

Theatre Interview: The Cast Of Minefield (Part I)

In the first of three articles about York Theatre Royal's production of new play Minefield, [Carla Torres](#) interviewed three of its war veteran cast members

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

Have you ever been to war?

An English war veteran mourning the death of an Argentinean soldier. An Argentinean war veteran that have always abhorred English music, now singing in English on stage. Yes, English and Argentinean soldiers re-acting personal experiences from the Falkland/Malvinas war. *"What about the English deaths?"* war veteran David asks on stage. The success of Argentinean director Lola Arias has arrived at York. *Minefield* delivered an astonishing performance at York Royal Theatre last Thursday. War veterans, Argentinean and English, from the Malvinas/ Falklands war that took place in 1982 between Argentina and the United Kingdom. The play invites the audience to break down barriers and stereotypes about the war, the veterans, and the rivalry between our people because of the war. It embraces humanity and sorority at its highest level. In this interview, Argentinean veterans Darío, Gabriel and Ruben, explain how the play was a healing process and helped them to work along English soldiers, sharing common feelings and experiences after the war.

The first question that came to my mind after watching the play, is how do you decide to become part of this project? What caught your attention and motivate you to join Minefield as

war veterans?

Marcelo: Each of us has its own motives and reasons. At first, I didn't want to know anything about it, not with the English either. I was scared. Talking about the war is very complicated and you have to talk in front of the families of the fallen soldiers, and if the storytelling is not good it is very hard. But well, since I have always talked about the war, about Malvinas everywhere, I said, why not? To be here and share my part of the history; that is why I made the decision of occupying a place in the play.

Gabriel: In my case, I am very interested in everything that has to do with Malvinas. As I tell in the play, I like to be aware of movies, books, all is of interest for me and I try to keep up with everything; and to participate myself of a theatre play was very interesting for me even though, as Marcelo was saying, you are always cautious about what you are going to say, and how is it going to be said. As I went getting involved I understood how Lola (play director) wanted to tell this story and that it was always going to be from our personal experiences, a non-fiction story where each of us is to tell what we lived; that caught my attention. Besides, I was retired, and I had time to do this.

Ruben: As Marcelo said, in my case at the beginning, I rejected Lola's offer to be part of this play. But then, I thought that if she had chosen me after having a conversation, maybe there was a reason for me to be in the play. I decided to be in this play because I believe it is a way of paying tribute to the fallen soldiers in the sinking of the Belgrano (*An Argentinian navy cruiser) and all 649 soldiers.

While watching the play, I thought of this process that you went through, as war veterans, of breaking down barriers or doubts about going on stage with this play and other British war veterans. I felt this play is a way of empowering the figure of the war veteran. There may be a perception that war veterans as a weak figure, or else, as a person that was taken to the field by the dictatorship (*During the Falkland war in 1982, Argentina was being ruled by a Military dictatorship) and I feel this play can change the perception about this.

Gabriel: Yes, each of us tells a story and it is not a lie. As you say, the image of the veteran may be a stereotype in the sense that people, society, think that war veterans are begging on the trains, that they are crazy and so on. Difficult things happened in our life, and we are trying to cope with them. That is why it is interesting how the play doesn't only tell what happened during the war but afterwards too: we also tell how our life was once we went back. That is very interesting because not all of us could put together a life again with a family or a stable job and still today some soldiers may never be able to do so because they can't find the way or the support and help they need.

How was the first encounter with the English veterans?

Gabriel: First we met each other. Then, in one of the rehearsals in Buenos Aires, Lola sent us to a bar to wait for the English and when they arrived at the place where we were rehearsing, we were told we could head to the bar. We went to the bar and we meet up with people like ourselves. They spoke another language, but the same feeling, the same memories, the same pain of the war. It was an encounter without anything in particular.

Marcelo: It was a natural thing, an encounter of war veterans that went through the same thing. I had travel to Malvinas and I had met English veterans and there is always mutual respect. There is no need to say much in these occasions.



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

Would you consider there is a meeting point between Argentineans and English veterans, a connection? For instance, in Argentina, a hostile attitude towards the English may be more common than in the UK; and the play sends the opposite message.

Marcelo: I think that its been a long time since the war, 36 years, that also helped. We were able once, to bring English war veterans to a vigil in Argentina where there were a thousand of Argentinian soldiers, and there was no issue about it, they were welcomed by the people and the families of the fallen. But maybe 10 years ago, it would have a hostile situation.

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Gabriel: Yes, answering your question, as far as we got to know them, we discovered that they went through the same things we went through, even though many people may not think the same or may just consider that because English soldiers were professionals, they did not suffer. David was dismissed from the army because a bad knee, he was not considered physically apt, he has post traumatic stress and he was left alone. So, you say, what’s the deal? Isn’t UK a first world country? And the feelings, something that mobilized me, is that they also have dead friends in this war, forever. This is one of the things that was discussed in the play, and that they wanted to bring to the stage. David says a phrase, “where are the dead English?” highlighting that English soldiers were also killed, and that these English veterans have also lost their friends.

Ruben: I see that the meeting points between us are the same. The only thing we will not discuss or agree is the issue of the sovereignty of the islands; that’s our only breaking point. We won’t agree there. English will always claim that the islands are British territory and we will always say they belong to Argentina. But this doesn’t mean that we can’t work together, we can be all the other things.

I found interesting how the music brings you together on stage. How was the idea of playing music on stage conceived? What about the Get back trio?

Ruben: That was a creation of Lola. The Get Back trio, that came after the war, that’s my life after the

war. That's true: I have a band and I play. I'm going to Buenos Aires now and I have a show, I put my musician costume, I go, and I play the drums. Lola always told us that music is a major thing in her plays and specially in this one, in the sense that we should try a union between us and them, to accomplish it on the stage through music. She came up with all this.

Gabriel: We rehearsed a lot. We had to, otherwise it could sound untidy or that didn't fit with the play. We rehearsed the music during the morning and for the play during the afternoon.

Marcelo: I was handed a bass. At first, I thought I was only going to stand still, and the others could play, but then I wanted to join them because I didn't want to be left out of the musical performance, but I wasn't going to sing, not in English, not even if I was crazy. I always tell that in the play: I couldn't listen to English music; that was true. So how was I going to sing a song in English? No way!

Gabriel: Until one day, he came along, and he says, "Hey Gabi, that song you always sing, how is the lyric?"

Marcelo: So, there I am, now I'm singing in English with David!

How did the play change your life, or helped you to overcome life after the war? We could say that you have gone from war veterans to actors, quite a transformation.

Marcelo: It changed me a lot. Some time ago, when the play started, I went to a super market near my house and there were British clocks on the wall, with the British flag on it. And I asked myself, how can this be sold here? Who buys these things? I couldn't even stand to see a kid with the British flag. It upset me. I remember I had an argument with my wife, I wanted to explain her how this made me feel. So, all of this, the play, has helped a lot. I am here, in the United Kingdom, I see the British flag everywhere! I feel a lot better, without relinquishing my cause and remembering our fallen soldiers, but I feel I live better now, that I can enjoy a lot of things.

Gabriel: It made me a better man, more tolerant, more reflexive. It allows me to see things with more perspective. It changed our lives, in part because of what you were saying, now we manage technicalities of the stage such as lights, the sound, how a play works, it was a process to learn how to move in this ambient.

Ruben: Luckily, the three of us, had spoken before about Malvinas at schools and so on. That made all this much easier. I understand that Lola saw a quality in us to selected us. I think it would have been unlikely for her to choose someone who had never spoken about Malvinas before or wouldn't be able to fit that experience to the play. I keep healing every time we do the play, in the sense that while you are on stage performing, you suffer the play as well since it starts until you finish. But what you feel when the play is over, it's a relief: another piece of the story is out there. You feel a lift of your shoulders.

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Do you think the play changes the perception of what a war veteran is?

Gabriel: Yes, I think it does. In the UK and in Argentina. In every place we go, we have been to places where you are telling about a war to the Germans. However, public tells you things that still surprises you. Once, in France, there was a woman whose husband was from Bosnia, he had been to war and she came to talk to us at the bar and said that the things that we told on stage are the same things my husband tells about the war. A war is the same in everywhere. This war, may be ours, but is an example for all wars across the world.

Would you consider the play leaves a teaching for the audience?

Marcelo: What the play teaches is that war is useless, that is a strong message.

Gabriel: Without a doubt, the play has that message. But else, the play also says that even though we may not agree on the issue of the sovereignty of the islands, we can do things together all the same. In our disagreement, we can still work. We may not be able to find a solution for that ourselves, but with someone that has a different opinion than yours, you still can come together and work, sing, act, have a beer when the show is over; you meet his family and they meet yours. These things happened with the play.

Marcelo: We have also been at the embassies.

Gabriel: We create spaces for encounters. For instance, when we went to the Argentinian embassy in London, the British ambassador was received there as well, and it was the first time a British ambassador was in our embassy since the war. We had luncheon all together.

Ruben: British ambassador hosts reunions in Buenos Aires and he has always invited us to different events. Sometimes we can make it and sometimes we can't.

Marcelo: If you come to think that people like them, who were once in confrontation, you realized that if they can talk and getting along, why wouldn't us?

The second part of our interview with the cast of Minefield will be available to read tomorrow (1st April), along with a review of the show. For more information, please visit the [York Theatre Royal website](#).



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