



FINAL SAY

John Bowler

actor, Live Theatre

The Red Lion is a marvellous play. It is brilliantly funny and sad, but also about football – which I love.

Live is an exciting place and I have always been a fan of the theatre and what has been achieved here. It is surviving in a world where cutbacks are always happening. It is great to be at such a thriving theatre, with its new writing programme and youth groups.

For an actor, theatre and TV are essentially the same thing. You have to find out what the story is that you are telling.

With the theatre you get a few weeks' rehearsal so you can analyse the character in detail. You work closely with the director and find new things out. Because theatre is live you have to (fingers crossed) know what you are doing.

TV is much faster these days. Decisions are quick and there is less time to rehearse. You always have the chance to do another take.

I did the last series of DCI Banks with Stephen Tompkinson; I was his forensic pathologist. We first met when we did Drop

the Dead Donkey about 20 years ago and we have worked together since then on Grafters and Harrigan.

It's always funny when Auf Wiedersehen, Pet pops up as I did that about 30 years ago. People who were fanatical about the show remember it better than I do.

You have to live in the now, which sounds corny, doesn't it? I've been lucky to be in happy company over my career. Most people I've worked with have been fun to be with. I try and get the best out of every job.

There is always an element of luck. I have just done three months with BBC radio and I hadn't done radio for 25 years. Suddenly the phone call came through and I thought, 'Why not?' Straight off the back of that I have come to Live Theatre, which is lovely.

It is hard graft sometimes, but I have had a huge variety of work over my career, which is good. I have kept it varied and been able to pay the bills – not a bad thing.

I grew up in Newcastle from the age of four so I am not a stranger to the place as I have close family here. I am writing a project

about my mum, who was from Bangalore, and who brought up five children virtually by herself. It was an interesting time growing up in the 50s and 60s and quite tough.

As a youngster, if you are interested in drama, join your local theatre group. When I was young you could get grants to go to drama school but it's expensive now. Maybe it has become a bit elitist, but don't be put off – there are other ways. When I started out, you wrote 200 letters, got seven replies and one job interview. Hopefully you got it.

Most performers are drawn to comedy. We all think we can do it! I wouldn't be a stand-up, though. Solo stand-ups are the kings and queens of our industry.

I was in a double act once and I was the straight man, known as the feed, so my partner did the punchlines. I might wander on again one day – what's the worst that could happen?

The Red Lion by Patrick Marber, directed by Max Roberts, is at Live Theatre from April 6 to May 6. The show stars Stephen Tompkinson, John Bowler and Dean Bone. Box office: 0191 232 1232, www.live.org.uk.