

HURTS SO GOOD

INFORMATION PACK



ABOUT THE SHOW

OPERATION SPANNER

In 1987, police in Manchester acquired a videotape depicting sadomasochistic sex acts between a group of gay men. This led to one of the largest vice investigations in British history, codenamed Operation Spanner.

In 1990, the case went to trial at the Old Bailey. All sixteen men present were prosecuted. The fact that these acts were consented to, even enjoyed, was deemed immaterial. The verdict was appealed all the way to the European Court of Human Rights.

The men lost their appeal.

Today, the case seems largely forgotten. It has been buried.
The legal precedent it set still stands.



HURTS SO GOOD

I found out about Operation Spanner from a TikTok and immediately became obsessed. Not because I felt a deep moral responsibility to preserve an overlooked chapter of queer history. I just panicked that Russell T Davies might get there before me.

What began as a casual bit of late night scrolling has become a two year obsession with the UK's largest investigation into consensual gay BDSM. Since then, I've visited archives, argued with the Metropolitan Police, posted letters to strangers, infiltrated Facebook groups, joined Runnymede Meccano Guild and become far too invested in a story most people have never heard of.

Part queer history, part live investigation, and part cautionary tale, Hurts So Good explores the legacy of Operation Spanner. The show traces an increasingly obsessive search for a story that doesn't seem to want to be told. Performed by a cast of four, fuelled by archive fever and an alarming quantity of Black Forest gâteau, HSG asks what we're really looking for when we go digging through the past.





MARCH, 1981





PAST DEVELOPMENT

**ORIGINS FESTIVAL – BIRMINGHAM HIPPODROME
MAY 2026**

**Developed by Louis through Birmingham Hippodrome's Origins programme,
an early work-in-progress sharing was presented in the Patrick Studio in
May 2026.**

**The project evolved over 18 months of targeted mentoring and
development, with key dramaturgical support from Anna Himali Howard.**

OTHER

In January 2025, HSG was shortlisted for the New Diorama Untapped Award.

**In April 2026, support through a Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP)
grant provided vital R&D time, enabling Louis to expand the work from a solo
performance into an ensemble piece**



CREATIVE TEAM

LOUIS WHARTON – WRITER/CREATOR

Louis is a West Midlands-based theatre maker with a passion for queer storytelling and interdisciplinary collaboration. His work combines devising, new writing and experimental performance to uncover hidden narratives, often drawing on archival research to bring overlooked LGBTQ+ histories into conversation with contemporary audiences.

He was one of eight artists selected for the inaugural cohort of Birmingham Hippodrome's Origins programme and is currently developing a new site-specific theatre project with Birmingham Rep.

Recent credits include Assistant Director on I Do for award winning site responsive company Dante or Die, and writer of Breeders, commissioned by Shout Festival and performed at the Belgrade Theatre.

STEVE ELIAS – DIRECTOR

Steve is an award-winning Director, Movement director and Presenter, RTS Winner of Best Observational Documentary for Our Dancing Town (BBC2 / Twenty Twenty).

His recent credits include Director of Don Pasquale for Opera Toulon and La Traviata for Opera Holland Park. Steve recently made his New York directorial debut, at the off-Broadway theatre, the Soho Playhouse with his acclaimed play Caitlin.

Directing credits include; Tosca (Clonter Opera Theatre), Caitlin (UK Tour), Alice in Wonderland (Birmingham Old Rep), European premiere of Mo Williams, award winning musical Elephant and Piggie – We Are In A Play, Cuckoo's Nest (Stockwell Playhouse – Winner of Best New Musical), The Addams Family, Little Women, Urinetown, The Drowsy Chaperone, 25th Annual Putnam Spelling Bee (BOA), God of Carnage (Manchester -Immersive Theatre Festival).

RUDY PERCIVAL – COMPOSER + SOUND DESIGNER

Rudy Percival is a musician working across songwriting, orchestration/arrangement, sound design & music direction.

Theatre credits include Lessons on Revolution (Barbican Centre); Maison Mac (Goodspeed & Rhinebeck USA); The Mozart Question (Barn Theatre); The Koala Who Could (Southbank Centre); The Criterion Theatre's 150th Anniversary Gala; Twelfth Night & A Midsummer Night's Dream (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama); Derry Boys (Theatre 503); Drum (Soho Theatre); The Butterfly Project (Toyooka Theatre Festival Japan).

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