

Barry Sykes *It Must Be Told*

Part performance lecture, part auto-narrative, part adaptation, Sykes opens this piece 'off stage'. He plays the narrator, describing the set and props as they appear to the audience. Appearing from behind a draped black curtain, he then addresses the audience directly, breaking the fourth wall, and turns our attention to a series of PowerPoint slides projected onto cloth.

We are invited to examine a collection of advertisements for a long-running West End ghost play, which Sykes had discovered within the pages of his assortment of Time Out magazines hoarded and stacked in his bathroom since 2005. We are informed that this play has had a 25-year run, and Sykes has scanned and filed every advert from his personal archive. There is something eerie about the recurring images, title, quotes and reviews which advertise this play, recreating the same image of the main character with a constantly changing actor. As the process continues, we are lead through the first pages of the published script of the play. The play has only three characters and we are given some context to the narrative: the protagonist wants to tell a story and hires an actor to help him, a mysterious character's role is not fully revealed but we are aware that they are the ghost in the play.

At this point the technical directions, characters, plot of the play and Sykes' process begin to unfold and amalgamate, recontextualising the work as a whole. Here, Sykes appears to immerse himself into the role of the protagonist. He hires the actor Michael Shaeffer prior to the performance to spend a few hours in a workspace at RADA to advise him on his presentation of the play, and we are shown the two working together through short projected film clips. In these clips, Sykes and Shaeffer mirror the roles and exchanges between the lead characters in the play. This could be interpreted as a form of Stanislavski's method acting, where Sykes is pursuing the thoughts and feelings of a character and drawing from his own emotions and memories whilst also presenting a rigorous self-analysis and reflection of the process overall.

The piece ends with Sykes performing Act 1 of the play, reading both roles, where the last line echoes the piece's title, *It Must Be Told*. I later asked Sykes where the ghost was in his adaptation of a play within a play within a play. He told me that the advertisements represented the ghost character and I agreed that they, like ghost in the play, had haunted him to tell his tale. Performed three times during the *4 Days* festival at the Arnolfini (the Preview, Matinee and End of Run), I felt the preview was more successful than the End of Run. Sykes being completely present in unrehearsed work created a certain pace, rhythm and energy that held a charismatic and magical quality, taking the audience through a journey along with him. Barry Sykes is witty, charming, engaging, and funny; a natural performer presenting an ingenious new work which, for me, also offered a curious model of practice-based research. I hope to see more of Sykes' performance work over the next 25 years.

Ria Hartley