

Nottingham Playhouse Theatre Company presents

# WONDERLAND

By Beth Steel

Directed by Adam Penford



## INSIGHT PACK

### FRI 9 FEB - SAT 24 FEB 2018

**Nottingham  
Playhouse**

**70**  
YEARS  
1948 - 2018



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**Nottingham**  
City Council

# INTRODUCTION

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This pack supports Nottingham Playhouse's 2018 regional premiere of **Wonderland** by Beth Steel. This will be directed by Artistic Director, Adam Penford. This pack provides audience members an insight into the production. Some of the activities provided are specifically designed to support KS4-5 students, who are attending the performance, or those studying the play in school.

It's Nottinghamshire, 1983. Two 16 year olds wait nervously at the pithead. Guided by a veteran miner, they descend into the brotherhood, banter, searing heat and liquid blue light of Welbeck Colliery.

Meanwhile in London, an American CEO known as The Butcher is brought in to reform King Coal. Pits close and a strike is called.

A Tory MP tussles with his leader's hard line ideology, whilst an eccentric dandy is sent undercover to break up the strike. Cracks appear on all sides as the embattled miners are torn apart trying to protect their livelihoods and families. Nothing will be the same again.

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# THE MINERS' STRIKE - THE KEY FACTS

The Miners' Strike happened because the National Coal Board announced that **20** pits in England would have to close with the loss of **20,000** jobs. Many wanted to fight these closures and stood up to the prevailing force.

The Miners' Strike was one of the hardest fought industrial disputes in British history.

The Miners' Strike marked the beginning of the end for Britain's coal industry, the end of an industry that had once been the backbone of industrial Britain.

Before the Miners' Strike, the **East Midlands** boasted around **30** working mines.

The 1984 Miners' Strike was a last attempt by the mining unions to stop mining closures and the loss of jobs, it was to last more than **12** months.

In March 1984 more than **187,000** miners came out on strike.

It became one of the most confrontational strikes ever seen, marred by picket line violence and clashes between police and miners.

Some miners continued to work and were branded as "scabs" by their colleagues when they crossed picket lines.



Over **5,000** miners stood trial for a variety of offences.

**£6 billion** was the total the state spent to win the strike. A further **£60 billion** was spent dismantling the coal industry.

**11,000** people, the approximate number of those who had been arrested during the strike.

**3 miners committed suicide** whilst on strike

**3 miners died** on picket lines and 1 man died driving a miner to work.

**3 children died** picking coal from colliery waste heaps in winter.

**20,000 MINERS WERE HOSPITALIZED, 9,808 WERE ARRESTED, 1,849 WERE SACKED.**

A Picket Line is a form of protest, where the striking workforce will create a boundary to the work place, or line up in a large group to make it harder for authorities and police to break up the protesters.



# THATCHER AND THE MINES

Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister from 1979 – 1990. Her government was best known for breaking down trade unions, privatisation of social housing and public transport and making significant cuts to sectors including the arts. She had an unrelenting will to achieve her policies and is regarded as one of the fiercest politicians to this day; and many called her the 'Iron Lady'.

There are many aggressively contrasting views about Margaret Thatcher. It is alleged that she tried to undermine the miners' union in order to take power away from trade unions in general. It is suggested that she resorted to low tactics to create a divide amongst the workers to make them collectively weaker and fall. She also overlooked police brutality at the time of the strikes and, as a result, many were injured, some even died in all the violence.



## Take a look at a speech she gave at a Conservative conference in October 1984:

For a little over seven months we have been living through an agonising strike. Let me make it absolutely clear the miners' strike was not of this Government's seeking nor of its making.

We were reminded by a colliery manager that the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) always used to accept that a pit should close when the losses were too great to keep it open, and that the miners set great store by investment in new pits and new seams, and under this Government that new investment is happening in abundance. You can almost repeat the figures with me. £2 million in capital investment in the mines for every day this Government has been in power, so no shortage of capital investment.

We heard moving accounts from two working miners about just what they have to face as they try to make their way to work. The sheer bravery of those men and thousands like them who kept the mining industry alive is beyond praise. "Scabs" their former workmates call them. Scabs? They are lions! What a tragedy it is when striking miners attack their workmates. Not only are they members of the same union, but the working miner is saving both their futures, because it is the working miners, whether in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, North Wales or Scotland, it is the working miners who have kept faith with those who buy our coal and without that custom thousands of jobs in the mining industry would be already lost.

What we have seen in this country is the emergence of an organised revolutionary minority who are prepared to exploit industrial disputes, but whose real aim is the breakdown of law and order and the destruction of democratic parliamentary government. We have seen the same sort of thugs and bullies at Grunwick, more recently against Eddie Shah in Stockport, and now organised into flying squads around the country. If their tactics were to be allowed to succeed, if they are not brought under the control of the law, we shall see them again at every industrial dispute organised by militant union leaders anywhere in the country.

The nation faces what is probably the most testing crisis of our time, the battle between the extremists and the rest. We are fighting, as we have always fought, for the weak as well as for the strong. We are fighting for great and good causes. We are fighting to defend them against the power and might of those who rise up to challenge them. This Government will not weaken. This nation will meet that challenge. Democracy will prevail.

And a simple one, men in failing pits are no longer entitled to the tax payer's purse.

**Margaret Thatcher**



# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR, ADAM PENFORD



## **What inspired you to choose *Wonderland* to begin your tenure as Artistic Director at Nottingham Playhouse and did you face any challenges when choosing your first play?**

It's a big deal choosing your first play, it says a lot about your artistic vision for the building. There's a tradition of new Artistic Directors choosing a well-known classic such as a Shakespeare, and I also considered famous modern plays by leading playwrights, but it didn't sit quite right with what's important to me as an Artistic Director and, more importantly, Nottingham's identity. Instead I wanted an ensemble play rather than a star vehicle, something of the people.

**Wonderland** has the perfect spirit and encapsulates the Nottingham that I know and love. It's a play about a community that is robust and feisty. It balances passion with humour. It's also an incredibly ambitious production and there are moments in the script that are seemingly un-stageable. I'm aware that the scale and ambition is a gamble but if we pull it off then it will make for amazing theatre. It's a way to demonstrate my ambition for Nottingham Playhouse as a leading UK venue, it allows our excellent production departments to flex their creative muscles and the play will really take the audience on a theatrical roller coaster.

## **What research of Nottingham's mining history have you undertaken in preparation for the play?**

The miners' story and industrial tensions have already been told a lot through British art, both on stage and screen, so I watched films

like *Brassed Off*, *Billy Elliot* and *The Full Monty* to digest how other directors and writers had broached the subject. Beth's dad was a miner at Welbeck Colliery where the play is set and she had already done a huge amount of research so the first thing I did was to really delve into the script because there is so much detail in there. He took her down the colliery for a shift and that clearly influenced a huge amount of the play because the underground world rings so true.

I also read very widely around the topic. One book in particular that was very helpful was *Look Back in Anger: The Miners' Strike in Nottinghamshire – 30 Years On*, by Harry Paterson which has been published by Nottingham's own independent book shop; Five Leaves Bookshop. The designer and I visited the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield and went down in a cage underground. That was really useful in getting a sense of the sights, the smells and the textures that exist down there, which massively influenced the set design and also the lighting and sound design. I also spent time talking to ex-miners who were around during the 1980s. It's still such a contentious subject that they mostly asked to remain anonymous and their stories were fascinating, terrifying and very entertaining. That certainly greatly influenced the work that I've been doing with the actors in the rehearsal room.

## **How important is the local aspect of the play and did that influence your casting choices?**

I'm from Nottingham myself and my parents were originally from Mansfield and Sutton-in-Ashfield, so I'm familiar with the areas that were hit hard by this period of history. It influenced the casting choices because we'd just done some general auditions to widen our casting pool and had met over 100 local actors. We were able to recall many of them to audition for specific roles in **Wonderland** and I'm delighted that a couple of them are now in the cast. Most of the actors that we've cast do have regional roots but there are also a couple who have links to other mining communities in the UK. This is historically accurate because miners were travelling around the country in search for work at this time so there was a melting pot of people working underground.

# DIGITAL CONTENT

Why not take a look at some of our videos where we interview Writer, Beth Steel and also Director, Adam Penford. See the links below:



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gM\\_5YFq5lx4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gM_5YFq5lx4)

**Wonderland: writer Beth Steel in conversation with her dad, ex-miner David.**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBjrx5TVeMY>

**Exploring Wonderland with Adam Penford.**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhs10QHSDWE>

**Margaret Thatcher speaking about the Miners' Strike.**



## Did you know?

Writer of Wonderland, Beth Steel's father was a miner at the time the play was set. Therefore, the references and atmosphere are honest depictions of life underground.



## Did you know?

This will be the first production Adam Penford has directed since becoming Artistic Director of Nottingham Playhouse.

# THE PICKET LINE

GREAT  
WARM UP  
ACTIVITY!



- Stand in a circle and go round the circle and one by one say your name as if you want to be noticed. Think about physical stance, volume, pace and repetition.
- Divide group into two and ask one half to sit and become an audience. The other half stand in a group facing the audience as if you are the front of a picket line. You are now part of a protest!
- Now all the members of the protest walk forward together as a group saying your name as many times as you wish. Your aim is to be noticed by the audience. Remember some of the techniques you used when standing in a circle...you may have other ideas to add here.

**Discuss** - Who stood out to the audience and why? How did it feel being part of the protest, did you feel powerful as an individual or as part of a group? Did anything surprise you, either watching the protest, or being in the picket line?

- Now swap over, so the previous audience become the picket line protesters. This time, the protesters cannot use their voices, only movement and mouthing their names. Consider all the techniques, you may want to apply more physical approaches to this protest.

**Discuss** - What was effective about removing sound? How did it feel not being able to use your voice? How did the protest look to the audience? If you were the miners, which techniques would you employ if you had to protest to save your job?



# BE A MOVEMENT DIRECTOR: DOWN THE PIT

*It's down a mine...it's cramped...it's dark.*

Often Movement Directors are employed to create movements, or basic choreography to convey those scenes that are hard to recreate in live theatre. They work closely with the director to create something of visual interest, using the actors' bodies.

**Activity:** Get into groups of 5 - 6. Work together to decide how you would show the men working down the mine. Think about whether you would like this movement sequence to be heightened, therefore, tightly choreographed and stylised, or if you would prefer to create something naturalistic. Think about tempo, rhythm and how big, or small the movements should be. Create two minutes of physical theatre to set this scene without words. Share your opening sequences with the other groups.



**PERHAPS ALSO ADD LINES OF THE OPENING SONG:**

*Out of the dirt and darkness I was born, go down!  
Out of the hard black coalface I was torn, go down!  
Kicked on the world and the earth split open  
Crawled through a crack where the rock was broken  
Burrowed a hole, away in the coal, go down!  
In a cradle of coal in the darkness I was laid, go down!  
Down in the dirt and darkness I was raised, go down!*

**How to start:** To begin, each member of the group create three actions, or movements of your miner digging, shovelling, wiping their foreheads from sweat and so on. Then teach these actions to the rest of your small group. Once you have learnt everybody's actions, try ordering them to create a sequence. You might want to add some music to underscore this and play with pace and repetition.

**Discuss:** Why did you decide to either create something naturalist, or stylised? In what ways can an effective movement sequence help to tell the story and engage the audience?

# THE DEPTHS OF OUR FAMILY

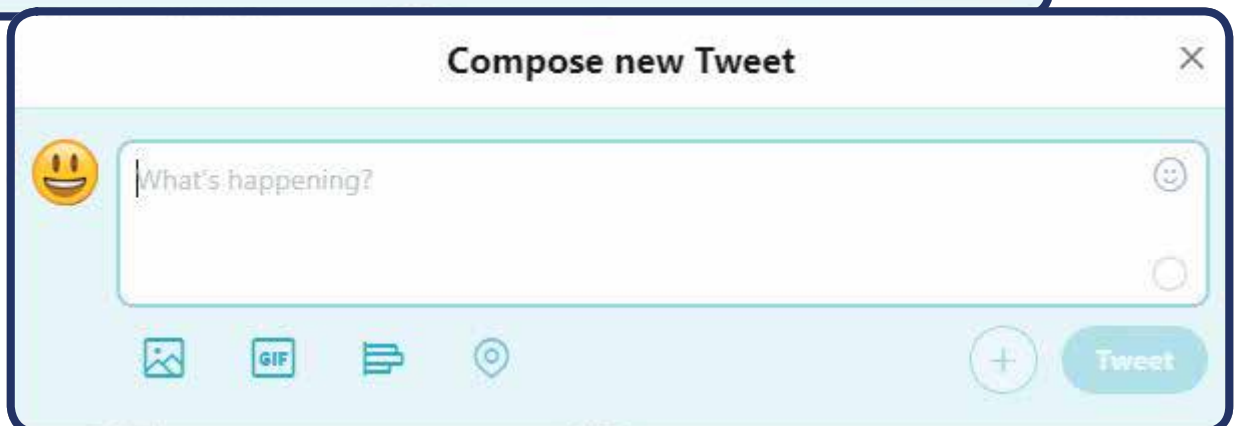
- In small groups of 4 – 5, imagine that you are a family, with one or two members who are working miners. Decide who everybody is i.e. parents, children, siblings etc.
- Create the following three strong freeze frames:
  - The family on a normal working day before any knowledge of any mine closures.
  - The family 6 months into the strike.
  - The family after the strike.
- Now choose one line of dialogue for each member of the family and bring your freeze frames to life for a minute or so with these words.
- You should now have three short scenes, which you can present to the rest of your group.

**Consider:** What crucial moments you want to show at the three critical points listed. How you are going to convey important relationships and personal moments that each family member faced? What are their bodies doing, what are their facial expressions?

**Discuss:** What did you see and feel? Whose story did you want to learn more about? Where were your sympathies? Did you see any trigger points that may have pushed the family to make certain bold decisions to react to political tensions? How is the personal narrative different to the public and political debate?

# TALK BACK TO THATCHER

- Look back at the speech Margaret Thatcher delivered at a Conservative conference earlier in this Insight Pack. **Page 3**
- Now tweet your responses in up to 280 characters, or less. What do you feel is important to defend, or say?



# WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?



Split your group in half and appoint the team leader, or teacher as the chair of the debate.

- Half the group debate in favour of the Strike, potentially discussing how coal was cheaper to import and as Thatcher said, she did not want to live in a 'museum' country. Perhaps you might consider the safety of workers as mines were often very dangerous places, or debate the power of unions to drive society to a halt.
- The other half argue in favour of the strikers, mentioning that many jobs would be lost if mines closed, a vibrant economy that can flourish through the mining trade would be forsaken and that many people depend on mining for their livelihood. Perhaps also take into consideration longer term implications of dismantling the mining trade in the UK.
- In your groups, come up with a convincing list of reasons supporting your stance. i.e. reasons why the mines should close, or reasons why they should remain open.
- After about 10 - 15 minutes of debate (make sure everyone in the group presents at least one supporting point), ask the chair to either decide to keep the mines open, or gradually close the mines.

**Hint...** Think about using emotive language and persuasive techniques i.e. rhetorical questions and bold statements to bring your arguments to life.

# RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE: GETTING YOUR VOICE HEARD

- Find a space on your own and spend 5 minutes thinking about and reflecting on what makes you most angry in our society, or what you would like to change, whilst you listen to the music.
- Jot down your thoughts on post-it notes (one idea per post-it).
- Now come together as a group and stick all your post-it notes onto one board, or a wall and spend a few moments looking at all the ideas.

**Resources** – For this activity you will need post-it notes, pens and some music during the reflection i.e. *Rage against the Machine*, *I Predict A Riot* (Kaiser Chiefs), or Billy Bragg songs about protests and strikes. Large coloured marker pens and large card/paper. Camera & small note pads.

**Discuss:** Do any themes emerge, are there any similarities between them?

- Start to group the post-it notes in common themes and give each group a main heading / title. (Aim for around 4 -5 categories).
- Split into smaller groups of 4 – 5 and assign each group to a category or heading.
- In your smaller groups, choose how you want to respond creatively to make your protest come to life.

For example you could create...

- A chant
  - A rap
  - A poem
  - A series of slogans
  - Design and make a placard
  - A series of freeze frames to make your points
  - A short piece of physical theatre, maybe two or three seamless moves to repeat in a sequence
- Spend 20 minutes collaboratively creating your form of protest in your small groups.
  - Once you are happy with it, work out how you are going to present it to the rest of the group and rehearse your protest. Think about how you can make it as visually effective as possible.
  - Finally, share back what you have created to the larger group. (If you have time, please refer to the extension activity at this point).
  - Discuss how effective they all were in presenting your views.

# Rage against the Machine Extension Activity

## BE A REPORTER: MINING FOR THE TRUTH

**Teacher Note:** Source and share articles of different protests from a range of newspapers and eras (optional).

- Whilst the protests in the previous exercise are being shared, everyone apart from the protesters take on the role of the press. You are working for a newspaper, or digital platform and you must report what you have seen, heard and felt. Use a camera and reporter's note pad to document what you saw.
- Once each group have performed their protest, find a space on your own and think about one protest that you would like to review for your newspaper / online platform.
- Spend 10 minutes writing a short article. Remember to write about what you saw, heard and your emotional response to the protest. You might choose to conclude with an opinion about whether you think the protest will be successful.
- Come together as a group again and read out your articles.

**Hint:** Remember your journalistic styles of writing.

NEW UPDATED EDITION

# THE ENEMY WITHIN


## The Secret War Against the Miners

MARGARET THATCHER branded the leaders of the 1984-85 miners' strike "the enemy within."

In this classic account, Seumas Milne reveals the astonishing lengths to which her government and its intelligence machine were prepared to go to destroy the power of Britain's miners' union. In this 30th anniversary edition new material brings the story up to date with further revelations about the secret war against organized labour and political dissent, and the devastating price paid for the Thatcher administration's onslaught by communities across Britain.

**PRAISE FOR "THE ENEMY WITHIN"**

"A tribute to detailed journalistic investigation ... strips away the myths and lies." *New Statesman*




**Seumas Milne**

**30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION!**

NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS (SOUTH WALES AREA)

# DEFEND SOUTH WALES MINERS



The funds of the NUM in South Wales are being plundered. But the miners will not be intimidated or starved back to work.

We will stand firm in our fight to retain our pits, our jobs and our communities.

**WE CAN ONLY DO IT WITH YOUR HELP**

# NO SURRENDER

# RESOURCES

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<http://theconversation.com/war-on-the-picket-line-how-the-british-press-made-a-battle-out-of-the-miners-strike-60470>

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/12/newsid\\_2540000/2540175.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/12/newsid_2540000/2540175.stm)

<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/features/mar04.shtml>



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