

STUDENT WORKSHEET 5

THE ROLE OF THE PRODUCER

COLIN INGRAM IS THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR **BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE MUSICAL** IN LONDON AND HAS WORKED IN THE THEATRE INDUSTRY FOR 23 YEARS WITH SOME OF THE WORLD'S LEADING PRODUCERS, DIRECTORS, DESIGNERS, AND WRITERS. HE HAS PREVIOUSLY PRODUCED SHOWS SUCH AS *GHOST: THE MUSICAL* AND *GREASE*, AND IS CURRENTLY DEVELOPING A STAGE MUSICAL OF *THE TIME TRAVELLER'S WIFE*, BASED ON THE BEST-SELLING NOVEL.

Q. HOW DID YOU BECOME INVOLVED IN BACK TO THE FUTURE?

I was brought into it very early in 2012, actually, when I worked with Glenn Ballard on *Ghost*, which we were doing on Broadway at the time. And Glenn said to me, 'I'm talking to Bob Gale, Bob Zemeckis and Alan Silvestri about making **BACK TO THE FUTURE** a musical,' and I instantly went 'well... I'd love to do that. That's amazing. I love that film!'

Colin had previously translated the film Ghost onto the West End Stage, which he says also involved a lot of 'technology and spectacle', so he was the ideal Producer to bring on board.

Q. WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE AS PRODUCER INVOLVE?

In terms of my role and the show, as a producer, you put the creative team together, you put the money together, you hire the theatres, you hire the casting director. You get all these things parked together and, a big part of this, the marketing of course as well. So, there's a lot of things going on with it. But on **BACK TO THE FUTURE: The Musical**, it was really putting it all together.

Q. WHAT IS A COMMERCIAL PRODUCING?

I guess the difference is a commercial production is a show that is completely driven by profit, where the money comes from investors who expect to have their money back and a profit. And the producer takes a split of the profit when it's been recouped.

So, all the surplus of a show will go back to the investors to recoup their initial money. When you get to recoupment, you then split according to the terms you've agreed. If they put a lot of money in, they'll have a higher split because they're taking a higher risk. If they have a smaller amount of money, then it's a lower split.

"There's no subsidy from the government or any Arts Council money."

When you go into the theatre, it is what they call a 'four-wall deal', which means they are renting the theatre to you. They're not helping you in any other way apart from, 'here's the theatre.'

But essentially, you're not going into a non-for-profit house where they've got a whole marketing department and they've got a set building area and a box office... you're not going into something which is being managed. You are managing everything.

Q. WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE ADELPHI THEATRE FOR BACK TO THE FUTURE?

There really aren't many theatres for this show. We were pretty fussy about where we went to. We didn't want to go in too big because it's a comedy and you'd lose the comedy. Being small, it wouldn't have worked financially. So, yeah, there are plenty of 1500-seaters on Broadway, but we don't have many. The problem with the West End is there's a lot of big theatres and lots of small theatres. And there's really not many in the middle. So, the Victoria Palace and the Adelphi are probably the best.

Q. WHAT SKILLS ARE INVOLVED IN BEING A PRODUCER?

"I think when you're a producer, you have to kind of will something to work. You've got to be optimistic."

Tenacity, optimism. Your interpersonal skills are absolutely critical because you're not just dealing with investors, you're dealing with a director, a writer. When you go into the theatre, you have to deal with actors. So, you have to deal with everybody. You probably have to have a bit of an ego because otherwise, you've really got to have a belief in what you're doing. I know that you got to believe you're right. I do think you do have to listen to people. And I think you have to be willing to take advice.

There's two types of producers, of course. There's a creative producer who's there to create the show and put the team together and get the rights and put it on. That's what I do. And then there's the money producer who just raises the money.

So, you can do both things. You could be a money producer and that's just a case of raising money and getting to know who the investors are out there and how to present your work. And you've got to put a pack together. You've got to show the numbers. You've got to have a story to selling it. It's a cliché, but you've got to say why you're passionate about it, how it's come about, why is it going to be successful?

Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE WITH ASPIRATIONS TO BECOME A THEATRE PRODUCER?

Work for a big organisation because I think with a big organisation, you're going to get a lot more experiences. You can have a good turnover of shows. You don't want to be working on just one show. You're there to train and to learn, a sort of apprenticeship.

"See a lot of shows. I don't think you can see too many shows."

I think that's really important. Good shows, bad shows, see lots of shows in the West End. See smaller shows. And what I used to do is I used to write down in the programme who I liked and where I thought the lighting was good, the sound was good. And I sort of kept this big bundle of programmes with lots of notes on them, according to what I saw. And then you start to learn, the same people start to come up because it's a pretty small business really. And then you start to get a feel. You'll know the creative teams who are good. You'll know the actors who are good and the directors.

TASK

- ✓ Can you find the names of any other West End Producers?