drawing on Two Tone, ska, reggae and other initially non-European forms (although Two Tone is influenced by ska and reggae, it also brings together British punk tones and aesthetics, and speaks to a politics of inclusion in its conception) would allow me to develop a way of representing Black British and working-class voices that the story of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* entailed. The politics of representation, and the politics of the performance itself around inclusion and acceptance, was mirrored in the creative process of making the work itself. This meant that we not only developed a non-hierarchical process but also brought elements of animation and music into the heart of the process (see FIGS 2–3 and the Radio 4 interview) in a novel way to further flatten the hierarchy beyond solely the work of directors and actors to the entire creative and production team.

A collaborative, non-hierarchical approach

Closely related to the aim to create a non-hierarchical Two Tone dramaturgy, this project was particularly focussed on disrupting the conventional order in which things happen in the devising process. Therefore, the work of the video designer and animator were brought into the centre of the process whilst still maintaining a sense of freedom within the workshop and rehearsal process for actors and creatives to improvise. Here, an important part of this practice was designing ways to accommodate animation and video within a development and rehearsal structure.

The development of video design as a discrete theatre-design discipline emerged in the late 1990s. This design discipline, as with digital sound design, has developed rapidly alongside the available technology over the last 20 years. Complicité's first video collaboration was for the prologue sequence in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at the National Theatre in 1997 (Complicité 2020b). The video designer Katie Slater Jones (interestingly credited as 'Projection' not 'Designer') came from a night club/gig context, and it was the first time that this role was considered a potential part of the creative design team.

A key part of the new methodology for my practice research was the collaborative process that brought all parts of the creative process together, from design to operation, in order to disrupt usual creative timelines and consider the technical aspects of the work alongside the creative elements (see, for example, the Radio 4 interview and FIGS 2–3). This allowed for a more nuanced development of the aesthetics of the practice across all aspects of the production (from lighting, sound, animation, video, script and more). Bringing these different voices and creative processes into the room at the start also commits to a politics of diversifying creative processes, as reflected in the diversification impulse of Two Tone music and the Two Tone dramaturgy. Furthermore, to develop complex and challenging aesthetics in this way speaks to my commitment to bring different and more vibrant practices to children's theatre, and to represent marginalised voices and stories in children's theatre — and wider theatrical — contexts. For me, the Two Tone dramaturgy offers ways of taking children's theatre seriously by creating challenging and engaging aesthetics, sonic landscapes and, ultimately, performances that extend the limits of what children's theatre can be and can do.

Whilst not a panacea for the issues and challenges of children's theatre, such as those highlighted in the scholarship discussed above, the Two Tone dramaturgy constitutes an innovative and successful intervention into the contemporary landscape of children's theatre. Through the centring of Two Tone music and aesthetics, the Two Tone dramaturgy functioned as a methodology which is significant for making children's theatre across three areas. Firstly, it uses a particular musical genre as a starting point for creative development and draws from the wider rhythms and the politics of this genre to inform the timescale of the research and development. Secondly, it highlights the importance of diversification in creative processes alongside the genre and form of the work itself, centring the role of the animator and sound designer in the



FIGS 7-8 Production shots. *I'll Take You To Mrs Cole!* at Theatre Peckham

I'LL TAKE YOU TO MRS COLE!

process of creating a performance. Finally, it offers a way of representing marginalised voices and stories in children's theatre by drawing on subcultural practices and aesthetics connected to Black and working-class British culture.

V Timeline

The core research work on the production spanned two years (from April 2017 to August 2019), involving several practical research and development weeks and two shorter experimental workshops, periods of writing, reflection and planning, working with the design team and conducting the workshops with primary school children. The practical work was underpinned by ongoing reading and research.

In 2018 and 2019, I was invited to lead several master-classes and workshops for Complicité which formed an important part of developing the process. I tested hypotheses and methods with different expert groups including professional workshops for Complicité and the film department at Aalto University, Finland. After the initial phase of performances in 2019, I disseminated my research findings via a seven-day workshop at Serendipity Arts Festival, Goa, India. These were all selective workshops for professionals and participants including academics, film and theatre professionals, postgraduate and doctoral students.

Phase 1

2017-19		Research and development, and pre-rehearsals
2017	April	One week working with actors and sound designer, to develop songs and story sequences, as well as conduct 'literature review' of <i>Two Tone</i> in academic and media material as well as the music itself.
	May	Workshop, 'Training to Transgress' at The Academy of Performing Arts Theatre Faculty in Prague, to share and test my hypotheses around diversity as core to devising.
	November	Workshop, 'Devising: The Future of Actor Training' at Coventry University to test and share methods of centring diversity in the devising process.
	December	Three days working with Steve Tiplady, actors and video designer, exploring

shadow puppetry and video design, and evolving a set of methods around filming shadow work.

2018	July	Two days of devising and song writing with actors and sound designer to create fixed timecodes and structures for action and animation sequences.
	September	One week of exploratory work in September with the full creative team and three actors to develop the methodology and plan rehearsals.
	November	Complicité Open Workshop (London) disseminating initial findings and workshopping ideas around creating space and atmosphere through sound. Workshop, 'The Lecoq Legacy: Devising and Diversity' at the Shanghai Training Academy International Forum to develop methodology further in relation to diversity and inclusion.

2019	January	Workshops in Aalto University (Helsinki, Finland) working with film sound designers and editors to explore different devising processes starting from places other than the script (for example, the sound or animation design).
	April–June	Design meetings and final design plans confirmed to create workable structures and surfaces for projection as well as capturing discoveries from the previous workshops.
	May	One-week writing retreat to complete draft working script and rough storyboards, before starting rehearsals to give sufficient structure for animation team. Conducting ska workshops with Year 6 brass band students at Gospel Oak Primary School.

Phase 2

2019	Rehearsals, performance and further dissemination	
	June	Four weeks rehearsal. Interviews and recording process for Adam Fowler for BBC Radio 4 documentary 'Fence Me In', broadcast in August 2019 (see Radio 4 interview).
	July	One week of technical rehearsal on stage at Theatre Peckham, London, and two preview performances; 25 and 26 July 2019.

August	Pleasance Theatre, Edinburgh Fringe performances (see the film of the performance and the script).	A D
September	Debrief and planning.	
December	Serendipity Arts Festival (Goa, India), sharing the methodology and dramaturgy with a group of professional actors, writers, directors and academics.	

Phase 3

2021 (pending) **Subsequent rehearsals, performances and publication**

Please note: subsequent revisions, rehearsals and performances at Polka Theatre in 2021 have been cancelled due to COVID-19.

VI

Findings

By using Two Tone music and aesthetics as the predominant creative drive for devising a children's theatre production, this practice research project has innovated a Two Tone dramaturgy. This Two Tone dramaturgy advocates for the viability of Two Tone as a grounding genre to represent Black and working-class narratives and identities on stage. Through its non-hierarchical and inclusive practice, Two Tone also offers wider interventions into dramaturgical processes and structures and, in particular, the use of music (see Radio 4 interview) and aesthetics (see FIGS 1–3, 5, 9), and the disruption of the conventional order of practice in theatre-making. Finally, as can be seen in the audience vox pops and the Social Story Performance Pack, the overarching use of Two Tone worked to provoke inter-generational conversations, promote positive dialogue around difference, inclusivity, immigration and anti-racism, and drew parallels for audiences between the socio-economic and political milieu of the 1980s and our contemporary moment in the late 2010s. This research proposes Two Tone dramaturgy as a practice that productively presents diverse stories and voices, and that indicates the need for complex devising practices that speak to the particular and specific narratives, politics and lives contained with the stories being told.

The insights developed in this practice research project are centred around the three key contexts into which this project intervenes: Two Tone, children's theatre

and devising dramaturgies. The findings that relate to these research contexts are all complexly linked with the politics of representation and the importance of bringing other voices, narratives and politics into theatre settings and, importantly, children's theatre settings. The use of the Two Tone genre, its aesthetics and politics allowed me to develop a practice which was representative of the marginalised voices in the source material, namely Black and working-class British voices and narratives of inclusivity which feature in the children's book *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!*.

As the research and development into Two Tone music as a genre began to inform the sonic and animated elements of the performance, the politics and practices of Two Tone influenced the rehearsal and development of the performance further. The Two Tone dramaturgy emerged through the process within the aim to develop an inclusive and non-hierarchical research and development practice directly reflective of the non-hierarchical and inclusive approaches of the Two Tone genre and subculture. Specifically, this happened through bringing the sound design (see Radio 4 interview) and animation (see FIGS 2-3) into the creative process from an early stage and using this as a basis for the devising process. Thus, different creative voices were centred in the devising process, generating a non-hierarchical strategy for the practice.

A specific example of this is bringing the video designers and programmers into the workshops and creative process as early as possible which allowed for a more creative and playful application of video design within the overall devising process. This offers a key argument for opening up devising processes to video design processes as early as possible. For example, the creation of shadow puppets and images developed out of Steve Tiplady's (Puppeteer) workshop and was then developed further by Jai Morjaria (Lighting Designer) and team filming shadows and projecting them. This technique provided some of the most dynamic work in the final show (see FIGS 2-3, the short montage video and the film of the performance). Whilst these are specific to the process of this project, I would argue that the insights here offer key transferable strategies across three areas. These insights demonstrate the value of bringing video and sound into the creative process as early as possible to add to the integrity of the project and of challenging conventional hierarchies in theatre-making, and that technical requirements can enhance rather than detract from the creative and devising process.

The new devising dramaturgies developed in this process were drawn from my existing practice with *Complicité* and extended through my engagement with

Two Tone and my subsequent articulation of a Two Tone dramaturgy. This new dramaturgy and its methodologies offer opportunities for more nuanced and effective engagements with technological approaches at early stages of the process to ensure fluidity and plasticity. They also offer ways of centring different practices in the creative process, therefore diversifying the creative voices in the room and flattening more traditional hierarchies.

The Black Lives Matter movement is at the centre of contemporary culture thus rendering the politics of race and representation, and histories of representation, key issues. A children's show that puts a Black family centre stage and explores issues of immigration and racism, whilst also encouraging community is timely and crucial. The dramaturgies of Two Tone running through the performance facilitated inter-generational dialogue about particular music and genres, and the resonance of the social and political implications of the 1980s with contemporary political situations, such as ever-increasing social and economic precarity under a Conservative government. This is evidenced through the script, trailer and film of the performance, as well as in the audience vox pops and reviews.

Nearly all the reviews highlighted the aesthetic of Two Tone, many mentioned the social and political context wrapped into the play and some understood the significance of the lives of the characters for audience members of different ages (Bowie-Sell 2019; Craze 2019; Primary Times 2019; Stott 2019; Sutherland 2019; Tripney 2019; Williams 2019). Didi Craze (2019) noted that the performance contained themes that would appeal to younger audiences (feeling misunderstood) and older audiences (such as Thatcherism and racism) but that these themes run through the work concurrently. I argue that these themes facilitate understanding and exchange between generational audiences, providing a route for understanding across generations as to how to respond to political and economic precarity.

This reflects not only the importance of bringing the form of Two Tone into the work, and working from the sonic qualities and aesthetics of Two Tone as a starting point to inform the wider politics of diversity and representation that drive the performance, but also of bringing challenging and complex ideas to children's theatre. This practice research developed ways of staging ideas of race, immigration, class and single-parent households within a context that brought Two Tone music, the genre and its politics to the fore. It complexly staged these ideas and used the aesthetics and music of Two Tone to provoke inter-generational conversations about these issues in the past and the present (see the script and the film of the performance).



FIG 9 Production shot. Robin Hood play sequence with stop motion shadow horse projection. Barry Fitzgerald, Mae Munuo, Diana Yekinni

Returning to children's theatre writer Mike Keely, who called for critical attention to children's theatre in order to develop a complex theatre ecology, this performance contributes to this wider theatre ecology and answers the demand for more complex, original, thought-provoking and challenging children's theatre.

Dissemination

This practice research has been shared through:

- ⊙ Performances of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* at Theatre Peckham (see the film of the performance and the script); A D
- ⊙ Performances of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* at The Pleasance Courtyard Beyond, Edinburgh (see the film of the performance and the script); A D
- ⊙ Social Story Performance Pack, given to young people before seeing the show; E
- ⊙ Workshop: 2017, 'Training to Transgress', DAMU (The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague Theatre Faculty);
- ⊙ Workshop: 2017, 'Devising: The Future of Actor Training', Coventry University;
- ⊙ Workshop: 2018, 'Complicité Open Workshop: Making Space', London, 5–7 November;
- ⊙ Workshop: 2018, 'The Lecoq Legacy: Devising and Diversity', Shanghai Training Academy International Forum, 16–18 November;
- ⊙ Workshop: 2019, 'Sound design and collaboration', Four-day workshop for film editing and sound design students and tutors, Aalto University Film School, Helsinki, Finland, January;
- ⊙ Workshop: 2019, 'Space and Sound: A Theatre Workshop Curated by Atul Kumar' presented at Serendipity Arts Festival, Goa, 15–22 December.

The performances of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* at Theatre Peckham (London) had a total audience of 251 people and at the Pleasance Edinburgh of 2215. The research and development workshops with young people at Gospel Oak Primary School involved 15 students over 6 weeks as participants, and during the research and development, the workshops where work-in-progress was shared engaged approximately 400 participants. The workshop where the findings surrounding design-led devising processes were disseminated in Goa at the Serendipity Arts Festival engaged a total of 24 people.

The engagement with the design-led process by writers, directors and film makers in London, Goa and Helsinki provides evidence that traditional dramaturgies and work flows can be challenged, disrupted to create satisfying and functional devising processes. The students and tutors at Aalto University particularly held on to the application of my work in relation to sound design and creation. In feedback, they said that the concepts and exercises I have developed from Lecoq should be applied to all departments in film. These modes of dissemination beyond the performances of *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* are important since they reach not only theatre audiences, but also industry by communicating how aspects of the Two Tone dramaturgy provide a useful and transferable blueprint for creating challenging and highly effective children's theatre work.

This practice research has indicated that disrupting the conventional, accepted timelines and timescale of devising processes offers new creative strategies and process, whilst allowing space for individual creativity. Although the findings of this research are grounded with *I'll Take You to Mrs Cole!* and the use of the Two Tone genre as a driving aesthetic and sonic landscape, the wider practice research offers insights into how musical form, particularly that connected to marginalised voices and communities, can be brought into theatre-making to offer alternative and inclusive devising strategies. The practice has also identified and addressed key issues concerning contemporary children's theatre and devising dramaturgies. The work has demonstrated how the use of specific historical genres such as Two Tone offers new insights into the politics and practices of making work for young audiences and the potential to generate inter-generational dialogue around crucial issues of race, class and community.

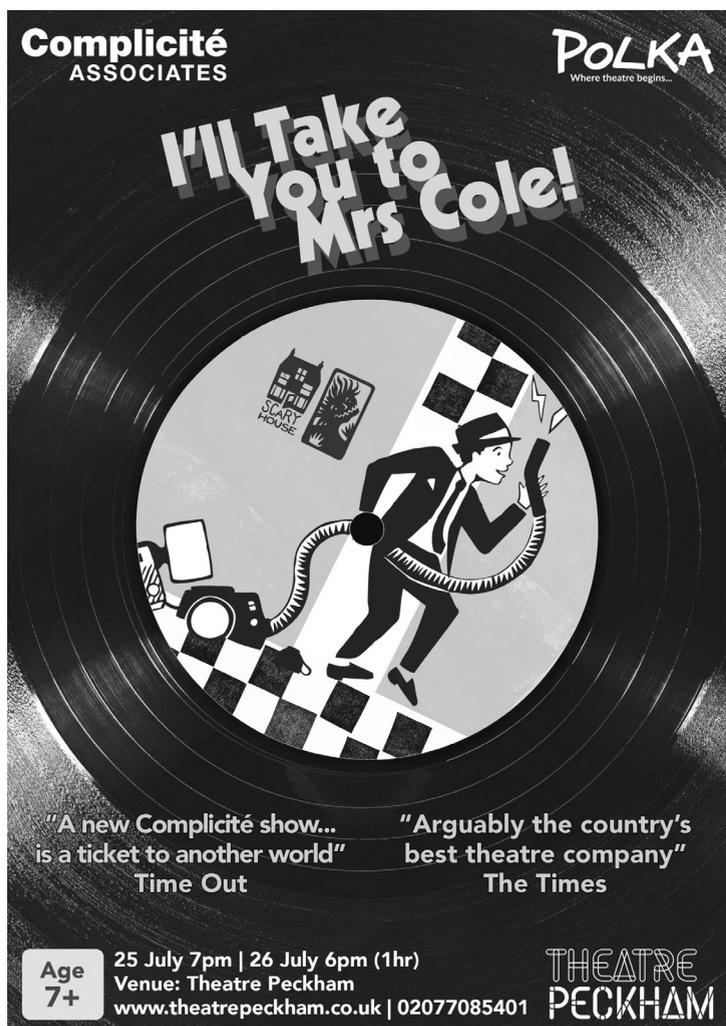


FIG 10 Production flyer designed by Amber Cooper-Davies

I'LL TAKE YOU TO MRS COLE!

VII

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