

Vamos Theatre, in a co-production with Corn Exchange Newbury and a co-commission with London International Mime Festival, presents:

VAMOS
THEATRE

DEAD GOOD.



★★★★★

An inventive and spellbinding theatrical experience

★★★★★

Funny, deeply touching and highly, highly recommended!

EDUCATION PACK



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



WELCOME!

This pack is for teachers and students (12 years plus) to use before or after seeing a performance of *Dead Good*. It contains lots of useful background information about the production and how it has been made, some great resources for teachers and links to the knowledge and understanding that students need during their journey through drama in school and beyond.

We hope you will use this pack as a resource in itself, encouraging students to practice their research and evaluative and analytical skills by using the information, images, interviews and questions provided.

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SECTION 1: WE ARE VAMOS THEATRE

Full mask theatre uses no words. As the UK's leading professional full mask theatre company, we bring together the exciting elements of physical theatre, mask and performance to explore themes that are often challenging and emotionally resonant. Our style is known for its visual inventiveness, original music, wit and innovation.

Vamos Theatre taps directly into the power of empathy. Replacing words with the visually inspiring, we encourage awareness of our shared human experience in an increasingly isolating world. We give voice to those who often do not have one, who through no fault of their own are unable to tell their own story.

Through the transformative potential of full mask theatre we communicate these stories. We translate the characters, the moments, the feelings, the memories and the hopes, into a universal language. We speak to audiences across the globe; we educate, we entertain, we empathise, but most of all we aim to change the way that people see the world.

For more about Vamos Theatre visit www.vamostheatre.co.uk

VAMOS
THEATRE



SECTION 2: FULL MASK THEATRE

Words are not the only way to communicate. When an actor wears a mask, which covers their whole face, then words are replaced by actions. Non-verbal communication, through gesture, movement, body language and spatial relationships, takes the place of words in a powerful mix of visual motion and emotionally charged expression. Think of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and the other silent movie greats.

To be successful, full mask theatre needs to be performed naturalistically, with physical precision, movement which is perfectly defined, gestures that are specific and controlled, visual expression which is economic and considered. Then there is the full mask technique –needing clarity in thought and movement which communicates precise meaning and feeling to an audience. The actor has an internal script –spoken silently behind the mask. The actor's role is to embed that script in the hearts and minds of the audience.

The role of the audience is to interpret meaning, to be active, to work towards a meeting with the performers that is both powerful and engaging. There are no passive observers here!

Funny, powerful, poignant, surprising, engaging, emotional, shocking, thought-provoking, relevant, sensitive, informative, empathetic, communicative and entertaining. This is full mask theatre. This is Vamos Theatre.



SECTION 3: THEMES AND THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Theme #1: living and dying

The main theme of the show is death and, more importantly, living life to the full.

This extract is from Maggie Keeble (Care Home GP and Clinical Lead for Integrated Care for Older People in Worcestershire) and sums up why we are making a show about death and its social and historical context.

Sex and politics are common subjects of discussion these days, but conversations around death and dying remain taboo. Throughout history - until about a hundred years ago - people were familiar with death. People most often died at home surrounded by family or friends, they died at a younger age, relatively suddenly and there were much higher rates of infant and child mortality. There were cultural norms associated with preparation for death, the dying process, and the aftermath. There is barely a Victorian novel without depiction of someone dying and even Little Women portrays the death of sister Beth; sad of course – but expected, peaceful and in her own bed in her own home, surrounded by loved ones.

These days, death happens out of the home in hospitals, hospices and care homes. Death has become a medicalised rather than a social event. Many people don't see anyone die until faced with it in a parent or spouse. It happens behind closed doors which means people are more frightened of it, don't know what it looks like and aren't sure how to talk about it. Whilst we have little choice in the cause of our death, we do have some influence over the manner of our dying. Experience and evidence shows that conversations about what we want and more importantly what we don't want results in a calmer, more dignified death and more often in the place of our choosing. If we are going to enable more people to live well until the very end of life, we need to encourage everyone to have conversations and to express and even record their wishes and preferences.

This is backed up and supported by Lucy Martin (Clinical Lead, Cancer and End of Life Care Dudley CCG). She writes:

As a person's life progresses and they experience different life events, they often have an internal thought process about their wishes and preferences around death and dying - 'Do I want to be buried or cremated?', 'What music would I play at my funeral?'. In the absence of illness and disease, these thoughts can seem quite abstract and non-threatening. It's not strange to us as humans to consider death, but sometimes it really concerns us to discuss this out loud with friends and family, 'Oh don't be so morbid!' 'We don't need to talk about that yet' or simply that this is too upsetting to contemplate. Many of us don't want to burden our loved ones with complex decisions after we have died, but equally we don't know how to bring it up with them without causing distress and upset.

Research has shown that most people faced with a terminal illness or diagnosis expect their health professional to bring up the subject of dying with them; however many health professionals also feel uncomfortable with this. The medical model of care today is all about prevention and treatment, hoping for a cure, and less attention is given to death and dying - even though it is still the only thing guaranteed to affect us all. Professionals say they feel worried about 'looking like we are giving up hope' and 'not wanting to upset people without adequate time to deal with it'. Patients and loved ones need to feel empowered to ask these questions of their health professionals and they in return need to feel skilled and empowered to answer questions and have honest discussions about what people do and do not want for themselves at the end of their lives. We need to normalise talking about death and dying in every setting to enable this to happen.

This is a really useful video- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Bfomd2mq7w> and links to a leaflet created by Age UK (not age-related information)

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/relationships-family/end-of-life-issues/talking-death-dying/>



Imagine...

You have been given the task of devising a five minute wordless drama on the theme of death. Using the extracts from Maggie Keeble and Lucy Martin as your research, structure, develop and perform your drama, deciding what ideas you would include, who your characters might be, what message you want to communicate to your audience and what techniques you would use to do this.

HINT: You could also use the section on Structural Devices (page 27) to help you. You could use this task as practice towards your assessed devised performance work.



Theme #2: friendship, love and laughter

The other main theme in the show is friendship, which includes love and laughter.

Bernard teaches Bob how to laugh again and to find a way to accept his death, whereas Bob teaches Bernard about the things that are more important in life than money; things that are free, like true friendship, the beauty of nature and treating people well and with respect. Bernard's subsequent relationship with Marie is that of complete respect, playfulness and care.

We wanted to make a show about genuine human connections and treating people with respect, as this is central to Vamos Theatre's ethos and runs through all of our work. At the top of our ethos guide document it says '*We believe in the importance of genuine and honest communications, making connections with a kind and generous spirit, with respect and consideration.*' This is the frame of mind that drives all our work and is how we aim to communicate with everyone, so it seemed obvious to put this ethos at the centre of a show.

SECTION 4: SYNOPSIS OF *DEAD GOOD*

Here is a scene by scene breakdown of the *Dead Good* story, to remind you exactly what happened. Schools and colleges who have seen the show live can access an online film of the full show: please contact us for more details at learning@vamostheatre.co.uk

SCENE 1: (CROSS CUT)

Bob and Bernard, in different hospitals, are waiting to hear about their diagnosis. In a cross cut scene, we see them in turn finding out that their illness is terminal. Bernard tries to buy his way out by offering money, but nothing can be done. Bob sinks into depression. They are both given leaflets for the same local hospice.



SCENE 2:

Bernard is now a day patient at the hospice. A confident, rich and successful man, Bernard is a practical joker, playful with staff and patients alike. When Bob arrives, depressed and angry, Bernard tries to avoid him, but when they begin to talk they discover a shared love of cars.



SCENE 3: (FLASHBACK)

Looking through a classic car magazine with Bob, Bernard is reminded of a toy car he had as a boy, which makes him remember his childhood. We see him with his mother, who has little time for him and we see his loneliness.



SCENE 4:

Back at the hospice, Marie the nurse tells Bernard that his friend and fellow patient, John, has died, which hits Bernard hard. He decides that it is time to start having fun whilst there is still time, and invites Bob to join him on a car trip.



SCENE 5: (THIS IS A FILM)

Bernard and Bob set off on their adventure in Bernard's classic car. They are heading to the seaside, but at first the car won't start. Bob (who is a mechanic by trade) manages to fix it and they set off.



SCENE 6:

Bernard and Bob arrive at the seaside, and settle down in deckchairs. Young lovers run past, the men watch and reminisce about times gone by. Soon, they decide to go into the sea, where they skim stones and forget their troubles. Bob then realises he needs to go to the toilet, but can't pee because of his illness. Bernard tries to call for medical help, but there is no signal. Bob gets desperate



SCENE 7:

Bob and Bernard arrive at the hospital. A young doctor helps fit a catheter on Bob – which is a tube that helps people to pee. The doctor isn't very good at it, and Bob and Bernard get frustrated, but at last Bob can pee. When the doctor has gone, Bob looks at a picture of his wife on his phone, and remembers when they first met.



SCENE 8: (FLASHBACK)

Bob remembers when he was younger and worked in a garage. This is where he met his wife, Shefali, for the first time. When she comes in to get her car fixed, he falls in love instantly.



SCENE 9: (THIS IS A FILM)

Bernard and Bob are having fun in London. They go to famous places, as well as visiting lots of pubs! Bernard gets tired and Bob finds him a wheelchair so they can go further. Finally, they see the famous hotel, The Ritz, and decide to go in to eat.



SCENE 10:

Bob and Bernard have dinner at The Ritz. They visited so many pubs in London that they are very drunk, and behave very badly during dinner. In the end, the waiter asks them to leave.



SCENE 11:

It is a rainy night, and Bob has gone to the chemist to get pills. On his way home, he has a text conversation with his wife, who asks where he is. Bob says that Bernard needs him. When she asks Bob what he is doing, he replies 'living'



SCENE 12:

Bernard is now very ill, and has to go back to the hospice as a resident patient. Marie and the other staff care for him well. Bob arrives to visit, and is really sad to see Bernard so ill. Bernard gives Bob a present, but tells him not to open it yet.



SCENE 13:

Bernard decides there has been enough of being sad, and that it is time for a party. Marie helps him to decorate the room, and they listen to music and dance. Then they take selfies, and Bob shows some of the photos he took when they were in London and at the seaside.



SCENE 14:

Bernard is now very ill, and is dying. The nurses care gently for Bernard, and Bob is always there, looking after his friend as he gets sicker. Finally, Bernard dies.



SCENE 15:

Bob remembers about Bernard's present. He wonders what is in it. He unwraps it and finds a remote control inside, with a switch to press. Bob presses it, and suddenly confetti fall from the sky and music plays. It is Bernard's way of saying to Bob, don't worry, just live.



SECTION 5: THE CHARACTERS

Within this section, we meet the three central characters in the first person, giving you a bit of insight into their backstory and unspoken facts.

BERNARD

Hello I'm Bernard. It is a pleasure to meet you. I do like that jacket you're wearing, is it new? I have had a fun and rather full life, helped by a healthy bank account and being blessed with good looks. I grew up with money, went to a rather good school, boarding of course. Mother was too busy; she was a very beautiful woman, but I did feel somewhat of an accessory. I worked selling Government Bonds for many years, very successfully, which meant I could build a rather fine collection of classic cars, date some rather wonderful women and drink some very fine wine. Later in my career, I became a consultant and sat on a number of Boards for various companies.

In retirement I developed a nasty cough, which I ignored for a while. It was only when it got worse that I went to the doctor. I was diagnosed with COPD, which stands for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. It affects the lungs and breathing; it's also terminal unfortunately. I can't buy my way out of this one.



It is since becoming ill and meeting some very dear people that I have learnt how to really live and what is really important. All the cars, money and dating were a front; genuine love and real connections are what matter.



BOB

Hiya, I'm Bob. How would I describe me? In a nutshell, down to earth, working class, a drinker, unhealthy, kind, genuine, helpful, loyal and funny - I've always been funny.

I've been a mechanic all my life. I love classic cars; a Morgan is my favorite car to fix, given half the chance.

I've been married for thirty plus years to Shefali. I have to say since getting the news of my prostate cancer, I have run away a bit. Need a bit of space to get my head around it all. I've been given a year to live, I'm only sixty. It feels pretty unfair. I seem to have lost my sense of humour.

MARIE

Hi I'm Marie. I've worked in Palliative Care all my working life. But what does that mean? It means I help people to live well and die well. People ask if that's a depressing job, but it's so far from it. I feel privileged to care for people in their last days and to support their loved ones too. Dying can be calm and without fear. There can still be moments of love and joy and humour right up until the end. I have so many stories of life and love and I adore my work. I am inspired by a woman called Marie de Hennezel: she wrote a wonderful book, *Intimate Death*. You really should read it.



Try this...

Using the three character profiles, produce a **role on the wall** for each character. Then write a **scene plan** for a drama which develops a story between these three characters. Think about situation, location, how the characters might change over time, how their relationships might develop and what the **climactic points** of your drama are. You might want to develop this into a script or an improvised drama. This is useful practice in planning a drama and producing portfolio evidence of your work.



From L-R in the photo: Joshua Patel, James Greaves, Aron De Casmaker, Angela Laverick

SECTION 6: PERFORMERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Here are the biographies of the actors who perform *Dead Good*, including the work they have done previously.

ARON DE CASMAKER

Aron is a clown performer, writer and teacher who has travelled the world for love of his craft. Originally from Canada, he has worked internationally for over 20 years with companies including *Cirque du Soleil*, *Stufish Entertainment*, *Slava's Snowshow*, *Whynot Theatre*, and *Mump and Smoot* to name a few. He is a founding member of the award winning *Theatrophy – Undead Theatre* as well as *Miscreations Theatre*, a company developing the ridiculous in the North East of England. As a teacher, he has taught in conservatory, university and private classes alike. Highlights include *The National Theatre School of Canada* in Montreal, *University of British Columbia* and *Coventry University*. He continues to teach private classes around the UK. He is a Graduate of *Ecole Philippe Gaulier* in France, *Scuola Internazionale del Attore Comico* in Italy, and holds a *Masters of Fine Arts in Theatre Studies* from the *University of Calgary* in Canada.

JAMES GREAVES

James Greaves studied acting and theatre at *Middlesex Polytechnic* and in 1987 he co-founded *Trading Faces Theatre Company*, specialising in physical theatre and mask work. From 1989 he worked extensively with *Trestle Theatre Company* taking mask performance all over the world, from *Tashkent* to *Sydney* and *Tokyo* to *Taunton*. *Trestle* credits include *Top Storey*, *State of Bewilderment*, *Blood and Roses* and *Adventures of the Stoneheads*. Recently he has toured *Finding Joy*, *Nursing Lives*, and *A Brave Face* for *Vamos Theatre*. He has taught mask work throughout the UK and around the world. Other credits include work for *Ophaboom*, *StrangeFace* and *Scarlet Theatre*. Recently he appeared, unmasked, in the epic BBC Television series *Taboo*.

ANGELA LAVERICK

Angela trained at GSA. Theatre: *Cinderella* (Newbury Corn Exchange), *Crime and Punishment* (Gods & Monsters), *A Brave Face* and *The Best Thing* (Vamos Theatre), *The Gruffalo* (West End/ Tall Stories), *Mamma Mia Immersive* (Rueben Feel), *The Tempest*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Theatre Set-Up), *Polka Dot Shorts* (ATP/No. 1 Tour), *Cabaret* (Il Palchetto), *We Love Gary* (White Horse), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Spin-Off Theatre), *The Maids*, *Macbeth*, *Dr Faustus* (Edinburgh Fringe), *Get Over It* (Take Art). Film: *Reprise* (Rick and Joe Ltd) Relate Promo, *Pocket Money* (Psychodynamix Prod.) Voice-Over: *The Hive* (Disney Junior/ Lupus Films), *Little Wolf's Book of Badness* (Channel 4). Angela also jointly runs Tor Theatre and is a community artist at Wiltshire Creative. She is delighted to be touring, once again, with Vamos Theatre.

JOSHUA PATEL

Joshua is a freelance actor-musician based in Gloucester, and joint-company manager of Coventry-based outdoor theatre company, The Fabularium. Since graduating from Coventry University in 2012, Joshua proceeded to devise and create work with The Fabularium, leading to four successful touring productions: *The Town Band of Bremen*, *Reynard the Fox*, *There Be Monsters!* and *The Hare and The Moon*. Alongside this, Joshua has performed and toured internationally with a variety of companies and productions, including Polish outdoor theatre experts Teatr Biuro Podrozy in *The Winter's Tale* and *Silence*, site-specific specialists Talking Birds in *The OakMobile*, *The Q* and *The Whale*, world-renowned physical theatre company Frantic Assembly in *X & Y*, and the prestigious Staffordshire New Vic in *Tale Trail to Treasure Island*. He also teaches at Coventry University, and is an associate member of the London-based theatre company 'The Lions Part'. *Dead Good* marks Joshua's second production with Vamos Theatre, following a tour of *A Brave Face* in 2019.



SECTION 7: CAST AND PRODUCTION TEAM

CAST.

Aron De Casmaker, James Greaves, Angela Laverick, Joshua Patel

PRODUCTION TEAM.

Writer/Director: Rachael Savage

Composer/Sound Editor: Janie Armour

Additional writing by: James Greaves and Alan Riley

Script Consultants: Janie Armour and Nick Moss

Advisors: Dave Harper, Ruth Davies, Pete D, Dr Maggie Keeble, Dr Lucy Martin, Richard White, Barry Goldman, Esther Ramsay-Jones, Emily Madsen, Hazel Ratcliffe, Jalesh Sanchania, Rinkoo Barpaga, Elaine Donnelly, Nick Hancock

Set/Costume Designer: Carl Davies

Mask Maker: Russell Dean

Dramaturg: Alan Riley

Lighting Designer: Matt Clutterham

Film/Projection Designer: Daniel Hill

Sound Designer: Sam Glossop

Tour Technician: Paul Milford

Rehearsal Stage Managers: Sarah Hawkins, Daniel Hill

Set Construction: Leigh Stanley

Costume Supervisor/maker: Hannah Marshall

Wig Dresser: Alison Barlow

Photography: Graeme Braidwood Photography

Print Design: Sauce Creative Communications

EXTRAS IN LONDON FILM.

Stephen Hewson, Lucy Plant, Rosa Savage

SOUNDTRACK.

Original music composed and arranged by Janie Armour

Mixed by Sam Glossop

Musicians

Janie Armour: piano, keyboard, accordion, ukulele, bass

Jamie Cameron: cello, guitar, ukulele

Julia Doyle: double bass

Simon Roth: drums, percussion

Ruth Westley: violin

VAMOS THEATRE TEAM.

Artistic Director: Rachael Savage

Creative Producer: Honor Hoskins

Executive Producer: Claire Morton

Head of Better/Associate Artist: Janie Armour

Health Care Connector: Hazel Ratcliffe

Marketing Manager: Abbie Payton

Office Administrators: Sarah Hawkins and Rhiannon Malbas

PR Consultant: Mandy Rose

For an explanation of some of these job roles, please see the [Glossary \(Section 13\)](#)

SECTION 8: INTERVIEWS

An interview with Carl Davies, set and costume designer for *Dead Good*.

How have you approached the theme of death through the design?

Oooh tricky question! During the design process I tackle each scene separately and differently, looking at the location, mood and atmosphere of each scene. *Dead Good* is set in so many different locations, from The Ritz to the seaside, to a room in the hospice. Most of the story is about life and living it to the full. The idea of the sky, used as a painted texture on the set, came from conversations with *Dead Good* script advisor Nick, who is terminally ill. Since becoming terminal, he has gained an appreciation for the sky, looking at it daily. He and Rachael [*Dead Good* director] text daily with sky updates! It also depicts the feeling of tranquillity, almost a dreamlike background that gives us a sense of comfort, and is a gentle symbol of the end of life. It works as a good background to add colour, imagery and lighting that take you on Bob and Bernard's journey.

The show, story and staging changes greatly during the rehearsal process so I never really have a fully fixed idea. We use a lot of props, textures and colours to create a visual story. All of the show is snippets of real stories, so there is a focus on getting the props and costumes that are true and accurate to these stories - this influences the design, costume and props sourcing a lot!

What is your process for designing a show?

I design the show about 6 months before we start rehearsals. Working with Rachael we collaborate to see how the show is going to work through storytelling and design. I then make mood boards and costume designs from this initial meeting to help the creative team visualise my ideas and a scale model and drawings of the set for the construction company/builder. The aim is for the set to arrive on day one of rehearsals, so the actors can use it straight away. In rehearsals, the design team and I work with the rest of the production team and cast to create the show, including sourcing and making props, adapting costumes, painting and dressing the set.

Does designing for a mask show differ from other genres?

Very much so: it's more creative and challenging as the design, and particularly the props and costumes, must be precise. Quite often props need to be slightly oversized so the audience can see them clearly, especially in bigger theatres. Usually as a designer you are more conceptual



and it's about dressing a set to help create a scene and give a fullness to the stage, but with mask everything must be clear and specific to the storytelling.

What are the differences of designing and dressing a touring show, compared to other work?

Touring is always a bigger challenge and more complicated: you are restricted in so many ways. The designer must think about weight in the van, how the set comes apart to tour, how the touring team will carry and manoeuvre the set. It must be weatherproof, as it will get hot on stage and cold in the van. I will quite often have to look at each venue's stage to make sure the set will fit in, look the same as in every other venue, and the sight lines are good. Costumes need to be made to be quick changeable, there are a lot of fast costume changes. Costume alterations are mainly replacing buttons with Velcro and shoelaces with elastic. Always, in Vamos Theatre shows, the actors don't have time to go off stage to change, so we have to create hidden dressing areas at the back of the set, so they complete their fast changes. The design and thought of these areas are just as important as the set you see as an audience member; both areas have to complement each other and need to be factored into the space of different venues. I hope that answers some questions for you.



Exam Style Question...

Consider the answers given in the interview. Look at the picture of the set design (above), and write a paragraph in response to the following question:

Q: Justify why the set design would be suitable for a performance of *Dead Good*.

HINTS:

- Research your answer using the interview responses.
- Give specific examples from the interview and/or the performance of *Dead Good*.
- Command Word - **justify** (to make an argument for something supported by examples).
- Drama Words: **designer** (person responsible for creating the stage set).
- **Stage set:** the scenery and props on a stage, which create location and exits and entrances.

SECTION 8: INTERVIEWS

An Interview with Janie Armour, composer and sound editor for *Dead Good*.

What is the role of the music in a *Vamos Theatre* show?

It's pretty central! Because there's no dialogue, the music tells the aural story, helping the audience to understand the action and the motivations and emotions of the characters. The music underpins the action on stage: it can tell you what a character is feeling, establish the pace of the scene, let the audience know whether there is danger round the corner. It's very exciting to write music for *Vamos Theatre* because the scope is so wide: it's also really challenging, as the slightest mismatch between what the music is doing and the aims of the scene means it won't work.

At what stage is music added to the devising process?

It's added from very early on. I start adding music and sound during the research and development period (usually about 6 months before the show itself), although at this stage I'm just looking for the right kinds of mood and pace, rather than the exact music. I'll often use existing tracks rather than original composition, which I use as a guide for when I start writing. I usually write a lot of musical ideas before rehearsals start, working from the script, and then try them out as demos during the rehearsal weeks, gradually getting them into shape.

For *Dead Good* how have you approached the theme of death? Has it influenced your composition?

For me, *Dead Good* is less about death as about life, and so I've approached it by writing the most positive music I've ever written! Much of the show is actively celebratory, and so it's been a joy to write for it. At times it's been challenging, though, such as the scene when Bernard dies. It was important to write something that reflected the process of dying, and so I had to put myself there as best I could to do that – which was not easy. I relied on finding a key to it through the beauty and fragility of breath, and I improvised on the piano along with the scene to get the timing. Challenging...but also fascinating.



Exam Style Question...

Try this question, if you have already seen the performance:

Q: What impact did the use of music in *Dead Good* have on you as an audience member?

HINTS:

- Research your answer using the interview responses.
- Note that the question asks for your personal response from the point of view of an audience member.
- You might want to think about **semiotics** in your response.
- Give specific examples of the use of music and the effect it created in the performance.
- Key Words: **impact** – how it affected you, what it communicated to you, how it enhanced the performance. **Semiotics** – the combining of dramatic elements to develop meaning.

SECTION 8: INTERVIEWS

Notes from Rachael Savage, writer and director of *Dead Good*

I don't have a good relationship with death; does anyone? My best friend Rob died when we were both 27 - a secretive, non-detected brain tumour. Clubbing in Camden together on the Saturday night, dead by the following Tuesday: 15th February 1998. I've lived my life since utterly fearful of death, especially of how sudden, unannounced and brutal it can be, how it turns your life upside down and how it has driven my ambition to lead a life worthy of two people, mine and Rob's.

So when a fan of our shows, Dr Maggie Keeble, emailed me and said she'd like to talk about the theme for our next show being end of life, I was filled with dread. Maggie is a passionate and persuasive woman and I soon realised that we were on the same page on many things including life, priorities, and empowerment. I was convinced, and ever since I've been immersed in researching and writing the show, meeting people being supported by palliative care services and health professionals who work in end of life care.

I was introduced to Dr Lucy Martin of the Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge. My possible preconceptions of hospices have been smashed - Mary Stevens is noisy, full of music and laughter, activities, jokes and a cupboard full of gin. Ruth, the sister, is utterly genuine and generous with her time, compassionate and kind. She wants to make anything possible, from bringing a horse to the window of a patient in his final days (he loved horses), to getting into bed and holding a patient close in the final moments of his life, to making a wedding happen, hours before a young woman's death on Valentine's Day; she mentioned, "I always wanted to get married on Valentine's Day." And she did.

Then there's Dave, oh my! Dave talked to me about how his cancer has totally changed him, his relationships, his charitable nature, his capacity to love... Dave and his capacity to love; it's a bottomless pit.

Then I visited the Men's Space group at St Richard's Hospice and met Nick, and his mate Pete. Curiously, they were as close as could be to the two characters I'd started to write about. Nick has helped me shape the script of *Dead Good*, sharing draft after draft. His input has changed what the show is about, particularly around the relationship of male friends in a hospice.

Nick and Pete's friendship is based on a deep, caring, unflinching concern combined with the most outrageous



schoolboy, dark humour. Nick's input has made the show more outrageous, positive, delightful and funny.

The phrase "Nothing about us without us" has become part of our core beliefs. I could not have written this show without the input of so many generous and wise people, and in particular, my now close friends, Nick and Dave, both terminally ill. I'm stunned every time I meet, text, or email them: their zest for life and love, their appreciation of the minutiae of life, and their often shocking sense of humour.

Writing *Dead Good* has deepened my value of life, made me think about planning for a good death myself; and I've laughed ten times more than I've cried.

People don't talk about death, I certainly didn't. Why is death taboo, when it inevitably encompasses us all? It used not to be in the last century, when death was sadly a more everyday occurrence. Is there such a thing as a good death, and can we plan for one? How do dying people teach us to live? Surely, we start by talking about it?



Exam Style Question...

Try this question if you have already seen the performance:

Q: Explain how the director of *Dead Good* used proxemics to develop character relationships and what impact this had on you as an audience member.

HINTS:

- In your answer make sure you use specific examples of moments from the performance.
- Note that there are two parts to the question. Read it carefully.
- **Command Word:** explain – make something clear through detailed description and examples.
- **Drama Words: Director** – the person who develops a clear creative vision for every aspect of a performance. **Proxemics** - the expression of relationships through the changing use of space.

SECTION 8: INTERVIEWS

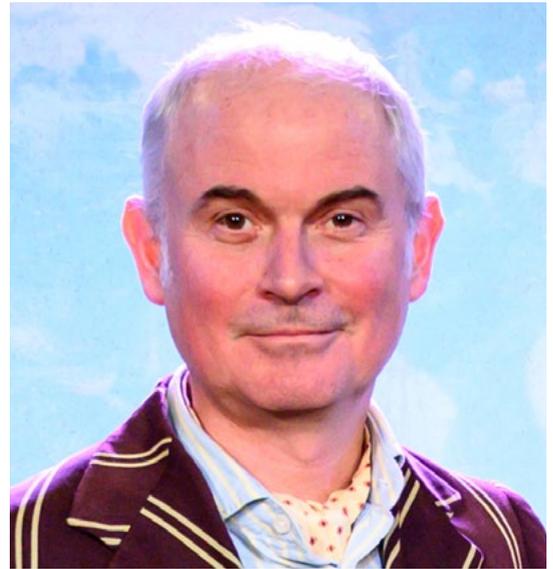
An Interview with James Greaves, who plays Bernard in *Dead Good*

I always think that being a mask actor is akin to being a naturalistic one. We, the actors, still have to find and develop a character. The mask gives you the basics; the age, the twinkle in the eye, the slight arrogance, the smile. However, it won't tell you how the character walks, what twitches they have, the pace, rhythms and mannerisms of the character; to find these is the role of the actor.

It is our job to bring the mask to life, to find its voice. So, with that in mind, after I have had a good look at the mask I tend to ignore it. To find the emotions and show those physically, I personally approach through an almost Stanislavskian method. Pulling upon the 'Magic If' - if this were my own situation how would I feel and react? - and using my personal feelings and experiences as reference. Working with Rachael, we find the movement, gesture and pace that physically reads what we are trying to say and then we refine it. Some mannerisms and gestures develop and gain a specific purpose, i.e. the smoothing of the hair and straightening of Bernard's tie connects Bernard and his younger self, little Bernard, in his flashback. Incidentally, this gesture is based on a family member of mine who was always very well dressed and presented and therefore conscious of his appearance. He was always smoothing his hair down at the sides. All the hair he had left! [For more on this, see the Internal Monologue Technique Film on the Vamos Theatre website.]

In my opinion, in its simplest form, there are only two stages to Bernard's character development during the show. Number one, the Bernard we see in Scene 1; a man of wealth and privilege who is nervous, awaiting the results of a test and if they are going to confirm a terminal illness. He is sharply dressed, he is upright and somewhat uptight. Secondly, and the character that carries us through, is the Bernard we see from Scene 2 onwards. He has accepted his illness and is embracing the last stages of life. He is relaxed and playful. He enters on a scooter, his costume is shorts and a cravat; he's become approachable, jovial and flirty because of the knowledge of his imminent demise.

Within this version of Bernard, he is sometimes seen to revert back to his inner child, possibly become the child he was never able to be in reality. For example, in Scene 2 when he is told by Marie to go and make friends with Bob, he crosses the stage, foot dragging and petulant,



just like a young child. There is also a childish and playful energy in the beach scene, where Bernard and Bob play in the sea, learn to skim stones and delight in getting two bounces!

Touch is really important to him, and he is delicate in his touch. He is not being flirty in this. If he was ever smarmy, he has left that behind now. It is a genuine and truthful way of connecting with the world around him. Do look out for those moments of touch, with Bernard and Marie especially.

Self-preservation

Self-preservation as an actor is vital especially on a long tour. The moment in the show after Bernard dies, I am left on stage looking through one eyehole at a blue wall. I can't see anything else. I have to say, your mind does begin to wander off to strange places and thoughts. It is easy to imagine 'is this how I will go? What will my death be like?' It is a bit freaky, especially if you've followed a 'method' approach to the role, but it does get easier. It has to. Because then you rely on actors' technique to recreate the moments, rather than go the full Stanislavsky and 'feel it'. It may seem a little bit callous sometimes to throw these issues away at the end of a performance, but to survive a tour you have to let go of the moment and leave it on stage.

Development of character after the first night and on tour

One of the advantages of going on tour or being in theatre is the opportunity for the show and its characters to develop. On film, you get one, maybe two if you're lucky, shots at getting it right. Then it's there for all time. Live performance means you can evolve. However hard you work at perfecting the storyline and the right gestures etc. in time for the opening night, there are always extra layers to add as the show starts to relax and get on the road. If you film the show at the beginning and end of tour, the difference is marked. We haven't diverged from the story but we have made our gestures crisper, found extra details, realised previously unspotted flaws and corrected them. The performances are rounder, fuller, more beautiful.



Imagine...

Imagine that you are a performer who has been asked to play the character of Bernard in a full mask production.

Read through the information in the following sections of the pack:

- Section 2 – Full mask theatre
- Section 5 – Bernard's profile
- Section 8 – An interview with James Greaves
- Section 12 – The scripted extract

Now describe what you as a performer would do to create the character of Bernard. Think about your use of movement, gesture, stance and body language. Also think about how you would create the expression and communication of a range of emotions whilst wearing the fixed expression of Bernard's mask.

SECTION 9: JOURNEY OF *DEAD GOOD* FROM CONCEPT TO TOURING

The inspiration (May 2018)

Rachael Savage (RS) meets with Dr. Maggie Keeble to talk about an idea for a new show.

Research and Development Phase 1 (June 2018 – May 2019)

- RS reads books, watches films and holds countless interviews with people who are terminally ill, health care professionals, friends and family, talking about the end of life
- Research is compiled into the first draft of a skeleton script
- First draft of the script reviewed and debated with Associate Artists: Janie Armour, Alan Riley, James Greaves
- Second draft of the script produced

Casting (June 2018 – Aug 2019)

- Cast is selected from existing ensemble cast
- Performers selected for their mask experience, physical theatre skills and physical build
- Other factors to consider: number of drivers in the company, technical knowledge to support Touring Tech, workshop delivery experience

Mask Making 2 (Oct 2018 – Oct 2019)

- Sept 2018: character profiles and script sent to mask maker Russell Dean (StrangeFace Theatre)
- August 2019: masks are made
- Oct 2019: Bob and Bernard masks arrive at the Vamos Theatre base

Projection and filming (Aug 2019 – Jan 2020)

- RS, Dan Hill and cast (including Vamos Youth Theatre members) go to London for filming
- Still and moving projection created

Research and Development Phase 2 (May 2019 – Nov 2019)

- 3 day R&D in the rehearsal room with RS, Alan Riley and James Greaves developing characters, plot and detailed ideas. Janie Armour (composer/sound editor) and Carl Davies (designer) are also involved at this stage
- JA experiments with using live musicians during the R&D process
- Scenes are played to an invited audience of advisors who give feedback
- Rewriting of script in response to R&D process

Rehearsals with cast (Nov 2019 – Jan 2020)

- Each scene is developed with the cast
- Work on clarity of movement and gesture and detail
- Selected audience invited in the rehearsals room (20th Dec, 10th and 17th Jan) to check storyline and clarity
- Sound designer sees a run through
- Costumes and wigs made and fitted, set painted, props sourced
- Soundtrack and composition edited in rehearsal

Composition & soundtrack (May 2019 – Jan 2020)

- Ideas formed after R&D process (May-July 2019)
- Structure planned and musicians booked (August 2019)
- Composition process (Sept-Dec 2019)
- Recording of musicians (Dec 2019)
- Mixing & mastering of soundtrack (Jan 2020)

Technical Rehearsals (Jan 2020)

- 10th Jan: lighting designer sees run through
- 17th Jan: sound designer sees run through
- 20th Jan: arrive at The Swan Theatre, Worcester for 3 day technical rehearsal period, where lighting sound and projection are finalised before previews

Set design (June 2019 - Dec 2019)

- Initial concept meeting after R&D
- Set design/model box production meeting with RS
- Designs sent to set builder
- Set arrives in rehearsals (Dec 2019)

Preview performances (Jan 2020)

- Dead Good is previewed to sell out audiences at The Swan Theatre, Worcester

Lighting (June 2019 – Jan 2020)

- Meeting between RS and lighting designer
- Lighting designer sees run through in rehearsal
- Lighting plan created

Touring and amending (Jan 2020 – April 2020)

- Dead Good premieres at Jacksons Lane as part of London International Mime Festival
- New projection added after opening night
- The show tours around the UK
- RS visits the show on tour, continuing to work on character, detail and clarity

SECTION 10: DRAMA PRACTITIONERS

In all forms of artistic expression there are influences that have shaped its style and form: dramatic expression is no exception. Full mask theatre draws on techniques and theories of many different drama practitioners. This is just an example of some of them. Maybe you can think of others.

Konstantin Stanislavski: 'The Method'

Stanislavski called his 'Method' the 'art of experiencing' as opposed to the 'art of representation'. It develops the use of emotional memory in the actor, searches for inner motives to justify action and strives for a realism that transcends the divide between actor and audience.

In his preparations for the role of Bernard in *Dead Good* the actor James Greaves said:

"To find the emotions and show those physically, I personally approach through an almost Stanislavskian method. Pulling upon the 'Magic If' - if this were my own situation how would I feel and react? - and using my personal feelings and experiences as reference."

Although the style of full mask theatre could be seen as removed from realism because of the use of masks, it is far from it. The connection with the techniques of Stanislavski, their use in the process of rehearsal and preparation, as well as their importance in developing sincerity and empathy within performance, is central to the success of communication with the audience.

Jacques Lecoq: Physical Theatre

The founder of a school of physical theatre in Paris, Lecoq is best known for his teaching of mime and movement techniques. He encouraged his actors to perform in ways which suited them best and which focused on the paramount importance of their relationship with the audience.

The performance of *Dead Good* communicates relationships, ideas, plot and themes through the physical; through movement, gesture, body language, spatial relationships and its connection with the audience. Full mask theatre breaks the fourth wall, it reaches out, it brings the audience in and lets them share in the emotive and moving experiences of the characters. If you have seen the performance, think of the nurse's frequent appeals to the audience over Bernard's behaviour, Bernard's knowing look as he produces the whoopee cushion.

Bertolt Brecht: Epic Theatre

Brecht's use of masks in performance was primarily in support of his 'alienation effect', distancing the audience from the action, but his use of gestic masks was designed to move the actor from facial expression to a greater reliance on physical movement to communicate with the audience. The style of *Dead Good* relies on the physical movement of the performers to express characters through a full range of emotion, feelings, ideas and relationships – all without the spoken word.



Think about...

Are there any other theatre practitioners whose influence and theories you can see in the development and performance of *Dead Good*? Think about:

- **Jerzie Grotowski and The Poor Theatre**
- **Antonin Artaud and The Theatre of Cruelty (an expression of the human condition)**
- **Vsevolod Meyerhold and Biomechanics (motion rather than language)**

How can each of these be linked to the performance of *Dead Good*? Do some research if you're not sure who these practitioners are or about their ideas.

SECTION 11: STRUCTURAL DEVICES

Structural devices allow a story to be told and characters to develop, building a journey for the audience. They highlight moments, communicate memories and lift us above the beginning, middle and end. Here are some of the devices used in *Dead Good* and an explanation of why they have been used.

Cross Cutting: Scene 1

Bernard, standing on stage left, is told of his condition by a nurse, who shows him his medical record. Bernard staggers slightly and lowers his head. Bob sits with his wife on stage right; he's nervous, waiting. She leaves and a doctor enters. The doctor comforts Bob and sits with him. We cut back to Bernard who offers the nurse money and his credit card – an irrational attempt to buy his way out of the situation. Instead the nurse gives him some information about the hospice, at the same time as Bob is given the same by the doctor. Both characters exit.



Originally two scenes, this was then combined into a cross-cut, so as to show parallel lives and the different ways in which the two characters react to the news of their terminal illness.

Flashback: Scene 3

Bernard is shown as a little boy, playing with his toy car, as the older Bernard looks on. His mother enters. She shows no interest in Bernard except to give him money and his suitcase, to send him off to boarding school. The links of Bernard's later interest in cars and his obsession with money are clear to see. The neglect of his mother and the lack of physical contact paint a picture of Bernard's early life. His later recognition that money cannot buy life and the simple pleasures of skimming a stone in water show his changing character and develop our empathy towards him.



Flashback is used several times during the production. It plays with time, communicating moments in the characters' lives which deepen our understanding of who they are, developing empathy and giving us an insight into their changing worlds.

Symbolism:

The plant and the sky

Humour plays an important part in the production – making the often-challenging themes and complex relationships accessible. The plant, a symbol of differences between the two characters, where Bob is impressed by nature while Bernard is obsessed with fast cars and money, is also a focus of comic interaction between Bob, Bernard and the audience. The sky, its shifting colours and growing importance, represents a change of attitudes within the characters and their developing awareness of the world around them. Both the plant and sky are used to show the passing of time, with the plant at different stages of growth through the show and storm clouds being projected in between scenes.



Film: Scenes 5 and 9

Bernard and Bob drive into the distance in a classic car, once Bob has tinkered with the engine and got it started. They drive through the countryside, down a dirt track, Bernard's hair blowing in the wind. Full mask, though driven by a naturalistic process, is a specific style of performance. It is communication with an audience that relies on physical expression to replace words and masks which replace changing facial expression. The use of film in *Dead Good* brings a reality to this style, changes the energy, changes the pace and makes the plot and character development increasingly accessible to the audience.



Try This...

There are many other examples of where specific techniques are used in the performance.

If you have seen the performance, try to pick out where other examples of the following techniques are used. For each one, explain how they develop the plot and/or characters within the performance.

- Symbolism
- Flashback
- Breaking the fourth wall
- Cross cutting
- Photographs

HINT: To support your comments describe a specific example of the use of each technique in the performance of *Dead Good* (similar to the descriptions in the pack) and then explain their purpose.

SECTION 12: SCRIPT EXTRACT

In this section, we have included a section of the script for the start of Scene 2, which traces the characters' internal monologues, stage directions and internal dialogue. When reading the script, think about when the masks will 'clock' the audience. [For more on this, see the *Clocking Technique Film on the Vamos Theatre website.*]

This is Bob's first time at the hospice. He is struggling to come to terms with his diagnosis and does not want company. Bernard is a regular at the hospice and is living life to the full. The hospice nurse has instructed Bernard to make friends with Bob...



SR: a table with *Financial Times*, *Classic Car* magazine, plant pot, bulb. 2 chairs side-by-side SL of the table.

SL: a trolley with a selection of spirits and glasses

Bob is sitting on one of the chairs doing a newspaper crossword. Bernard enters SL with a glass to get a refill of gin. He clocks Bob but decides against speaking.

Bernard picks up the gin bottle. *Drink?*

Bob: *No thanks*

Bernard: *Hm. Your loss.* Puts the bottle and glass back on the trolley and makes his way to behind Bob's chair. *Ah, crossword.*

Bob: *Hmm...what's that word...*

Bernard: *Oh! I've got one.* Gets his fountain pen out of his jacket and takes the lid off with a flourish – it is an expensive pen. Accidentally flicks ink on Bob's back. *Oops, I'll just rub that off...Right, where was it....ah yesJ U R Y*

Bob: *What are you doing?*

Bernard: *Oh, another one! T E A*

Bob: *This guy is doing my head in*

Bernard: (quicker this time) *Oh! P E N C I L*

Bob: Thrusting newspaper at Bernard. *Here, you finish it!*

Bernard: *Oh, no no, no, sorry, no really.* Puts the pen away



Try This...

Working with a partner, have a go at staging the scripted extract between the characters, Bob and Bernard.

Important – Remember that in full mask theatre words are never spoken by the actors – the words in the scripted extract show the internal monologue and dialogue, which create meaning and support the actors in developing non verbal communication.

When you stage the scene, you must find creative ways of communicating to the audience without speaking the words. Think about movement, gesture, facial expression, body language, spatial relationships, the use of props and your relationship with the audience. But remember to keep it small and naturalistic. For example, how do you communicate the line *This guy is doing my head in* without speaking the words? Remember to think about the internal dialogue.

SECTION 13: GLOSSARY

This section is to help you with some of the terms used in discussing *Dead Good*.

13.1 Professional theatre roles

Writer: The writer researches the subject matter and writes the script that is taken into the rehearsal room. In the case of Vamos Theatre, this is not the final script and is used as a skeleton to inform that actors and creative team in the creation of the final piece.

Director: A theatre director is in charge of the creative vision of the production. The director's goal is to bring out the best performances from the actors and tell the story of the play in a compelling way. A theatre director also oversees creative choices on set, costume, music, design and other production elements – though those decisions are made in conjunction with the other professionals involved.

Composer/soundtrack editor: A theatre composer writes original music and sounds that help tell the story and guide the mood and emotion of the show. In the case of *Dead Good*, the composer creates the whole soundtrack, editing together the original music with existing music and sound. She also performs most of the music, and records additional musicians.

Advisors: advisors play a big part in Vamos Theatre shows, and are often people who know the subject matter well, either professionally or personally. Advisors are from various walks of life and professions; for example, d/Deaf artists, health care professions, people who have life-limiting illness, or experts on any other relevant area. They advise on the script and watch run-throughs of the show in rehearsals to ensure it makes sense to them.

Set/costume designer: these roles can be taken by one person or be separate roles. At Vamos Theatre, we have one person who does both, and also coordinates the use of props. A set designer creates the overall look of the playing space. Working with the director they develop the conceptual ideas and create the drawing for the making and painting of the set. A costume designer ensures that the costumes reflect the era of the show, the character who wears them, and balances the colours and texture on stage.

Mask maker: We work with a specialist mask

maker who creates all our masks by hand. The mask maker creates masks for each new show, working from a brief in discussion with the director. The masks are first made in miniature (a maquette), then when these are approved, the masks are modelled out of clay, vacuum formed (moulding the plastic onto the clay) and painted.

Lighting designer: working with the director, the lighting designer creates a plan for the lighting that provides the right mood, atmosphere, and illumination to support and enhance the telling of the story.

Film/projection designer: The film/projection designer creates and supervises all moving and still images that are projected onto the set during the show.

Sound designer: The sound designer works closely with the composer/soundtrack editor to make sure that the soundtrack is heard at its best in each venue. This includes supervising the position and levels of speakers, effects, equalisation and transitions between scenes.

Tour technician: The touring technician works with each of the venues on tour to ensure the lights, sound and projection in each venue is at its best, as well as operating and working the technical elements for the show.

Rehearsal stage manager: The rehearsal stage manager ensures the smooth and safe running of the rehearsal room. The role includes making sure the cast and production team know call times (when they are needed), filming scenes as required for reference, resetting the stage area between running scenes, and communicating between the production team, actors and the company office.

Set construction: This is the person/company that builds the set, working from the set designer's drawings.

Costume supervisor/maker: The costume supervisor/maker alters and makes costumes under the design of the costume designer.

Wig dresser: The wig dresser cuts and sets the wigs on all of the masks at the start of every tour.

13.2 Thematic Glossary

Hospice: A hospice is a place where people who have a terminal illness can go to receive support in living as fully and as well as they can in the last part of their lives.

Palliative care: Different from hospice care – it is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life threatening illness: it not just for people in need of end of life care.

13.3 Mask Performance Glossary

For specific Mask Theatre terms please see our website: <https://www.vamostheatre.co.uk/learning/resources/mask-theatre-terms>

SECTION 14: RESOURCES

We find our stories through researching human histories, through talking to people about their own lives, and through stories and histories already written. Stories can be found in the most unlikely places, often closer to home than you might think. Do some research; talk to people, and look around - you'll find something to inspire you!

The following resources were useful to us in the making of *Dead Good*.

BOOKS

- *Intimate Death* by Marie de Hennezel
- *Before I Die* by Jenny Downham
- *The Fault in our Stars* by John Green
- *Let Go Of My Hand* by Edward Docx
- *With the End in Mind* by Kathryn Mannix

FILM, TELEVISION AND DIGITAL

- *Gone Fishing: Bob Mortimer and Paul Whitehouse*
- Terry Pratchett: Choosing to Die <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LviHXDp8SHk>
- *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (film): official trailer at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqijVXvw7_E
- Dr. Kathryn Mannix: BBC Ideas <https://www.facebook.com/bbc/videos/2185162658165588/>
- *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (film): official trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eawGsbRLzHQ>
- *The Big Adventure* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxa-kvT4OcA>

THEATRE

- *Infinita Familie Floz* (full mask theatre)
- *A Minute Too Late Complicite*



MUSIC

There is lots of interesting and exciting music that you can try when you are making your own mask theatre. Here are a few pieces of music to try – see what effect they have on your scene:

- *High Speed French Train* (Alexander Dusplat): *Fantastic Mr Fox* soundtrack
- *Tika Tika Walk* (Carlos D'Allessio): *Delicatessen* soundtrack
- *Vuelvo al Sur* (Gotan Project)
- *Lost in Time* (Nigel Kennedy/Kroke)
- *Sun Harmonics* (Jon Hopkins)
- *Nocturne No 2 in Eb* (Frederick Chopin)

We also have a *Vamos Theatre* music playlist for workshops on Spotify, which you can find at: <https://spoti.fi/2USbaep>

SECTION 15: GETTING INVOLVED



If you are between 14 and 25 and live local to Worcester, you can join our weekly Vamos Youth Theatre or Vamos Central (for young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities). Find out more at <http://www.vamostheatre.co.uk/learning/join-in>

To be the first to find out about our shows, workshops and news you can join our mailing list (you have to be over 18) - sign up from our Home Page at www.vamostheatre.co.uk

We'd love to connect with you on Social Media: you can find us on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) - just search for Vamos Theatre.

Occasionally, we have work placements and apprentice positions for young people: contact us if you are interested in finding out more www.vamostheatre.co.uk/contact-us

Tell us what you think!

We'd love to hear from you and to find out what you thought about *Dead Good*.

You can tell us in lots of ways:

We have an online Comments Book on our website www.vamostheatre.co.uk/comments-book

You can contact us directly via our website Contact Form www.vamostheatre.co.uk/contact-us

You can get in touch with us via social media

You can write to us at: Vamos Theatre Worcester Arts Workshop, 21 Sansome Street, Worcester, WR1 1UH, UK.