

## Theatre Interview: The Cast Of Minefield (Part II)

In the second of three articles about York Theatre Royal's production of new play Minefield, [Carla Torres](#) interviewed the other members of the full cast

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A scene from Minefield by Lola Arias @ Royal Court. Photo Credit: Tristram Kenton

In the second interview to the cast of Minefield, we had the opportunity of speaking to English war veteran David Jackson. *"There is an assumption that because you fought against someone during the war, you are enemies for life"*. David shares his experiences after the war and how the cast works on and off the stage. *Minefield* will challenge every assumption you ever made about veterans and the war.

### ***How did you get involved with the project? What was your reason to be a part of this?***

**David:** How I got involved was that in the 2015 World Cup, I was asked to play Rugby with some Argentines, so there was a game during the World Cup we met in London to play together. It was for a project called *Rugby for Peace*; which is an argentine project. What happened from that is a long story, a skype interview and 2 auditions. Rugby for Peace produced a documentary about the Falklands when they went there to teach young children rugby. So, that's a very interesting story in itself.

### ***How was the first encounter with the Argentineans veterans?***

**David:** Well, it wasn't how one would have expected it to be. There is an assumption that because you fought against someone during the war, you are enemies for life. That assumption is a stereotype perpetuated by the way we are represented within popular culture and the way we are represented in

current thinking in academia. My view on how war veterans are represented within academia is that they are represented as objects rather than looking to our subjective stories. So, it was no different than meeting anyone else from any other country for the first time. You know, I am researcher in University of Exeter, and my research is about the narrative of war veterans. I have spent twelve years from my masters researching war veteran's experiences. I have been involved in projects and with charities and I have tried to change some of their ridiculous assumptions that are made about us. Importantly the stereotypes of having a mental disability like myself and Marcelo. It's about challenging this stereotype and I think the play does this. So as an outsider you may have assumptions about meeting the enemy for the first time and the answer you are going to get. I am asked about this a lot, but I always say, there was no problem at all.

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### ***How doing this play change your life as a war veteran?***

**David:** It hasn't, no. I think that an assumption can be made that the play is therapeutic. Well, as a psychologist, any form of positive experience is therapeutic. So, for me, there is a therapeutic side to the play. There is also an unspoken therapeutic understanding for those who have been to war. It doesn't matter whether it was Vietnam, Korea, the Second World War or the Falklands. I have done a lot of interviews with veterans and there is a connection, an unspoken knowingness that you had the same experience; that is therapeutic. But for myself, has the play been therapeutic? Not at all. I feel I was at the right place, at the right time in my own acceptance of a mental health disability. That is not to say that before the play a certain amount of anxiety does not kick in. I have been having some interesting hypervigilant periods where I don't sleep at all, I sleep 10 minutes and I wake up, and I do not get much sleep. That is interesting for me with my psychology training because I have not experienced this in many years, its quite intense and it goes on for three nights. But I realized it is about doing what we do, which can be very emotional and uplifting, and it also can be incredibly sad. You can't go on stage and say "*right, today I'm going to be sad*". When the play goes well you will feel pretty good. It's like a dance. If everything is going well is like you are experiencing this beautiful dance, and its amazing. However, you can say one line and you go back in your body with all the feelings of that experience in the past. For instance, last time in Newcastle, I had seven cousins and their daughters and grandchildren in the play in the front row, and I hadn't seen them in 30 years. It was my mum's elder brother children. He landed on D day and one of my cousins fought in Aden. In front of me I have that strong connection of my family's military experience and then suddenly I couldn't stop thinking about my mum and dad. That connects with my grief and loss because I was suddenly missing them. That was very emotional for me, I shed a few tears after the show that night. Sometimes you are up, sometimes you are not.

If someone, one person at least changes their view on war veterans and their families I feel I have done my job. It is important to acknowledge the damage that war does. In Argentina, you were saying, war veterans are seen as victims. That is exactly how the aftermath of war is portrayed works. We are seen as victims, alcoholics, homeless, suicides, or we are held up as some type of hypermasculine hero rowing across the Atlantic. There is no room, specially in popular culture, to men like us, that despite our difficulties, have managed to be good enough, good fathers or friends. So, I hope this play changes this. I am very lucky, I have jobs that I enjoy, but I'm going to keep challenging the dominant discourse that society has about war veterans. Someone else must do it. How can you write with authority if you don't talk to the people that have that embodied authority? You must walk along with them in this process. And I think that is what the play does, it grabs people by the hand and we get the audience to walk along us.



A scene from Minefield by Lola Arias @ Royal Court. Photo Credit: Tristram Kenton

***Where is the meeting point between Argentineans and English war veterans? Music on the play seems to be one. But maybe on and off stage, what that point can be?***

**David:** I mean, to be honest, I was never told why I was chosen. I think its clear in the obvious why some of the cast were chosen. She (Lola Arias) actually never said why I was chosen but I was chosen and that is what matters. Music is an interesting part, but music at the very beginning, didn't, become a vital part of the play. We played musical instruments and we played some songs and we did Argentinian songs of the seventies. We played other Beatle songs that never made it to the play. There was always going to be music in the play. Does it bring us all together? I think the last song does more than just bring us together. It is about ourselves, it is therapeutic. I improvised my solos every night depending what mood I am. I like the freedom of that. It is a connection thing, but in a sense, we use music and in the last song we say they play is over!

***Do you think that the play changes the perception on war veterans?***

**David:** I don't know. I can't really answer that, can I? You would have to ask the audiences. I don't think is about that. You could understand how it changes perspective of war veterans in Argentina and the UK. However, there is evidence that the play goes beyond the UK and Argentina. For example, when we were in Montpellier, a young man from the audience came into our dressing room crying. He was a Russian student studying in Montpellier. He said to us "Thank you very much, my grandad survived Stalin I know understand him" So in some ways I think is about normal guys, leaving aside our disabilities, who got on with their lives.

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***What do you think this play leaves to the audience?***

**David:** I don't think there is a conclusion to the audience really, they must draw their own conclusions, from their own subjective experience. I know the last song made certain journalists and certain

newspapers uncomfortable. That's their stuff. Perhaps in some ways is about their insecurities about being a man and their own emotions (Laughs) I think the play does challenges on many, many levels the masculine stereotype. A journalist once said that we were blaming the audience through the words of the last song! That is the least reason of the performing of the song. I think it challenges politicians who send young men to war. I have no complaints on my life, I am not anti-militarist, I am very proud of my great grandfather and great grand uncle that were killed on the front in the First World War.

***The play gathers people with different perspectives about the war. In the Argentinian side for instance, there are some division about the role of the military because of the dictatorship that was ruling the country back then. This is a unique thing of the play, there are different perspectives about the military and the war.***

**David:** I think so and people ask me, whether I had had trouble with the Argentines when I was in Argentina because I'm a British Falkland war veteran. I have met hundreds of people. Me and Lou went to speak at schools and at hospitals. What is important is the next generation and young people. What is great about the play is that has a lot of young people coming to see it. This is very important. Actually, I only had one very uncomfortable discussion in Argentina with a lady who had lost her dad during the war., She blamed me. All I could say was I didn't pull the trigger. I fully understand why she was very angry with me. I could never imagine losing my dad in a war. Perhaps to finish that is a very point for the audience to think about. What would it be like losing my father or mother in a war or from terrorism. Very sad, very sad indeed.



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