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TEECHERS LEAVERS 22

by John Godber

SAMUEL FRENCH

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TEECHERS LEAVERS 22 was a co-production with Hull Truck Theatre as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations, John Godber re-imagined his iconic play for the leavers of 2022. The performance was directed by Mark Babych. The cast was as follows:

SALTY ..... Levi Payne
GAIL..... Purvi Parmar
HOBBY..... Martha Godber

Original and West End productions directed by John Godber.

CHARACTERS

SALTY – A school-student bright and fresh-faced, rather dirty in appearance. Plays **TEACHER A**, **MRS PARRY**, **MR JONES**, **PETE SAXON**, **OGGY**, **BARRY**, **RON**, **DR BASFORD DEANIE**, and **MR CLIFTON**.

GAIL – Loud-mouthed and bossy, attractive and full of enthusiasm. Plays **TEACHER B**, **MS WHITHAM**, **OGGY**, **DR BASFORD**, **MR HATTON**, **JACKIE PRIME**, **PIGGY**, **DENNIS**, **DOUG**, and **MRS COATES**.

HOBBY – Hard**.** Should be large, must be bigger than the other two. She is doing the play despite herself. Plays **MS NIXON** and **MRS PARRY**.

MS NIXON – New drama teacher, young and casual.

MRS PARRY – The Executive Head, large and loud, a real eccentric.

DR BASFORD – The Deputy Head, strict but good, a nasty piece of work.

MISS PRIME – PE mistress.

MS WHITHAM – A fussy and hopeless teacher, desperate to leave.

MS JONES – A moaner, rather fat, someone who wants to leave but no one will employ.

DEANIE – A teacher.

DOUG – Site Staff, a miserable man, he hates kids and drama.

OGGY – The cock of the school, looks much older than he actually is, the school bully in a modern age.

PETE SAXON – A large, frightening youth with tattoos, appears foolish.

MR FISHER – Head of PE.

BARRY WOBSCHALL – A small boy who never brings his PE kit.

PIGGY PATTERSON – A boy who is always telling on others, he always runs to his lessons.

RON – A boy who never does PE.

MR HATTON – Helps with the youth club dance.

DENNIS – Oggy's side-kick.

MRS COATES – Head Mistress at Saint George's.

MR CLIFTON – Head of Governors at Saint George's.

SETTING

The action takes place in a comprehensive school hall.

TIME

The present.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Teechers Leavers 22 was designed to be played by three actors, multi-role playing twenty other parts in a play-within-a-play format. Everything about the production was reduced to the basic essentials: actors, stage, audience. I wanted to produce a play that relied on the same bare essentials that a drama teacher might have in school: kids (actors), a few chairs and desks (the set), and an audience. With these basic ingredients anything can happen in a drama lesson; indeed, the characters in *Teechers Leavers 22* illustrate that once talent has been tapped in school the result is often staggering. Multi-role playing is also, it must be said, an economic as well as artistic consideration. Maybe if I had twenty actors at my disposal I would have produced a different play? In this version of the play the twenty multi-roled parts have been listed in order that twenty actors (kids) could perform the play if so desired. However the play is performed, actors or students, it is important to remember that *Teechers Leavers 22* is a comedy, a comedy which illustrates many anxieties in education today. Comedies must primarily be funny, here is a comedy, I think, which is also deadly serious.

THE SET

Nothing is required in the way of a set except for three plastic briefcases, old newspapers for the staff-room scenes, a broom for Doug, and two chairs and two open-top desks for the various other settings, all of which should be easily obtained in school. When produced by three actors, character differentiation is helped by the use of funny noses (which the kids would have bought cheaply from W. H. Smith's). Clearly when the play is produced with a larger cast a proportional increase in props is to be expected.

THE MUSIC

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TEECHERS LEAVERS 22

When I wrote the original *Teechers* back in the early 1980s I had no idea that it would be so enduring, or that its themes would still be relevant almost forty years later. I had always wanted to be a drama teacher, discovering drama in a state secondary school was a revelation for me, and I have two great drama teachers to thank for that.

You might have thought that drama would be widely accepted in school as a core subject and a highly regarded area of investigation, and yet, it saddens me to report, that in some secondary schools drama has less status now than it did when I was teaching back in 1983.

For anyone who understands the central importance of drama in the curriculum as both a subject and a tool for educational research, not to mention it's human aspects in the round, the absence of drama for all in our schools is an outrage in my view.

Those of us who have seen first hand how it can engage, stimulate, grow, challenge and develop young people will stand aghast as we contemplate a Government who are promoting maths to be studied until students are eighteen. It's not that I'm bad at maths, I'm actually rather good; but it undoubtedly demonstrates a clear lack of knowledge about the importance of the person in the educational process, for as the late lamented Sir Ken Robinson observed two decades ago: we have to educate the whole person, not just that bit above the neck! For me that means developing empathy, sensitivity, imagination, mutual understanding and cooperation, in short the things that make us connect as humans beings. Underneath the lunacy and comedy in Teechers the message is clear!

John Godber OBE
Hull. 2023

ACT ONE

(A comprehensive school hall 2022.)

(A wooden stage. There are two old wooden double desks upstage. Upstage right is an old locker with a school broom leaning against it. Downstage centre is a chair; left and right two single desks and chairs angled downstage, and three bags. A satchel, plastic bags and sports bags are near the chairs and desks. They belong to **SALTY**, **GAIL** *and* **HOBBY** *respectively. The students wear a variation of the school uniform, all have seen better days.* **HOBBY***'s trousers are slightly too short and she wears boots which make her taller, even though she is a unit already. She is a hard-faced, frightening girl.* **SALTY** *is cheeky and instantly likeable a powder keg of energy.* **GAIL** *is impish and lively, likeable and unreliable. The shirts they wear are worn and old, blue ties with a stripe are worn in various styles. with blue blazers and a poorly design school badge. Despite the uniformity it is clear these students are low on financial support. Slowly* **SALTY**, **GAIL** *and* **HOBBY** *enter, and look at the audience, they have Covid-19 masks which hang from their chins. As the play begins the masks get secreted in to their pockets. They are nervously excited, and eyeball the audience; which is the entire school, they acknowledge friends and staff. There is a tense silence before they start.)*

SALTY. All right?

GAIL. Look at 'em!

SALTY. Are you nervous?

HOBBY. We are!

(They are nervously enjoying their power.)

SALTY. Been an odd two years!

GAIL. Mrs Hudson's, there look!

SALTY. All right Mrs Hudson?

(They wave at the audience.)

HOBBY. Alright Dr Bishop?

SALTY. Look at his face!

GAIL. All right, Mrs Weaver?

(A beat.)

HOBBY. Can't believe t' whole schools looking at us!

(A beat.)

SALTY. Can't believe we're not doing it on Zoom!

GAIL. I bet you wish we were don't you Miss?

HOBBY. I don't, I want to do it!

*(***GAIL** *is self deprecating.)*

GAIL. You've got to suffer this in-person!

(A beat.)

SALTY. I've always wanted to be on this stage. I've always wanted to come up here and say, "School's shit." I bet you all have. Whenever I see Mrs Hudson come up here to talk about Social Responsibility or being a good Samaritan or Safe-Guarding, I think about that. Cos really Mrs Hudson would like to come up here and say, "Shit to the lot o' you!"

GAIL. Are we doing it then?

SALTY. It's like when she gets you in her office, all neat and smelling of perfume and she says, "You don't come to school to fool around, to waste your time. We treat you like young adults and we expect you to behave accordingly. I don't think that writing silly comments on a wall is a mature thing to do."

HOBBY. That's good that.

SALTY. Yeh, but really she wants to say, "Hey Salty, pack all this graffiti in, it's getting on my tits."

GAIL. Look at 'em just looking!

SALTY. Anyway why am I bothered, this is it. No more school, after today mate!

HOBBY. It's college for us!

GAIL. No more Miss Jubb shouting like you're deaf as a post, "Gail Saunders how dare you belch in front of me." Didn't know it was your turn…

HOBBY. Funny!

SALTY. No more full school assemblies sat on the cold floor of the sports hall freezing your arse off!

GAIL. No more running round t' school field, and cold showers and people saying; it's good for you.

HOBBY. No more Zooming!

GAIL. No more scenes in the changing rooms where you daren't get changed because you wear a vest and everyone else has got a bra…

HOBBY. Mind you I wasn't on Zoom half the time, turned it off.

GAIL. No more teachers with beards and hush puppies.

SALTY. No more teachers, who say "I'm just like you"!

HOBBY. That's you Sir!!

GAIL. No more having to run the fifteen hundred metres with a heart condition.

SALTY. No more.

HOBBY. Cos today we're off.

GAIL. Let's start!

SALTY. Hang on, before we start, we want to thank Ms Nixon, our drama teacher. Before she came here three years ago, we weren't really interested in drama. And we know that she's been offered a job at a better school…But before Miss came here, the teachers had given us up for dead…We were average.

HOBBY. Yes they said; I was average, she opens her book well, and likes a warm room!

GAIL. They never said that!

HOBBY. They did!

SALTY. Well I don't feel average today, I feel like a boss… thanks to Miss.

HOBBY. I was told not to do drama, they said it was a waste of an option, and now I've helped put this together!

SALTY. This is what we did for our B.Tech performance on Zoom, and it includes Brechtian techniques, and physical theatre!

GAIL. Yes, but we've adapted.

HOBBY. First time we've done it in front of real people!

GAIL. That's made them nervous!

SALTY. A lot of the stuff in it was told to us by Miss over the last three years.

HOBBY. So blame her!

GAIL. And even though you might not like it, everything what happens in the play is based on truth

HOBBY. But the names and the faces have been changed.

GAIL. To protect the innocent.

SALTY. But you know who you are!

GAIL. We're going to take you to Whitewall Academy. It's a comprehensive somewhere in the north of England…

HOBBY. Near Hull!

GAIL. It's in Hull actually!

HOBBY. On a big estate!

GAIL. And they're expecting a new drama teacher to arrive…

HOBBY. …Coz the other one had a breakdown! There's seventeen hundred kids at Whitewall and it's got Serious Weaknesses!

GAIL. And it nearly failed it's Ofsted!

HOBBY. Which means that it's got issues right.

SALTY. All we want you to do is use your imagination because there's only three of us, and we all have to play different characters…

HOBBY. And narrators.

SALTY. And narrators.

HOBBY. So you'll have to concentrate…

SALTY. Oh yeh, you'll have to concentrate…

GAIL. Say the title Salty!

SALTY. Oh shit, yeh… And it's called *Teechers* –

GAIL. – *Leavers 22, Scenes from our school*!

HOBBY. Coz that's what it is, right!

(LX.)

(A sudden burst of music. They become* **TEACHERS**, *with briefcases and files, There is a physicality to their storytelling which belies their actual abilities. Three overhead spots pick them out across the centre of the stage. The lyric nature of the dialogue gives them a stylish physical manner through their story telling. Music fades.)*

HOBBY. Arrive first thing…

GAIL. Into the car park…

HOBBY. Through the gates…

SALTY. Find your spot…

GAIL. Mine's gone!

SALTY. Take another!

HOBBY. Quarter to eight on the dot!

SALTY. Kids, cars, chaos!

HOBBY. Steel fencing at every turn!

GAIL. Across the road!

HOBBY. Houses boarded!

SALTY. They're being replaced!

GAIL. It's taking time!

SALTY. With levelling up

HOBBY. It'll all be fine!

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SALTY. Into reception!

GAIL. Signing in!

SALTY. Photo done!

HOBBY. Lanyard on!

GAIL. Sanitise!

ALL. Sanitise!

SALTY. To the left!

GAIL. To the right!

HOBBY. Put your mask on!

ALL. Sanitise!

SALTY. To the left!

GAIL. To the right!

HOBBY. Put your mask on!

ALL. Sanitise!

(The three actors move across the stage chasing their spotlight positions as they do the personify various staff who are now in the large corridors of the school. They essentially switch overhead spots.)

GAIL. Morning.

HOBBY. Morning.

SALTY. Morning.

HOBBY. Morning.

GAIL. Morning.

PARRY. Stop running Simon Patterson.

TEACHER A. Morning Olly.

PARRY. Morning, Mike.

TEACHER B. Morning, Dr. Basford.

ALL. Morning, Mrs Parry…

PARRY. Good-morning…

WITHAM. You are chewing, girl, spit it out. Not into her hair, into a bin…

TEACHER B. I don't call that a straight line, do you, Kieren Macheath? No? Neither do I.

PARRY. I know that was the bell, Simon Patterson. The bell is a signal for me to move and not for anyone else.

*(***HOBBY** *becomes* **MS NIXON**. *She slips on a stylish jackets which will denote when she plays the drama teacher. She slightly adjusts her demeanour of a nervous new teacher who is learning on the job QTS.)*

NIXON. I'm Sharn Nixon the new drama teacher; yes I know it's unbelievable but go with it! And I'm looking for Mrs Parry's office.

SALTY. Up the steps in the nice part of the school, first left.

*(***HOBBY** *exits, to sit upstage.)*

GAIL & SALTY. Mmmmmmmmmmmm.

GAIL. She doesn't look much like a teacher; looks like somebody who's selling hairspray!

*(***HOBBY** *comes downstage as* **NIXON**.*)*

NIXON. I knew at my interview that Whitewall had a dodgy reputation and no drama facilities. But I went to a school like this; I'd seen what drama can do! So I made my way up to the Executive Head's office, but she was busy with Dr Basford, of the SLT. That's Senior Learning Team!

*(***GAIL** *dons a facial mask, nose and glasses from a lift-top desk, (which all the cast wear as* **DR BASFORD***)* **SALTY** *becomes* **MRS PARRY***, with the help of a scarf taken from one of the desks.)*

(LX.)

BASFORD. I don't believe you're doing this.

PARRY. It's what's best for the Academy, we've got the Primary pupils helping with the chorus, we need to make links with our feeder schools!

BASFORD. After all the work I've put in, now you turn around and tell me that I'm not Koko!

PARRY. Dr. Basford. it's pointless doing *The Mikado* if we don't have the best casting. I'm sure you'll have a great deal of fun in the chorus.

BASFORD. In the chorus with the Primary kids?

PARRY. I'm spinning plates!

BASFORD. Aren't we all?

PARRY. I'm sorry, but I have another appointment!

BASFORD. I wouldn't be seen dead in the bloody chorus!

*(***BASFORD** *replaces his mask in a desk and* **GAIL** *goes upstage to watch.)*

PARRY. Mrs Parry, or should I say Cordelia Parry, BA M.Ed MBA. was a huge attractive woman. She carried herself very well but had awful dress sense, and would often mix pink with yellow. She was of large frame with a voice to match. Ms Nixon? Sharn Nixon?

NIXON. That's right.

PARRY. Hello, nice to see you again. Coffee?

NIXON. Please. Mrs Parry's office was a cavern of theatre posters… She certainly had more than a passing interest.

PARRY. Drama in school, so critical! Ken Robinson, what thinker! This is my all-male production of *The Trojan Women,* and this is me as Ophelia.

NIXON. Behind her head was a photo of a much lither Mrs Parry in an amateur production of *Hamlet.*

PARRY. I'm going to *The Mikado*!

NIXON. *(Audience.)* I knew what she meant. I'd seen it *done* before!

PARRY. Drama is so important, but no one seems to value it anymore, we are so up against it in the state system!

NIXON. Are we?

PARRY. We need funds, we need sponsorship, we need good stories, we need people to want to send their children here. Goodness knows; look where we are!

NIXON. I came from a similar estate!

PARRY. Parent power they call it. We are all consumers now Ms Nixon. A good education is a right not a luxury!

NIXON. Amen to that!

PARRY. And we've got great staff here Sharn, everyone's fighting, but we're led by donkeys in the government who have had a different education all together!

NIXON. Sadly!

PARRY. They haven't got clue what it's really like!

NIXON. Well I'm told empathy…

PARRY. …Empathy! Absolutely, you have to know how much a pint of milk is otherwise we are just patronising do gooders!

NIXON. Forty-nine pence!

PARRY. Sorry?

NIXON. Forty-nine pence…in Tesco's. You might get it cheaper but…

PARRY. Excellent!

NIXON. My Dad was a bus driver… I'm the first generation to go to University!

PARRY. So was I. But the donkeys don't understand that! But what can we do? We fight on, we do what we can!

NIXON. I guess!

PARRY. I knew you'd get it! You see Dr Basford usually takes the lead in our local productions but he was rather tiresome last year in *The Pyjama Game* but we have to compete! Well that's given you something to think about!

NIXON. It certainly has.

PARRY. And so to business.

*(***PARRY** *freezes.)*

NIXON. The meeting went on for another twenty minutes, but I got the message. With another Ofsted coming up the school had got to succeed. Otherwise it'd be a carpet warehouse!

*(***GAIL** *animates.)*

GAIL. But one thing struck her about Mrs Parry. She really did care about the kids at Whitewall.

*(***PARRY** *and* **NIXON** *come downstage and look into the large screen of a computer. LX picks them out.)*

PARRY. As we walked from my office…I wished Sharn all the best with her induction year, and took her towards Dr Basford's room, home of the timetable.

NIXON. The complicated timetable was impossible to fathom. Seventeen digital pages, colour-coded and meticulous, it was certainly a work of art, but impossible to understand. How the frigging hell could any students follow this?

(They are looking at a computer screen.)

PARRY. The nomenclature is fairly straightforward. You will be N.I., Ms Nixon, and drama will be D.R. As you'll be having your lessons in the Main Hall, drama with you in the Main Hall, would read N.I.D.R.M.H. If you have a year three class it could read, N.I.D.R. M.H.I.Y.X. Period one. Fairly simple.

NIXON. How the frigg can <u>anybody</u> follow this?

PARRY. Sorry?

NIXON. Just thinking out loud!

PARRY. If you have any problems at all, don't hesitate, come up and see me straight away. And have a think about *The Mikado*. I know how much the theatre must be in your blood… It could be your big break…

NIXON. So I tentatively said "yes", to a small part in the chorus, and although Mrs Parry was disappointed that I didn't want Koko, she said that I could certainly enjoy my time in Titipu.

(LX.)

(Music. The scene dissolves and **NIXON** *confronts a lost student who is weighed down with bags.)*

LOST. Excuse me, Miss?