

# GODS & KINGS

created by  
Tamsin Griffiths & Paul Whittaker

Supporting material for  
Health & Social Care Professionals

A Four In Four production

FOUR



Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru  
Arts Council of Wales



Ariennir gan  
Llywodraeth Cymru  
Funded by  
Welsh Government

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## GODS & KINGS

Written by Paul Whittaker

Co-directed by Paul Whittaker & Tamsin Griffiths

Performed by Robert Bowman



"I touched a rabbit once."

### Synopsis

*"Ever since I can remember I have always been different..."*

*"If I take the pill that they have placed in my hand, who will I become?"*

At the age of 23, Paul walks into a psychiatrist's office believing he is either a God, or a King. He leaves with a diagnosis of Bipolar Manic Depression, and facing a life-changing decision: Take the pill and live, or don't take the pill and die.

23 years later; Gods & Kings draws on Paul's real-life experience to produce an emotionally honest, and darkly funny, account of what it is to live a life ruled by mental illness.

### A Patient Experience

Gods & Kings is a Four-in-Four theatre production that has many strings to its bow. As well as being a critically acclaimed show, Gods & Kings was recognised as Best Practice by Arts Council Wales (ACW) in its *Arts and Health in Wales - A Mapping study of current activity*.

As part of our agreement with ACW, Welsh Government and Public Health Wales (PHW), we have conducted cross-sector Audience Development work for Gods & Kings since its debut at the Sherman Theatre in September 2017. Since then we have engaged with, and connected, non-traditional theatre audiences and communities with theatres and the show's content.

These audiences include:

- Health Professionals
- Service Users
- Universities (Students & Staff)
- Politicians and Policy Makers
- The 3rd Sector
- Stakeholders



"...precocious and cocky and rude."

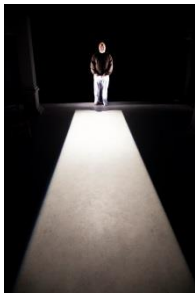
## FOUR

- Mental Health Researchers
- Community Groups, inc. Arts & Health Groups

"I found it to be a thought provoking, powerful, emotional and riveting portrayal of mental illness with the right amount of humour to lift what could have been an otherwise dark evening of entertainment. Having worked in the NHS for over twenty years including a number of years associated with mental health care it was all disturbingly familiar."

Zoe Couzens - Public Health Wales

Gods & Kings has been published by Oberon Books. The book contains Arts, Health & Science support materials. In addition, the National Centre for Mental Health (NCMH) has provided "Psychoeducation" materials from its Bipolar Education Programme Cymru.



### A Duty of Care

To support our audiences and ensure Duty of Care to All, Four in Four has created a 'Duty of Care' - Mental Health Access Guide. We also provide staff training for our host venues. There will be a display of both national and local Mental Health resources in the foyer and on the Four in Four website.

### Who are Four in Four?

Tamsin Griffiths and Paul Whittaker are cross disciplinary artists with a Mental Health (MH) diagnosis, based in Cardiff. We create participatory interactive projects that blur the boundaries of art-forms and challenge perceptions about MH, through form and content. Working in collaboration, we merge our expertise from the worlds of visual arts, theatre, audio, the written word, film, dance and physical performance.

We are passionate advocates of Mental Health. Its authentic portrayal through the arts is important to us as we consider it vital to social change and how we talk about it.





## FOUR

The arts are a powerful tool for engagement and conversation, which is why everything we create is considered and represents mental health in its most raw and truest form; with humour, compassion and empathy. We have a 'Duty of Care for All' philosophy that lies at the heart of all our work.

As service users, and artists who work in Public Health, we know how important it is to gather the experiences and thoughts of those with lived experience to underpin our creative output. To this end, our practice follows that of the iterative design process.

Our quality has been recognised by ACW who deemed our theatre production, *Gods & Kings*, as Best Practice in their *Arts and Health in Wales: A Mapping study of current activity - Volume 1: Analysis, findings and proposals January 2018*.

We sit on numerous advisory panels and work with Public Health Wales and 1000 Lives Improvement to consult on the development of Mental Health services across Wales.

Our clients include: *Public Health Wales, NHS Cymru, Llandough Hospital, Hafan y Coed, Mind Cymru, The National Centre for Mental Health, Welsh Government, ACW, Sherman Cymru, Rubicon Dance, the Schools Service and Universities.*

### **'Public Health Network Cymru' Podcast with Tamsin & Paul - Four in Four:**

(Listen to the interview using the link or read the transcript below)

<https://soundcloud.com/tams-griffiths/gods-kings-phn-interview>

**Paul W.:** Gods and Kings is a 70 minute autobiographical play. It's about the period when I was 23, studying at what was then, Newport Film School, and I got diagnosed with bipolar manic depression. The play essentially deals with him getting his diagnosis and then being given the decision, whether to take medication or not. The play is about him looking back at his life, looking at what this kind of diagnosis means, and whether he should take the Lithium or not.

**Tamsin G.:** It is a show about identity. Paul wrote a piece about the Self as part of his M.A. He shared that piece of writing with me, and I was like, "Yes, this is something special here, you know." The reason why we are doing this project and will continue to work with this project and give it longevity and life is because we feel like it's a story that a lot of people connect to. It allows people to connect with the character in different ways. Even if they don't understand anything about bipolar, they can empathise or gain an insight into the world of Mental illness, and then that opens up a whole breadth of conversation.

## FOUR

**Paul W.:** One of the reasons Tamsin and me work together is because she's someone with a diagnosis as well, and the best way to make it worth something is to keep it authentic. And so at points when it's really uncomfortable for me to share certain things about my mental health and my personal life, Tamsin's there to keep me on track. There are bits in the play that I still can't watch when it's portrayed on the stage, but I see the value in it being out there by the comments that people make afterward.

**Tamsin G.:** It was really important for us to ensure that it remained authentic and we didn't theatricalise it to a point where it lost the true core of what it was about. We worked really hard with the actor and the team just to make sure that it remained honest, and a story that people can really, truly connect to.

**Paul W.:** We're both service users, we're both artists and we both work in many disciplines. What was interesting is that we made the decision to direct it almost from the service user's point of view. Every time we made a decision, we put ourselves in the audience. We're the kind of people that if we were isolated at a point in our mental health journey, we would be attracted to come and see a piece of work about someone talking about their mental health. And so we just kept asking ourselves the question, "If I was sitting there in the dark, would this feel real? Would this feel authentic?" Because quite often we've had the experience of watching it on film, or on television, or on radio, or in theatre, and because they are using mental health as a device for the narrative, or for the plot, or just a character trait, there's a point where it's just inconsistent, and it can be very jarring.

**Tamsin G.:** It seemed that everybody who spoke to us took something from it, whether it was, "Actually, we need to really look at the access to buildings if they're going for psychiatry treatment." "We need to look at the school system here," or, "we need to look at whatever support we can give somebody who has to make these big decisions." What you get, is an insight into what happens after Paul leaves the psychiatrist room with a decision, "Do I take the Lithium, or don't I take the Lithium? What part of me is me, and what part of me is the mental health? And if I take the Lithium, what parts of me will remain and what parts will I lose?" That's where it becomes about the dilemma of identity and I think that's what most people can really identify with. Through our lives, we all have those moments where we start to question who we are and our identity and our purpose.

**Paul W.:** Because I'd had mental health all my life, I didn't know what were my symptoms and what my personality traits were. I was under the illusion that Lithium would take away my illness, and therefore would take away the symptoms, and parts of my personality. I didn't know who would be left, when you separated the mental health from who I was. That's the issue that even without mental health people can relate to during the play. When does taking

# FOUR

away a problem or a condition start affecting / taking away the personality as well.

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## Theatrical Trailers



"I no longer just felt  
different.  
I was different"

<https://vimeo.com/241887039>



"It was their duty and  
therefore it was mine"

<https://vimeo.com/241887685>



"As if their windows were  
rock pools"

<https://vimeo.com/241887298>

## Reviews

"Every politician should see Gods and Kings which is a gripping piece of theatre which follows one man's journey of discovery of diagnosis and treatment. The portrayal of how the health service works in these situations should also be seen by health professionals. It gives much food for thought and I hope it will be widely performed."

*Julie Morgan AM*

"During the performance of Gods and Kings I realised much of the experience of the main character resonated with findings of my PhD research."

*Dr Nicole Burchett, Mental Health Foundation*

