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## The Justice Syndicate review: Jury duty becomes a game

2 minutes

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### THE JUSTICE SYNDICATE

*Four Courts*

★★★★☆

What would happen if jury duty was a game? This emotive mock trial sequesters the audience in the Four Courts to reach a verdict on a sexual assault case with troublingly elusive evidence.

A world-class surgeon, specialising in child cancer, is accused of the attempted rape of a patient's mother. Is she making false accusations, following her spurred advances (as the defence argues)? Or does his sordid internet history, full of violent fantasy, reveal a predator hiding behind privilege?

As details and testimony are rationed out through iPads, and group discussions take place against a countdown, the only thing beyond reasonable doubt in UK company Fanshen's absorbing piece of interactive theatre are the quirks of human psychology. Those stumbles of cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias are explained to us, however, in a rather pedagogic debrief, as alive to Brexit schisms as #MeToo sensitivities. Our gameplay, it is noted, has been captured for further study. Are we the ones on trial?

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## The Justice Syndicate: A Highly Engaging Experience Where You Decide The Outcome

By Franco Milazzo Last edited 12 months ago

2-3 minutes

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*Looks like this article is a bit old. Be aware that information may have changed since it was published.*

Franco Milazzo The Justice Syndicate: A Highly Engaging Experience Where You Decide The Outcome

The Justice Syndicate, Battersea Arts Centre 5



Photo: Drew Farrell

The Justice Syndicate might sound like yet another superhero flick but it's an incredibly naked expression of DIY theatre wrapped around an intriguing social experiment.

Produced by innovative theatre company fanShen, each show seats 12 ticketholders around a wooden table, and presents them with an iPad full of evidence. The case is a fictional sexual assault prosecution, in which a top surgeon stands accused of attacking the mother of an ex-patient. A guilty verdict will have an impact far beyond the courtroom, and this ad hoc jury is asked to judge either a guilty or not guilty verdict based purely on what it is presented to them. There are no actors (other than on the screen), no props other than the tablet and no idea how this will all end.





Photo: Drew Farrell

There are some dramatic devices inserted here — jury members read off the written evidence, and can vote each other off for tactical or personal reasons — but not too many to distract from the central mission here of seeing how different people react to the same evidence.

For example, do we care about the alleged victim's past sexual history? Or the racy details of the man in the dock's browser history? What do we make of the scant hard facts around the case? Who do we believe more — the victim's sister or her assailant's wife?



Photo: Drew Farrell

After the jury make their final decision, there's a debrief with the boffins behind this experiment — feel free to stick around to hear how other juries fared.

This is an exciting premise which, on the occasion we went, delivered an enthralling and highly engaging experience which still plays on the mind.

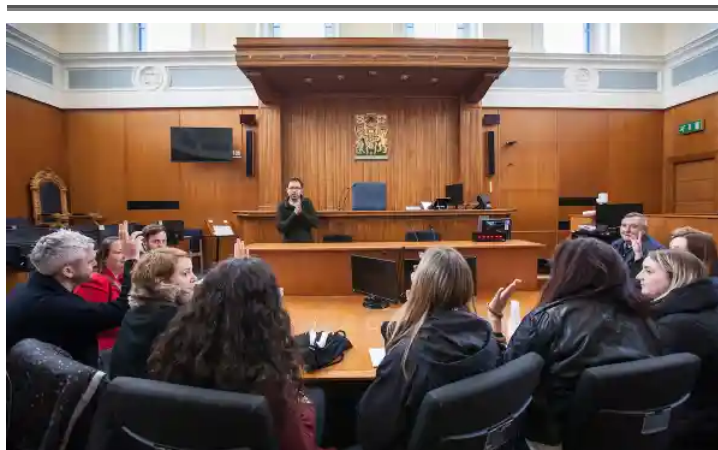
[The Justice Syndicate](#), Battersea Arts Centre. Tickets £12.50 (£10 concessions), until 23 February 2019.

Last Updated 15 February 2019

[amp.theguardian.com](https://amp.theguardian.com)

## Everyone is biased, including you: the play designed by neuroscientists | Psychology

12-16 minutes



Show caption **i**

Justice Syndicate jury members debrief in Dundee Sheriff court after reaching their verdict. Photograph: Drew Farrell

### [Psychology](#)

We all cling to beliefs despite the evidence. Immersive theatre experience The Justice Syndicate aims to show why

Sat 12 Jan 2019 16.00 GMT

"It's her word against his," says a middle-aged male juror in thick-rimmed glasses. "Someone of his experience wouldn't do something so risky." A woman to my right says the defendant is probably guilty, but maybe not beyond reasonable doubt. "But why would she lie?" asks another female juror.

Eleven strangers and I are discussing whether renowned children's surgeon Simon Huxtable tried to rape Sally Hodges, the mother of a former patient. She says he tried to kiss her and then force himself on her. Huxtable says Hodges made up the allegation after he spurned her advances. Mobile phone records show he was at her home for 26 minutes but he told police he was there for only 10. His browsing history reveals he has an interest in rape porn.

I fiddle with a yellow label that says I'm juror number 11. Except I'm not really. The witnesses are actors, and we've been watching their testimonies on tablets at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry. The case is fictional, but shared pretence is engaging and our deliberations become heated.

The Justice Syndicate is part interactive play, part psychology experiment developed by audience-centric Newcastle theatre group [FanSHEN](#) and Kris De Meyer, a neuroscientist at King's College London. It explores how we form and change opinions, our tendency to stick to initial instincts and how groups influence our views. De Meyer hopes that data gathered during the shows and their immersive nature will generate new insights into human decision-making.

It's a subject we surely need to understand better. On Monday, protesters jostled and [yelled at Tory MP Anna Soubry](#) in Westminster, calling her a "fascist" and "scum" because of her pro-Remain stance. Across the Atlantic, divisions appeared to deepen still further as Donald Trump and leading Democrats traded insults over his demands for a wall on the Mexican border. The increasingly polarised and hostile nature of public discourse raises important questions. If humans have the capacity for reason, why do we make so many bad decisions? How come people cling to extreme or irrational views in the face of facts? And can psychological insights lead to better, more rational decisions?



▲A scene from Sidney Lumet's 1957 courtroom drama *12 Angry Men*, in which an individual (Henry Fonda) challenges the majority view. Photograph: Ronald Grant Archive

The starting point for many who grapple with these questions, including those behind *The Justice Syndicate*, is the work in the 1950s of American social psychologist Leon Festinger. Based on a basic human desire to be consistent, Festinger said we compare ourselves to others to evaluate our own opinions and abilities, and that those in groups with diverging opinions will either seek to move towards consensus, ostracise individuals with opposing views or form entrenched factions.

He also outlined how, when humans hold contradictory ideas, or their actions conflict with their beliefs, they suffer a form of mental discomfort called cognitive dissonance. His PhD student Elliot Aronson fleshed this concept out, showing how this is especially likely to lead to poor decision-making when it concerns something that is important to our self-image. "If I see myself as someone who is smart, competent and kind, and you give me some information that I have done something foolish, immoral or hurtful, I have a

choice,” says US social psychologist Carol Tavris, co-author with Aronson of [Mistakes Were Made \(But Not By Me\)](#). “I can revise my view of myself, or I can dismiss the evidence. Most people take the least painful path and dismiss the evidence.”

These pressures can lead to confirmation bias – the tendency to pay attention only to information that confirms our existing beliefs. It is perhaps the best known of human biases. During the 1970s, Nobel prizewinning psychologist [Daniel Kahneman](#) outlined a series of other mental shortcuts that can lead us astray. The “availability heuristic”, for example, may mistakenly convince us that car travel is safer than flying. A £100 pair of jeans might seem like a bargain if reduced from £200, even if they cost £2 to make, thanks to the “anchoring effect”. And the “representativeness heuristic” can mislead gamblers into thinking they are due a win following a string of statistically unrelated losses. Kahneman went on to outline how the brain uses rapid, intuitive processes to make some decisions and slow, more conscious and deliberative processes for others.

Some argue our cognitive biases only look strange if we see human reasoning individualistically. French cognitive psychologists Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber argue in their 2017 book [The Enigma of Reason](#) that as highly social animals, we are deeply concerned with appearing to be wise, competent and trustworthy to others. Our reasoning capabilities therefore evolved not to reach the most logical solutions to problems but to help us argue our case and justify our positions. “We are constantly justifying ourselves and seeking to persuade others that we are the kind of person they want to cooperate with,” says Mercier, of the Jean Nicod Institute in Paris. “From this perspective, it makes no sense to hold on to arguments that contradict your point of view, but it does make sense to have a confirmation bias.”

In a 2015 study, Mercier asked participants to tackle a series of reasoning tasks, and provide justifications for their choices. When later asked to evaluate their own statements disguised as those of others, more than half disagreed with themselves.

▲Daniel Kahneman, the psychologist who exposed how unconscious biases often shape our decision-making. Photograph: unknown/BBC

Political polarisation has been a hot topic since 2016, the year Britain voted to leave the EU and Donald Trump moved into the White House. De Meyer, however, has been tracking the phenomenon since George W Bush’s narrow victory in the 2000 presidential election, through the rise of the Tea Party movement, anti-Barack Obama sentiment and the rumbling acrimony over climate change.

Aware of the insights psychology had to offer, he and film-maker Sheila Marshall produced the 2016 documentary [Right Between Your Ears](#), which featured American Christian radio host Harold Camping and his followers, who believed that God would gather up his chosen few and then destroy the Earth with huge earthquakes

on 21 October, 2011. It captures the intensity of the cognitive dissonance suffered by believers, who had left their jobs and sold their homes, on realising the end had not in fact been nigh.

There have been some 20 Justice Syndicate shows since early 2017. The software on which it runs also gathers research data, tracking how consistent participants are when asked three times during the piece which way they are leaning, and how long they view pieces of evidence for. An initial analysis of recent shows found that almost half of participants failed to change their initial leanings at all, despite the introduction of new evidence.

“Individuals take very different views on what bits of information are important,” says Joe McAlister, the computational artist who developed the software. “It’s taught me that people have a lot of different and unusual biases, which is fascinating but also quite terrifying.” The allegations of sexual assault made against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein and US judge Brett Kavanaugh both affected Justice Syndicate debates and verdicts. McAlister says younger participants have focused more strongly on issues of consent.

▲Protesters against US supreme court nominee Judge Brett Kavanaugh last year. Photograph: J. Scott Applewhite/AP

Recent failures to repeat experiments that support important concepts in psychology have led to a loss of confidence in the discipline. Some blamed the use of highly artificial decision-making tasks for this “reproducibility crisis”. De Meyer believes interactive theatre can produce more realistic results. “It allows us to recreate something with a certain level of realism, and opens up doors to do psychological research in a new way that we couldn’t do 20 years ago.”

Others seem to agree. In December, De Meyer and FanSHEN produced a new piece, commissioned by the Cabinet Office, to probe people’s reactions to a national power grid failure. Work on a scenario about someone dying due to medical negligence will begin next month. De Meyer wants to use the format to study why people are more likely to blame those of different ethnic groups to themselves for errors.

He also hopes his work can help explain rising political polarisation. Research by US thinktank the Pew Research Centre shows a growing gulf in the views of Republicans and Democrats on key topics such as race, the environment and the role of government. Another study shows Americans increasingly dislike or even loathe those who support the party they themselves oppose.

Many blame social media for fanning the flames of division. “The way people use social media and select their own online news sources keeps them in their own little confirmation bias bubbles,” says Tavis. “Tweets go viral when they really resonate with a group or really anger a group,” says De Meyer. “Social media seems to be amplifying existing divisions and probably making them worse.”

▲Social media seems to be amplifying distinctions between groups of people in society. Photograph: David Fanner

Psychology offers insights, both to individuals who want to make better decisions by learning about their own reasoning powers, and those seeking the secrets of persuading others. In a 2014 study, Mercier and colleagues found only 22% of participants could solve a reasoning task on their own, but when small groups discussed their thinking, this rose to 63%. “If people are reasoning on their own or only with people they agree with, nine times out of 10 they will stick to biased positions and you are going to get polarisation,” he says. “But if you take a group of people with some kind of common incentive but who disagree about something, then reason can help them get a better answer.”

Back in our mock jury room, and an initial show of hands reveals that, after hearing the evidence, we see Simon Huxtable as guilty by a slim majority or 7-5. “She was drunk and upset,” argues juror number four, a young male. “But what would she have to do for people to believe her?” asks a female jury member, who adds a not guilty verdict would send out the wrong message to other victims. “His sexual fantasies, however extreme, are irrelevant,” says a male juror. “We need to focus on the facts of the case.”

Another vote shows that 10 minutes of discussion has shifted opinion to 7-5 for not guilty.

At this point, I notice a matriarchal juror across the table is speaking both frequently and sensibly and that many participants are looking in her direction when they speak. She is arguing with increasing conviction that the evidence against Simon Huxtable is merely circumstantial. A short while later, we vote again, reaching a not guilty verdict by 10-2. During a debriefing session, Dan Barnard of FanSHEN describes some of the psychological concepts underpinning the show and encourages us to consider how they affected our decisions.

The show’s creators believe greater understanding of the mental triggers that affect our own decisions and those of others could help us all become a little more open-minded, tolerant and rational. “The most powerful form of learning is experiential,” says De Meyer. “My hope is that by making people aware of how they are thinking and behaving, it helps them to deal with real situations in which emotions and instincts might otherwise take over.”

*The Justice Syndicate is running on 9 February at the [National Justice Museum, Nottingham](#); 11-23 February at the [Battersea Arts Centre](#), London; and 14 April at the Pleasance theatre, Edinburgh as part of the Edinburgh international science festival*

### **Test your powers of reasoning**

1. A bat and a ball cost £1.10 in total. The bat costs £1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?
2. It takes five machines five minutes to make five widgets. How



long does it take 100 machines to make 100 widgets?

**3.** A patch of lily pads on a lake doubles in size daily. It takes 48 days for it to completely cover the lake. How long would it take for the patch to cover half of the lake?

Check your answers below. If you struggled, don't worry, you're in good company. Just one in six of more than 3,000 Americans, mostly of college students, got all three right. A third failed to get any correct. US psychologist Shane Frederick developed the cognitive reflection test in 2005 to measure the degree to which people either go with their gut instinct or take their time to reflect on simple but misleading puzzles.

Answers: 1. 5p. 2. Five minutes. 3. 47 days.

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## The Justice Syndicate review at Sheriff Court, Dundee – 'enthralling'

by David Pollock -

3-4 minutes

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Taking place as part of the annual NEoN (North East of North) Digital Arts Festival in the Scottish tech and design industries hub of Dundee, Citizen of Nowhere is a weekend-long festival sub-strand co-curated by National Theatre of Scotland artistic director Jackie Wylie and William Galinsky of GalinskyWorks.

Inspired by Theresa May's infamous "if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere" quote, the mission of this festival was to explore the current landscape of social fragmentation and rapid technological change through experiments in non-traditional theatre forms.

Created by Dan Barnard and Rachel Briscoe's Newcastle-based "recovering theatre company" Fanshen (which specialises in works involving performance, game and installation), The Justice Syndicate was the most compelling of the pieces on offer. Set in the jury room of Dundee Sheriff Court, it involves an audience of up to 12, who also perform the parts of the jury in a very conflicting trial.

Through the synced-up iPads and speakers before them, the audience are told of the trial of Dr Simon Huxtable, a world-renowned cancer surgeon whose success rates in treating children are unparalleled; accusing him of attempted rape is Sally, the mother of one of the children he treated, whose home he visited late one evening to deliver a birthday gift.

Through constructed documents and testimony performed by actors, we learn both of his interest in sadistic sexual chat online and her reputation as a promiscuous drinker. Given plenty of opportunity to discuss, to vote upon the verdict and to expel one of our colleagues, this finely-tuned simulation is thrilling – and hopefully enlightening to all, when it becomes apparent that what has really been on trial are our own susceptibilities to suggestion, moral groupthink and manufactured opinion.

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## Slice of paradise

*Fiona Charleton*

4-5 minutes

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There is something counterintuitive about giving trigger warnings at a fringe festival. Surely being provoked is part of the deal? This year's Dublin Fringe programme comes with at least 14 such warnings, and we're not just talking about the usual strobe lighting and nudity ones.

Admittedly, some are necessary. "This performance includes live shellfish," is the warning accompanying *Irish Food: A Play*, in which Michelin-starred chef JP McMahon features a live lobster, and tasting plates served with a side order of religious tension.

Another show that comes with a warning of "themes of sexual violence" is *The Justice Syndicate*. Set in the Four Courts, the audience will hear the case of a "top surgeon" (is there any other kind?) who is accused of a crime, and they are the jury. Compulsory for anyone who fancies themselves as Henry Fonda in *Twelve Angry Men*.

In fact, angry young men, or rather anxious and even suicidal young men, are an important theme in this year's 25th Dublin Fringe. *Weekend Warrior* by Tony Doyle; *Grounds for Concern* by Alan Bradley; *Nate*, a comedy by Natalie Palamides; and *Lad* by Alan Mahon and Rhys Dunlop all variously deal with how guys are coping with being male.

While toxic masculinity is comprehensively explored, many of the plays about women have moved away from the usual themes of domesticity and victimhood.

"Our icons are fats and femmes," writes artistic projects manager Bee Sparks in the programme. While I'm not exactly sure what she means, it certainly sounds empowering.

Fresh from an award-winning Edinburgh run with her new play *Collapsible*, Margaret Perry suggests "we are starting to see a greater wealth of complex female characters at the centre of their own narratives". *GAA MAAD*, a Fishamble co-production comedy by Vicky Curtis and Áine O'Hara, looks at the life of someone who is both a lesbian and a GAA fanatic. Strive Theatre's *Wishful Thinking* explores self-help culture, while an ice rink has been created on the Peacock stage for Belgian Suzanne Grotenhuis' show *On Ice*, which explores solutions to loneliness.

One of the roles of any fringe festival is to give voice to people on the margins. Making A Mark, a Talking Shop Ensemble show features Mark Smith, a 38-year-old man with Down's syndrome, who developed this autobiographical work with documentary artist Shaun Dunne. It's not simply about Mark's disability, Dunne points out. "It's more about looking at the marks we make in life . . . and the impressions left behind by those we hold closest."

No fringe is complete without a circus. "Circus performers and companies are working extremely hard to be taken seriously as an art form," points out Deirdre Molloy, producer of Irish contemporary circus act How to Square a Circle. Forget creepy clowns and caged tigers, and think thrilling acrobats such as Aisling Ní Cheallaigh and Ronan Brady.

If you miss that, try Sorry Gold by Emily Aoibheann, which ties in with another theme: climate change, while Afloat by Eva O'Connor and Hildegard Ryan reimagines a Dublin in which sea levels have risen to almost the top floor of Liberty Hall.

Now that we no longer have to apologise for liking musical theatre, there's plenty to choose from. It's Not About Love is a cabaret written and performed by Megan Riordan about the twisted nature of Romeo and Juliet-style love, while We are Lightning! threatens to shake up the National Stadium with fist-pumping euphoria.

Dance is represented in Losing Your Body by Rachel Ní Bhraonáin, who deals with burnout.

Some established artists are premiering plays, including Minefield by Clare Monnelly and Starlet by comedian Alison Spittle. Last year's hit Dreamgun Film Reads are back, supplying more edgy commentary on classic movies.

For big kids there's a treasure hunt-style show, Looking for Paradise, and for actual kids, Moop is a play about getting "un-bored". Whatever tickles your fancy, prepare to be triggered.

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## Heart vs gut in The Justice Syndicate - Miro Magazine

Sophie Talbot

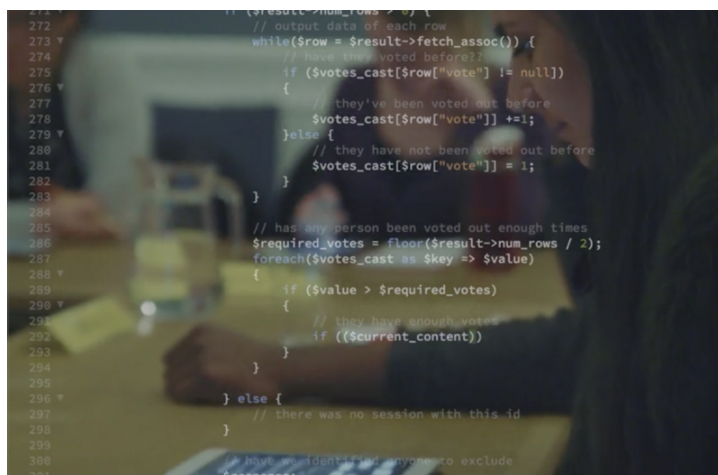
4-5 minutes

A world-class surgeon, convicted of attempted rape. Only 2% of sexual assault claims are false, yet conviction must be beyond reasonable doubt. Sophie Talbot reviews The Justice Syndicate:

Neuroscientist **Dr Kris De Meyer** reckons our decisions are made up of a whopping 95% intuition, and just 5% reasoning.

That can't be right, can it?

Well, *The Justice Syndicate*, a compelling psychological experiment-cum-theatre piece that looks at how we make decisions, suggests it might be.

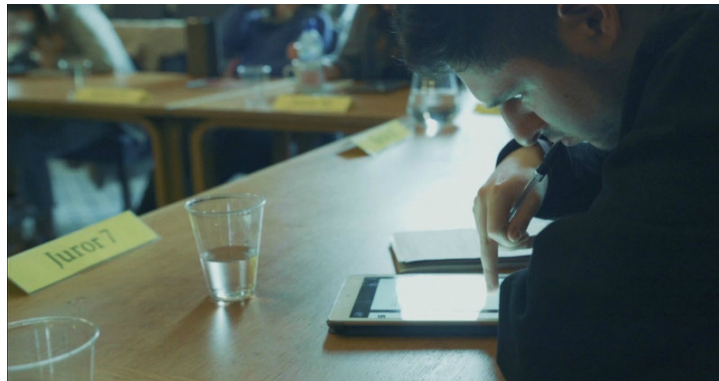


The show is a collaboration between Dr De Meyer, computational artist **Joe McAlister** and theatre company **fanSHEN**, who are all about audience-centric experiences. Here, the ten audience members sit around a wooden table, an iPad at each seat.

Except we're no longer an audience. We're a jury. And we must decide whether a world-class child-cancer surgeon is guilty of attempting to rape his patient's single mother.

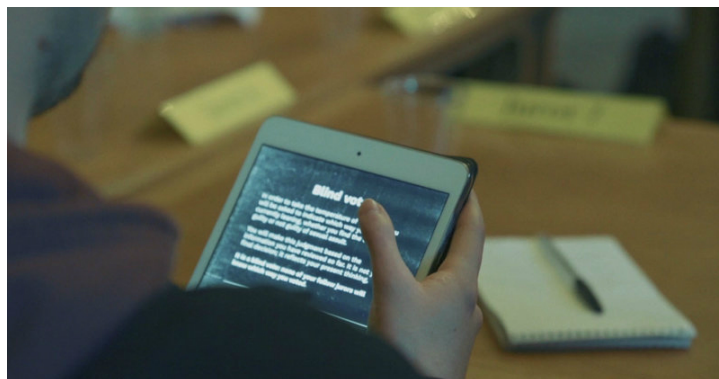
You wouldn't be surprised to find a gavel lying around the BAC's echoing chamber, with its solid wood floor and magisterial wooden beams. But it's McAlister's impressive computer system that really makes the fictional case tangible. The iPads cleverly represent an age where social media is used to serve up justice, and they guide us through the evidence, offering up testimonies and character witnesses. The technology works so seamlessly that the decision-

making process always remains centre-table.



The evidence presented is ambiguous at best. Essentially it's the victim's word against the accused. And so ***The Justice Syndicate***, this gripping courtroom simulation, poses an impossible decision, focusing our attention on how we're going to make it.

***The Justice Syndicate*** demands that we come to a verdict as a group, skillfully eliciting our involvement by prompting us to read evidence aloud and discuss the case together. The collaborators purposefully manufacture a fictional case that ignites feeling. We must be certain beyond reasonable doubt of the defendant's guilt. But we all agree that our guts are telling us one thing and our heads (and the evidence) another. Should we strive to verify our group feeling, our collective intuition, or corroborate the facts in front of us?



The show pokes holes in our justice system, perhaps unwittingly, which is testament to its intricacy. Only 2% of sexual assault claims are false, yet there needs to be evidence beyond reasonable doubt to convict a defendant, which isn't always the case.

It feels as if there's an injustice in such a justice system, based as it is on rationale. But that's the way it has to be.

So the way we vote, unable to separate our biases from fact, ourselves from the social pressures of the group, stands apart in the stark light of the post-show discussion.

And this post-show chat feels as important as the discussions that take place within the show itself. Artists don't often want to speak outright about their piece, but these guys do. By perfectly executing a scenario that shows us how little we use our capacity for reason, and then by helping us understand why, the collaboration hopes

that we'll step back when confronted with similar, real-life situations and take a more open-minded, rational approach to making decisions.

It's hard not to be guided by emotion and intuition in a world where there are far too many of these events occurring. ***The Justice Syndicate*** doesn't dispute this. Instead it provides a remarkably astute, eye-opening piece of theatre that delicately and profoundly highlights the importance of taking a different approach. One where decisions are rationalised and reason is worth a bit more than 5%.

★★★★☆

**The Justice Syndicate played at Battersea Arts Centre until 23 February 2019. For more information or to book tickets, please visit the venue [website](#).**



[nomoreworkhorse.com](https://nomoreworkhorse.com)

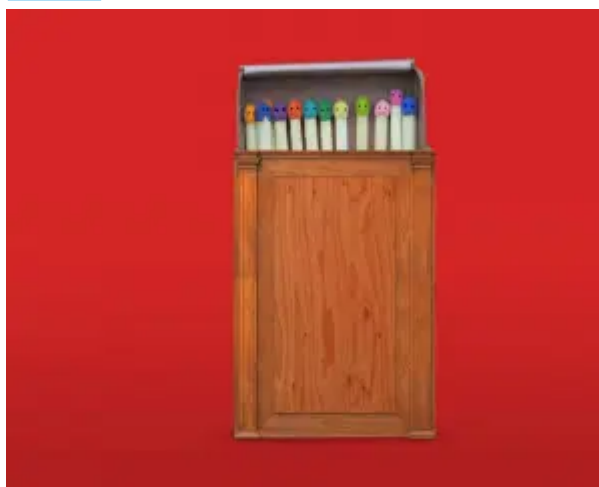
## The Justice Syndicate – Dublin Fringe Festival – Review

*No More Workhorse*

4-5 minutes

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[Festivals](#)



### [The Justice Syndicate](#) – Dublin Fringe Festival – Review

By Diana Perez Garcia

Performances – 13 – 15 September

Venue – Meeting Point @ Four Courts Luas Stop

At the debriefing that follows immersive theatre piece *The Justice Syndicate*, co-creator Dan Barnard, a self-effacing and quietly-spoken Englishman, tells participants that their experience as a juror in the fictional trial they have just taken part in with a group of their peers is part of a project that aims to investigate the nature of decision making. “Take, for example, a referendum where we may have made the wrong choice,” he says, a wry smile on his face, going on to explain that often, once we have made a decision, we will alter our interpretation of data to support our choice.

This is what neuroscientists call “confirmation bias”, one of a number of factors that *The Justice Syndicate* manages to stage as each member of a jury of twelve (eleven in this instance, as juror number twelve mysteriously never materialised) comes to make a life altering decision on the fate of the defendant, a renowned paediatric surgeon charged with sexually assaulting the mother of one of his patients. Unfortunately, given the thought-provoking and informative nature of this piece, it is hard to imagine Boris Johnson, a perfect casting choice for the part of an angry man ill-suited to make consequential decisions, ever participating in fanSHEN’s

[theplaysthethinguk.com](https://theplaysthethinguk.com)

## The Justice Syndicate, Battersea Arts Centre

*laurakressly*

2-3 minutes



by Lara Alier

Walking upstairs to the performance space, I was wondering why are there only 12 of us and why hadn't I investigated a bit more what am I about to watch. Or, as it turns out, what I am about to do. Around one, big table, there are twelve tablets and name tags saying Juror 5, 6, and so on. I am going to be part of the jury that would decide if a Doctor was guilty or not guilty of sexual assault.

Our tablets feed us documents and evidence, such as his phone location that night and DNA test results. We also have access to interviews with the women who are pressing charges, the accused, and other people involved in the trial. Every so often we have the chance to talk to the other members of the jury to share our views and discuss the pieces of evidence. Finally, we are asked to anonymously vote whether he was guilty or not.

We started talking to each other with small, shy voices, but as time goes on, each of us begin to really invest in elaborating our own points, speaking with confidence and assurance. It's powerful to consider what happens to us when we are given the power to decide someone's fate.

For 90 minutes, I am totally immersed in this trial. At some point my cheeks flush, my heart starts pounding and I have to remind myself that it is just a performance. Because in real life, there aren't cases like this.

In a world where life is more and more experienced through screens, getting 12 strangers to sit around a table discussing an issue is already an achievement in itself. I'm not sure whether this is a play, event, experiment, or interactive performance. Whichever of this, it doesn't really matter and certainly presents an interesting future for theatre.

*The Justice Syndicate* runs through 23 February.

*The Play's the Thing UK is committed to covering fringe and progressive theatre in London and beyond. It is run entirely voluntarily and needs regular support to ensure its survival. For more information and to help The Play's the Thing UK provide coverage of the theatre that needs reviews the most, [visit its patreon](#).*

dynamic and engaging piece of playable theatre. He could learn a thing or two if he did.

The Justice Syndicate is perhaps best-described as a mixture of role-playing, computer art, and focus group that manages to deliver a fast-paced and pressurised set up where participants must come to an important conclusion on the basis of the fragmented data fed through a tablet at their disposal. Its creators have provided the structure, setting and technology for each group of twelve to shape their own narrative as they attempt to fill in the gaps around the inconclusive evidence presented. The result of this process is as much a study of the interplay of individual personality and group dynamics as it is an enquiry into social and class prejudice and the inadequacies of the justice system.

fanSHEN has collaborated with neuroscientist Kris de Meyer to create The Justice Syndicate and the piece reveals information about decision making that we all ought to keep in mind when confronted with serious choices; but the reasons why each one of us arrived at our own individual decision remained hermetically mysterious as we exited The Benchers Room at the Four Courts. I realise now that as I stood in judgement of the fictional surgeon charged with sexual assault I also quietly judged the performances of my fellow jurors. I would like to flatter myself by thinking that I only looked out for the factual soundness of the arguments they presented but I would be lying if I did not admit that I was occasionally swayed in favour of a point delivered with a warm smile or mildly irked by what I thought was a tendency to grandstand.

As a reviewer, the most challenging aspect of this piece is that it forces me to review my own performance as a juror. If yesterday is anything to go by, inwardly, I am the slow-burning maverick that surprises everybody with their nonconformist and unpopular stance, whereas outwardly, I keep my cards close to my chest, calmly and quietly presenting arguments that could alternatively furnish both a guilty and not guilty verdict. In other words, I am a weird mixture of indecision and cockiness.

So, am I, on the basis of yesterday's evidence, equipped to make decisions of this calibre? Can I resist the cognitive obstacles that stand in the way of rational judgement? These are, as far as I am concerned, the two most important questions in a show full of important questions but I am afraid that the jury will be out on those for quite a while yet.

[felixonline.co.uk](http://felixonline.co.uk)

## The Justice Syndicate

*Claire Chan,*

4-5 minutes

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In *The Justice Syndicate*, an interactive 12-person game created by theatre company fanSHEN, we're on a jury deciding the fate of a top paediatric neurosurgeon who's been accused of sexual assault by the mother of one of his patients. It's almost like *12 Angry Men* when we walk in: twelve desks arranged in a rectangle, and at each seat an iPad, notebook and glass of water. Evidence for the case – statements, forensic reports, video testimonies from both sides, and expert opinions – is revealed to us piece by piece on the iPads as we go along. Guilty or innocent? We get to decide.

The evidence is designed to be equivocal. There is a clear power imbalance here: Huxtable, a renowned neurosurgeon, is clearly socioeconomically better off than Hodges, a struggling single mother of two. Though we might wish for more conclusive evidence, it just doesn't exist – much as in real life, where hard evidence in rape and sexual assault cases is often lacking. This makes it incredibly difficult to decide. It's a his-word-against-hers situation, but who is being truthful and who is lying?

The tech syncing, thanks to computational artist Joe McAlister, is great, with a slick interface and voting results displayed to everyone instantaneously. Our iPads are synced and different witness statements are read out by different jurors – we all get a chance to speak, emboldening everyone for the discussions later on. Although I must say I was glad it wasn't *my* iPad that lit up when it was time to read out the transcript of Huxtable's BDSM sexting...!

Midway through, we are even offered the option to bar one juror from the final vote. My group, which was fairly civil, chose not to, but the threat of elimination served to deter any single individual from being overly disruptive. The game creators Dan Barnard and Rachel Briscoe have clearly put a lot of thought into encouraging productive discussion amongst participants, and it works. Despite having never met each other before, we're soon getting into excited arguments about whether or not Huxtable should be convicted.

There are 3 opportunities for us to vote on which way we are leaning, and one last discussion of all the evidence before the final decision of the jury is handed down. Once the verdict is out, Barnard and Briscoe finally appear to facilitate the post-game debrief. After all the tension of the last hour or so, it's time to clear the air and for everyone to hash out any unfinished arguments. It's

[theplaysthethinguk.com](https://theplaysthethinguk.com)

## The Justice Syndicate, Battersea Arts Centre

*laurakressly*

2-3 minutes



by Lara Alier

Walking upstairs to the performance space, I was wondering why are there only 12 of us and why hadn't I investigated a bit more what am I about to watch. Or, as it turns out, what I am about to do. Around one, big table, there are twelve tablets and name tags saying Juror 5, 6, and so on. I am going to be part of the jury that would decide if a Doctor was guilty or not guilty of sexual assault.

Our tablets feed us documents and evidence, such as his phone location that night and DNA test results. We also have access to interviews with the women who are pressing charges, the accused, and other people involved in the trial. Every so often we have the chance to talk to the other members of the jury to share our views and discuss the pieces of evidence. Finally, we are asked to anonymously vote whether he was guilty or not.

We started talking to each other with small, shy voices, but as time goes on, each of us begin to really invest in elaborating our own points, speaking with confidence and assurance. It's powerful to consider what happens to us when we are given the power to decide someone's fate.

For 90 minutes, I am totally immersed in this trial. At some point my cheeks flush, my heart starts pounding and I have to remind myself that it is just a performance. Because in real life, there aren't cases like this.