Twitter Thread by Howard Goodall



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I'd like to say a few things in tribute to the brilliant musical director & vocal coach Kate Young, who died far too young last week. Even fellow musical theatre folk may not know what a trail-blazing talent she was, so here's my story of Kate (thread)/1

I first met Kate at a rehearsal for Wayne Sleep's 1983 touring dance show DASH, for which I was composer. What struck me first about her (apart from the poetic lilt of her warm, Edinburgh accent) was the impeccable care she was taking playing piano for dance rehearsals /2

(believe me, & I mean no disrespect to lovely dancers & choreographers but playing piano for dance sessions isn't called REPETITEUR for nothing and many repetiteurs switch to auto-pilot at the keys. Kate never did. Her playing was always immaculate)/3

We hit it off immediately & had long, ranty discussions about how we wanted to change musical theatre, like young people do. We had specific aims to do with the way singing was taught & shaped for the stage. /4

We wanted the singing to be much more text & meaning-focused, for actors to have the confidence to sing as well as trained singers & for the sound to be more nuanced, more plural in style & less belty & samey (tbh not sure we won that battle..) /5

We took our 'manifesto' into the first show she MD-ed for me, THE HIRED MAN, which opened in the West End in October 1984, after two stints at Southampton & Leicester. I'm pretty sure that Kate was the first woman to MD a West End show ■/6

She was certainly the youngest. Here she is at the opening night at the Nuffield Southampton in Feb 84, when she was just 24. Take a bow, Kate. /7

(The assistant MD of THE HIRED MAN was also a woman, Helen Ireland, who went on to assist Kate in GIRLFRIENDS, our second West End foray, which we'll come to in a minute) /8

Between THE HIRED MAN in Southampton & the West End, Kate MD-ed for me MANDRAGOLA at the @NationalTheatre & I'm pretty sure she was the first woman to MD a show there too ■ /9

We managed to persuade the National's music dept to let us have an all-female band for that show, another first, I think. It was here I first heard other male musicians sniping that I'd done it for 'tokenistic' reasons, not 'merit'. Kate had to field the same sort of twaddle /10

From the National we went straight to Leicester Haymarket for the 2nd, revised HIRED MAN before London. Kate met, fell in love with & subsequently married the lovely @garethsnook during that run /11

In a move for which I shall forever be deeply grateful, @OfficialALW took that show to the West End, with Kate as its MD. She also played the big, tricky piano part every night, more or less, for its 5 month run. I never heard a single, tiniest slip in it, all that time. /12

A year after THE HIRED MAN closed we were @OldhamColiseum for my next show GIRLFRIENDS. again Kate was MD, filling that nearly-all-female cast with incredible energy, commitment & musical depth. I wonder if you can spot some future stars in this pic? /13

And here we are in a GIRLFRIENDS rehearsal at Oldham /14

A year after that, in Oct 1987, that show transferred to the Playhouse Theatre in the West End and Kate had her 2nd MD-ing job in the West End on the trot. While I was flakey & short-fused, she was steady as a rock, good-humoured & unbelievably dedicated & professional /15

What's more, she was pregnant with her daughter Laura for the entire run, playing & conducting, supported by Helen Ireland (3rd from R) & the mostly female band (the tall trombonist at the back was just passing through) /16

In her work on various shows that followed, she came up against many of the same obstacles STILL being faced by working mums in our industry. Often away from home in cheap digs working unsocial hours. She undoubtedly struggled, not least because of the sexism she endured /17

In long phone calls from tour she'd recount the endless demeaning 'banter' she had to put up with from male colleagues, appalling stuff I'm not going to repeat here. But she'd laugh it off like those who are teased/bullied/belittled/objectified routinely do /18

It takes its toll, though. In retrospect I for one feel I didn't call out this shit more at the time. Cowardly, early-career instincts but all the time women like Kate just had to put up with it to make her way in the industry. We're still not where we should be, 40 years on /19

When Kate's dad George, & Gareth's brother Derek died, both of cancer, they turned their grief into something wonderful, a charity concert of THE HIRED MAN at the Palace Theatre in March 1992, in aid of Cancer charities /20

This concert, which brought back the original cast and a huge additional chorus of West Enders, testimony to the respect and affection in which Kate was held, was a triumph, and a double CD of it was released. /21

Throughout her career, Kate as MD and as vocal coach stayed resolutely faithful to those first principles we'd hoped to follow: give the performers confidence, make the text & the emotional journey of the song paramount, care for the tiny nuanced details. /22

I know this must seem pretty standard Route 1 stuff to modern MT students but the repertoire we inherited often had different priorities, remember the great Sondheim revolution was still in its infancy when we started. /23

Here's the other thing though. Kate wielded her 'power' as MD with kindness, respect & humour. She was so NOT a megalomaniac, and positions like MD, as they are for directors & choreographers, can often lead to control-freakery. She was a paragon of collaboration /24

So please raise your glass this evening to Kate Young, who was a pathfinder for every girl who wants to be a world-class conductor/musical director. Kate did. You can. Our hearts are heavy with grief but we celebrate her shining life. Farewell, dear friend. /25