PUNCH – Introduction Young Vic MARCH 2025

Welcome this introduction to PUNCH by James Graham, directed by Adam Penford.

The audio described performances are on Friday 14th March at 7.30pm, with a touch tour at 5.55pm, and on Saturday the 22nd March at 2:30pm with a touch tour at 12.55pm. Please arrive at the box office ten minutes before the start time for the touch tour.

PUNCH will be described by Eleanor Margolies and Miranda Yates. The performance lasts for 2 hours and 25 minutes, including a 20-minute interval.

The Young Vic’s website says of the play: Jacob Dunne, a teenager from Nottingham, spends his Saturday nights seeking thrills with his friends. One fateful evening, an impulsive punch leads to fatal consequences. After serving prison time, Jacob finds himself lost and directionless. Searching for answers, Joan and David – the parents of his victim James – ask to meet, sparking a profound transformation in Jacob’s life.

This production is dedicated to James Hodgkinson and all victims of one-punch.

Please note the production contains strong language, references to violence, death, bereavement, alcohol and substance misuse, and mental health. There are knives on stage, and the production is based on real life people and events. There is loud music throughout, flashing lights throughout, strobe lighting, sudden noises and theatrical smoke.

Further information including Frequently Asked Questions and a self care guide can be downloaded from the Young Vic’s website.

The production is set in and around the Meadows estate in Nottingham and is based on real events and people. There’s an ensemble of 6 people: three men and three women with all but one playing multiple characters. The action moves swiftly with actors seamlessly shifting between roles, and scenes are often underscored by fluid, dynamic movement. Snap costume changes involve the addition of simple items of clothing and often happen in full view of the audience. The physical nature of the storytelling is amplified by a sensory-rich design, with pulsing music, sharp soundscapes, and vibrant lighting. The two halves of the play have distinct rhythms, the first half moving at a hectic and, at times, chaotic pace, mirroring the turbulent and volatile nature of Jacob’s youth. The second half slows and steadies, taking on a more reflective tone.

**Jacob Dunne** is played by an actor in his mid-twenties. He has pale skin, short light brown hair and is clean shaven with a slim, toned physique. The opening scenes flick between Jacob as an eighteen-year-old, and an older Jacob recalling his early life. As a teenager, Jacob is rarely still, his posture tense, like a coiled spring poised and ready for action. As he narrates events to us there’s a swagger in his step that mixes with a restless nervousness, and at times he stands shoulders taut with jaw and fists clenched. His focus is directed outwards, on high alert. We begin with Jacob ready for a night out with the lads: as he describes it himself, he wears a black pair of Fred Perry trainers, dark blue jeans, a crisp white shirt with the top button undone. As we flashback to school years, he adds a bottle green blazer and striped yellow and green tie. In later years, out roaming the estate, his white shirt is replaced by a khaki short-sleeved polo shirt, and a pale blue Adidas tracksuit top.

**Jacob’s Mum** is played by a slim white woman with neck-length, reddish-brown hair, usually scraped back into a ponytail. Her pale, makeup-free complexion carries the weight of her exhaustion, aging her beyond her thirty-something years. Her posture is taut and nervy, she often paces or plants a hand on her stomach. Her brow is etched with worry and the strain of holding things together is echoed in her trembling voice. She wears a cross on a chain, a loose green wool cardigan over a black top and comfortable blue trousers. The same actor also plays **Wendy,** Jacob’s direct and no-nonsense probation officer, wearing a baggy orange jumper, her hair loose in a bob, and she also plays **Sandra**, the talking circle facilitator, in an oversized cotton shirt in alternating sections of pale pink and yellow, with her hair pulled back into a short ponytail.

**Joan Hodgkinson,** the mother of James, is played by a white actor in her fifties with a short crop of greying brown hair, a solid stance and grounded energy. Joan

holds herself with quiet dignity, her back straight, her movements deliberate. She wears a pair of wide-legged cropped trousers in dark blue, with a loose linen top and wool cardigan in paler blue, and navy pumps. The same actor also plays Jacob’s **Nan,** putting on a pale acrylic cardigan with splashes of pink and blue. As she speaks, Nan holds up her left hand with the first and middle fingers extended, miming a cigarette permanently on the go.

Joan’s husband **David** is played by a white man in his fifties with a short crop of grey hair and a sturdy muscular physique. His strained, tight-lipped expression reflects an internal battle between stoicism and anger. He wears dark jeans and t-shirt with a buttoned up cream wool cable knit cardigan. The same actor also plays other men including **Tony,** in black leather jacket, **Derek,** a college professor in a green tweed jacket with a name badge on the pocket, and **Raf’s Dad** who pads about in jeans and a white vest.

**Raf** is Jacob’s best friend and is played by a white actor in his early twenties with short light brown hair that’s shaved at the sides. Raf’s movements are quick and animated, with sweeping gestures and an easy, confident gait. He leans in a little too close, always physically in Jacob’s space. He wears a navy Nike baseball cap, grey joggers and dark polo t-shirt, under a pale blue Adidas tracksuit top that has three red stripes down the navy sleeves. Among other parts, the same actor plays **D.S. Villers,** a police detective in a smart navy suit, and Jacob’s younger brother **Sam,** wearing baggy jeans and a loose jumper with an arty geometric pattern in brown and black.

On a night out Jacob meets **Clare**, a smart, young woman in her early twenties played by an actor with light brown skin, large dark eyes and curly afro hair pulled back into a ponytail. She wears a fitting soft pink leather jacket over a black crop top that shows off her toned torso, and skinny jeans worn with lace-up calf length boots.

Clare carries herself with confidence, often standing still, arms relaxed at her sides, making space for others. With the addition of a bright green long sleeved blouse, the same actor also becomes **Nicola**, a member of staff at Remedi, a restorative justice charity.

The members of the ensemble also become many other characters including participants at a talking circle, Jacob’s mates out on the town, a teacher, a hospital nurse, schoolfriends and a prison officer and inmates.

For this production in the Young Vic’s main circular auditorium, the bench seating is arranged in long rows on stalls level and on the balcony level which wraps around the auditorium on three sides. The flexible set by Anna Fleischle evokes specific locations and is constantly redefined by the actors. A circular platform extending out into the audience is the main playing area. It’s based on the ‘talking circle’ in the play in which past events are shared: the circle now including the Young Vic audience.

Jacob frequently mentions Trent Bridge in Nottingham – and on stage there is a bridge. It’s a footbridge, much smaller than the actual road bridge, that nevertheless allows the actors to run across it or sit down with legs dangling over the edge. The two steep curving ramps up to the bridge follow the shape of the circular platform. Underneath the bridge, in the centre, there is a rectangular concrete arch, evoking a modern canal tunnel or motorway underpass. The ramps are very steep, broken up into five shallow sloping steps on each side and are enclosed by metal tubular railings, with a pair of barriers at each end, creating a chicane that the young people weave through, sit on or leap over.

The members of the ensemble come and go through the underpass and between the bridge supports; sometimes the bridge is used to represent an upper room in a house or flat. Lighting is used to suggest Jacob’s home, school classrooms, nightclubs and prison cells.

The wider city is suggested by three picture walls, to left and right of the bridge, and behind it, the back wall. These are covered with images of Nottingham buildings, slightly stylised, like illustrations in traditional non-fiction books for children. To the left of the bridge, there are the flats and houses of the 1970s Meadows estate, brick-built with white window frames and low rectangular arches between the buildings. On the wall to the right of the bridge is a view of Nottingham’s historic city centre, with shops and pubs in a narrow street. The back wall includes tower blocks to the left and the dome of Nottingham’s Council House on the main Market Square to the right. Concealed lighting behind these three walls allows the pictured windows in tower blocks and terraced houses to light up. More buildings are printed on the floor of the platform in a patchwork pattern in earthy tones, to appear like reflections in the water of the river Trent. The windows in the buildings on the platform floor can light up too. Also set into the floor is a ring of recessed lighting, about 4 metres in diameter, which can light up to create an illuminated circle on the floor. Additional projections sometimes appear on the back wall above the bridge, including family photographs and key phrases from Derek’s college lecture on ‘the aspiring working class’.

When we first come in, the stage is open to us. At ground level, there is a circle of six moulded plastic ‘bucket’ chairs on steel legs, the sort found in schools and community centres. In the opening scenes, we snap between a focused spotlight on Jacob as he recalls and re-enacts events of the past, and a wider light illuminating this circle of listeners.

**Cast and Production Credits**

Jacob is played by **David Shields**

Jacob’s Mum and his Probation Officer and Sandra are played by **Emma Pallant**

Jacob’s friend Raf and his brother Sam, and D.S. Villers are played by **Alec Boaden**

Joan Hodgkinson, the mother of James, and Jacob’s Nan are played by **Julie Hesmondhalgh**

Her husband David and Rafs’s Dad, Derek and Tony are played by **Tony Hirst**

Clare and Nicola are played by **Shalisha James-Davis**

Punch is written by **James Graham**

based on the book Right From Wrong by Jacob Dunne.

Design **Anna Fleischle**

Lighting Designer **Robbie Butler**

Sound Designer and Composition is by **Alexandra Faye Braithwaite**

Movement Director **Leanne Pinder**

Movement Consultation **Lynne Page**

Voice and Dialect **Sally Hague**

Associate Director **Omar Khan**

Associate Sound Design **Annie May Fletcher**

And Punch has been directed by **Adam Penford**

That’s the end of this audio introduction to *PUNCH*. If you have further questions or would like to book for the touch tour, please contact the Young Vic box office on 020 7922 2922.