

# TOTALTHEATRE

## MAGAZINE

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TOTAL THEATRE - DEVELOPING CONTEMPORARY THEATRE



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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the new look Total Theatre!

We've made some changes to the design of the magazine, but more vitally we are in the middle of a shift for Total Theatre that radically alters its purpose as an organisation. Founded (over 20 years ago) as a support network for artists working in physical/visual theatre, Total Theatre is consciously expanding its remit. We are now here, ready willing and able, to develop contemporary theatre and performance, for theatre-makers of all sorts and for audiences. A 'total theatre' indeed!

But with many of the artists that we have supported over the years entering the mainstream – Kneehigh at the National, Complicite and Hoipolloi at the Barbican, Peepolykus in the West End, Punchdrunk performing a large-scale site specific piece to thirty thousand people, to name but a few achievements – does Total Theatre, as a support organisation, still need to exist? Isn't the battle won? We feel that inroads have been made, but there's a way to go yet, so we are ready for the challenge. A few gauntlets thrown our way: a recent special issue of The Observer managed a focus on British theatre that didn't mention any of the above-named companies; street arts, puppetry, live art and circus (reviewed and featured regularly in Total Theatre Magazine) remain undervalued within the media, for the most part lacking critical appraisal due to ignorance or disinterest; provincial venues nationwide are often reluctant to programme work that is other than a 'regular play' by a known author, starring a TV personality, as they fear a lack of audience for innovative contemporary theatre. So plenty still to do!

You will hopefully see changes in the organisation reflected in the changing content of the magazine over the next few issues as we take a more outward and inclusive view. In this current issue, you'll see that we have a number of new features. There's the first of what will be a regular column from our new creative director Pippa Bailey called Out & About. Voices is an opportunity to hear first-hand from key contemporary theatre-makers: the first being Emma Rice from Kneehigh Theatre. In a special focus for this issue, we reflect on the state of the art for street arts. There's an audience with writer/performer extraordinaire Tim Crouch; a reflection on disabled artists' work at the Singapore Fringe; a look at interesting new work by Curious and Chopped Logic that in very different ways tackles the subject of young women trafficked into prostitution; and a report on the recent UK tour by body artist Fakir. Reviews include reports from London, Brighton, Birmingham and Manchester. Our extended News & Previews section flags up key news and coming events for August to October, and as always Company Updates features the goings-on of artists and companies who are part of the Total Theatre family. We hope very much that you like what you find inside these pages. Any comments are as always very welcome!

**Dorothy Max Prior**  
Editor

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COVER: OCKHAM'S RAZOR AT LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME FESTIVAL AND TOURING. PHOTO JULIET JENSEN.

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LA DIDONE



## EDINBURGH FESTIVALS 2007

If it's August it must be Edinburgh! This year sees the arrival of a new director for both the Fringe (Jon Morgan) and the International Festival (Jonathan Mills). We've also seen the appointment of Faith Liddell as the inaugural director of Festivals Edinburgh, the organisation created to oversee mutual areas of interest, and to help maintain Edinburgh's reputation as the leading festival destination (in light perhaps of the perceived rivalry of the new kid on the block – Manchester International Festival). Interestingly, with Fringe programmes like Aurora Nova at St Stephen's attracting top international companies, and the International festival programming experimental work by the likes of The Wooster Group, there is perhaps less and less distinction between the two. There will be more interaction between the Fringe and the International this year. For example, there will be the new Edinburgh International Festival Award, worth £5,000, to be presented to a company appearing at the Fringe. The award allows the chosen company or artist to develop a work and present it as a work in progress in front of an audience at the Edinburgh International Festival 2008. Festival director Jonathan Mills will select the artist or company following recommendations made by a panel charged with 'scouring the 2007 Fringe'. See [www.edfringe.com](http://www.edfringe.com), [www.eif.co.uk](http://www.eif.co.uk), and [www.edinburghfestivals.co.uk](http://www.edinburghfestivals.co.uk)

And talking of awards: yes, the Total Theatre Awards 2007 are up and running! Our team of assessors, reviewers and judges will also be doing a bit of 'scouring' – seeking out the best of contemporary 'total theatre'. For more, much more, on this see the free Edinburgh supplement that comes with this issue. Full details of our nominations and judging process can be found on the website, where we will be posting reviews throughout August, and publicising the shortlist (announced 16 August) and the winners (announced 23 August). See [www.totaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk)

## WATCH THIS SPACE 2007

The National's free outdoor summer festival is running until 16 September. An avant-garde artistic extravaganza featuring the best of European street theatre, bands from across the globe, breathtaking circus, installations, dance, cabaret, club nights and magnificent spectacle, Watch This Space offers over 100 shows and events across its eleven weeks. This year Theatre Square will also be hosting BBC Blast workshops and showcases for art, dance, film and music by young people. Performers include Membre, Cirque Bijou, Avanti Display, Ragroof Theatre, and Teatr Biuro Podró\_y. For a full schedule see: [www.nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk)



BICYCLE BALLET

DECIBEL



## DECIBEL PERFORMING ARTS SHOWCASE

This autumn will see the third and most ambitious decibel Performing Arts Showcase yet. Taking place in Birmingham, 3-7 September, the 2007 showcase promises to be a vibrant event bursting with innovation, talent and creative excellence. Over 50 of the UK's most accomplished performers of African, Asian and Caribbean descent will perform and present extracts of their work for the 2007/08 and 2008/09 touring seasons. This year's showcase will open with a one-day progressive and thought provoking International Symposium focusing on the theme of opportunities and practicalities for cross-cultural, international collaborations and partnerships in performing arts. Highlights include the UK's first female breakdancer Hanifa Hudson with Art Breaker...The Art of Breakin and Kompany Malakhi's Boxin, a gravity-defying work that literally breaks down the barriers to create a junction between dance, parkour, physical theatre, hip-hop and film. See: [www.decibelpas07.co.uk](http://www.decibelpas07.co.uk)

AURORA NOVA



## AURORA NOVA TOURING AT THE KOMEDIA, BRIGHTON

Komedia is delighted that as part of their Aurora Nova Touring 2007 programme, CoisCéim's *Knots* and Derevo's *Ketzal* (both presented in Edinburgh in 2006) will be playing at their Brighton venue this autumn. *Knots*, directed by Liam Steel (ex-DV8), will be playing 14-16 November. This daring, dynamic show mixes brutal, high-octane choreography with the insightful writings of psychoanalyst RD Laing. *Ketzal*, the dazzling new production from St Petersburg based company Derevo, described as 'an intimate celebration of the human form with dazzling choreography', won the 'Golden Mask' award (the most significant theatrical award in Russia) earlier this year, and plays from 21-23 November. See: [www.komedia.co.uk](http://www.komedia.co.uk)





### DORSET TURNS INSIDE OUT

Inside Out, which runs 13 to 23 September 2007, will bring eleven days of spectacular international art events to Dorset with a programme of free outdoor theatre, site specific performance/installation, dance, acrobatics and pyrotechnics. Iconic locations - a mediaeval Minster, a working harbour, a small fishing port, a Victorian pleasure garden, a Napoleonic fort and an ancient hill-top settlement – will become landscapes of the imagination. Highlights include Polish company Teatr Biuro Podrozy's seminal *Carmen Funebre*, Catalan company Sarruga (with Peixos (*Fish from the Deep*), fire sculpture from Carabosse, and UK company Periplum's *Arquiem*, a dark folk tale that takes the audience on a journey amongst the twisting alleyways and ancient buildings of Wimborne and the Minster. Inside Out also features Red Earth's new work, *Enclosure*. On the autumn equinox Red Earth create a ritual map to reactivate the Neolithic landscape of Hambleton Hill, a chalk massif rising spectacularly above the Dorset landscape: bronze percussion, horns, fire, pyrotechnics and the elements converge in an atmospheric and highly charged performance journey that weaves between the living and the dead in a landscape resonating with echoes of the past. See: [www.redearth.co.uk](http://www.redearth.co.uk) For further festival information call The Lighthouse, Poole, on 08700 668 701 or see: [www.insideoutdorset.co.uk](http://www.insideoutdorset.co.uk)



### THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP FESTIVAL 2007

Every year IWF brings the very best theatre and dance artists from around the world to the capital to teach skills, reveal diverse performance styles and give opportunities to theatre professionals and the wider community to learn, experiment, watch and collaborate. This year's highlights include Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens', residential site-specifics workshops in Cambridge and a three-week exploration of large-scale open-air performance with Snuff Puppets from Australia. Our one-off intensive workshops will include everything from pole and fan dancing to skipping tricks and renaissance dance. 27 August – 27 September. For more information see [www.workshopfestival.co.uk](http://www.workshopfestival.co.uk) or call 0207 091 9666



### WAR HORSE AT THE NATIONAL

Following *His Dark Materials* and *Coram Boy*, *War Horse* is a new epic (suitable for age 12 and above) based on the novel by Michael Morpurgo, Children's Laureate from 2003-05. It will open in the Olivier Theatre on 17 October. Morpurgo's text has been adapted by Nick Stafford and the show will be directed by NT associate directors Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris, who are collaborating for the first time. Presented in association with Handspring Puppet Company, the multimedia production will be designed by Rae Smith, with puppet designs and fabrication by Adrian Kohler, and video design by Leo Warner (for Fifty Nine Ltd). See: [www.nt-online.org/warhorse](http://www.nt-online.org/warhorse)

WAR HORSE

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## ORGANIC THEATRE RESIDENCIES

International Training and Performance Residencies is an Organic Theatre project focusing on the use of the body in performance, through the crossover between traditional non-western performance practices and contemporary western physical theatre. Organised in collaboration with Tobacco Factory, Asian Arts Agency and Theatre Bristol, it aims to provide high quality multi-artform training opportunities open to all performing arts practitioners. Forthcoming residencies will host renowned Kathakali performer Sasi Nair (Autumn 2007) and Indian Paratheatre group Milòn Méla directed by Abani Biswas, former collaborator of Jerzy Grotowski, for the first time in the UK (May/June 2008). See [www.organictheatre.co.uk](http://www.organictheatre.co.uk)



## LIVING IN HARMONY - THE ITC AND EQUITY AGREEMENT

An innovative new ITC/Equity Agreement for Performers & Stage Managers was formally launched at Hampstead Theatre in June. The launch celebrated both the new Agreement and the process that had created it, in which a series of meetings was held to hear the views and experiences of practitioners working in sectors such as site specific performance, dance and physical theatre, street arts, and young people's theatre. The new Agreement comprises collective ITC/Equity agreements to encourage fair treatment; streamlined 'terms and conditions' such as minimum rates; and the creation of The Handbook, an important new addition giving guidance on good practice. A reference version of the new ITC/Equity Agreement for Performers and Stage Managers can be found on the ITC website. See: [www.itc-rtts.org](http://www.itc-rtts.org)

## AUTUMN AT THE CORN EXCHANGE

The Corn Exchange, Newbury continues to present an impressive range of work, in Berkshire and beyond. Chris Goode's production *Longwave* shows as part of the British Council Showcase in Edinburgh, 19-26 August. The Cultivating Ideas programme at New Greenham Arts continues to flourish, with recent residencies by Curious, Andrew Dawson, Gecko, Keira Martin, Redcape and Claire Coache; currently developing are new pieces with Chris Goode and a music theatre piece with Barb Jungr and John Paul Zaccarini. Highlights of the Autumn season include DNA's *Ballpond Bobby* (13 September) and *Monster Hits* from Tall Stories (23 October). See: [www.cornexchangenew.com](http://www.cornexchangenew.com)

## JON DAVIDSON AND THE ESCOLA DE CLOWN

Jon Davison, co-director of the Escola de Clown de Barcelona, begins a three-year AHRC-funded Creative Fellowship at Central School of Speech and Drama, in October 2007. 'The Contemporary Clown Actor: seeking new modes of performance' will be asking the age-old question, "how is a performer to be convincing?" and will explore the new possibilities opened up to performers at the frontier of clowning and acting. Investigations will be ongoing via a series of workshops, presentations and performances, held in parallel at Central and in Barcelona. For more information or to become involved in the project, email [jon@escoladec clown.eu](mailto:jon@escoladec clown.eu)

## INTERNATIONAL MASK FESTIVAL AT GLASSHOUSE ARTS CENTRE OCTOBER 2007

Ninian Kinear Wilson runs a ten-day leather maskmaking workshop, and Didi Hopkins a two-day voyage into the energy, essence and esprit of Commedia, the DNA of all physical theatre and grammar of classical text. The workshops will use research and methodology to open up the world of the popular Commedia dell'Arte, exploring archetype, character, mask, emotional landscape and how this oral tradition is alive, kicking and vital to all theatre-making in the 21st century. See: [www.internationalmaskfestival.com](http://www.internationalmaskfestival.com)

## HOPE STREET LINKS UP WITH JOHN FOX FOR LOCK

*Lock* will be the last performance project of Hope Street's highly regarded apprenticeship programme. Former director of Welfare State International, John Fox, will lead a professional team and guide the Hope Street apprentices through a process of rehearsals, community workshops, filming and production preparation. The event created will feature performances, short films and a carnival and will be presented in, alongside, on and above the Leeds Liverpool Canal. A key location for the event will be at Saracens Head, Halsall, Lancashire. *Lock* has been made possible through the generous support from The Heritage Lottery and from The Culture Company. It will take place Friday - Sunday, 31 August - 2 September. See [www.hope-street.org](http://www.hope-street.org) or call 0151 708 8007.

## THEATRE OF SECOND LIFE

A consortium of research groups including PALATINE and the English Subject Centre and led by the King's Visualisation Lab at The Centre for Computing in the Humanities have received funding for pedagogical research into Second Life (which for those who haven't discovered it yet is the Internet based more-than-a-game 3-D virtual world entirely built and owned by its residents). In the first stage of the project fifteen 3D Theatre models will be imported into Second Life. It will then be possible to explore 'conventional' uses of the virtual theatres - in virtual performances set in them. It would, for example, theoretically be possible to run a performance-based workshop with students on the stage of the Globe Theatre. Or perhaps something more interesting! See: [www.palatine.ac.uk/projects/828](http://www.palatine.ac.uk/projects/828)

DANNY SCHLESINGER



FACELESS



## DESPERATE MEN

Big news at Desperate Men – the *Severn Project* is going ahead! The company will be working with Avanti Display and Whalley Range Allstars to create, among other things, a touring cabaret show, a giant puppet, a water-spurting spectacular, and a river-powered music machine, all kicking off in Gloucester Docks on 4 August. In the meantime the company has been busy with *Sequins and Sawdust*, produced by Cirque Bijou but with most of the Desperate Men on board. The company has also been to Northern Ireland, Streets of Brighton, and Hay-on-Wye. There are lots of Eco-Pirates gigs booked for the summer, so if you bump into some scurvy rogues while you're sunning yourself on the coast, don't be surprised. See: [www.desperatemen.com](http://www.desperatemen.com)

## FACELESS

Shake your tail feather this summer with Faceless' debut tour across Yorkshire, The Humber and NE Lincolnshire with their new street arts/community and schools project *Conference of the Birds*. *Conference of the Birds* is a non-verbal, visual, street theatre adventure set to the music of contemporary British/Asian composer Nitin Sawhney. It promises to be great fun for all the family and features energetic masks, flamboyant costumes and amazing puppets. See: [www.facelessco.com](http://www.facelessco.com)

## NOLA RAE

Nola Rae's new show, *Home-Made Shakespeare*, in which she is joined by the Swedish clown, Lasse Akerlund, had its first performances in May/June with great success. After performances in Finland, Norway and Sweden, it will have another UK tour from 16 to 28 October, including Southport, Holyhead, Norwich and Westacre. See: [www.nolarae.com](http://www.nolarae.com)

## NATURAL THEATRE COMPANY

After an extremely busy summer the Nats continue to tour their special brand of street theatre around Britain and the world. August sees them in China and September takes them to Johannesburg where they will be performing in a township as well as in a prosperous financial district. Meanwhile, plans are well ahead for the Greenwich Theatre panto which once again will be designed by the company's artistic director, Ralph Oswick. Ralph works with 76-year-old seamstress Olive Pike and their costumes for last year's show were described by The Times as 'exquisite' and 'true genius'. [www.naturaltheatre.co.uk](http://www.naturaltheatre.co.uk)

## MOMENTUM

After a successful research period this summer Momentum will be collaborating again with Tanya Khabarova (Derevo) for their new show *Anima*. Highly physical and visually compelling, *Anima* journeys into the surreal world of the subconscious, exploring the blurred line between dream and reality. *Anima* is the third part of Momentum's trilogy on the exploration of life. The piece will preview at Unity Theatre, Liverpool on 22 & 23 of November 2007 and will premiere and run 5-9 February 2008 as a part of the Liverpool's Culture Company Artistic Programme. See: [www.momentumtheatre.com](http://www.momentumtheatre.com)

## HOODWINK

Hoodwink have just finished *The River Is Revolting*, a site-specific project commissioned by Salisbury Festival and supported by ACE. Performed on a river site, Constable tries to paint the perfect landscape with sheep running amok, monster dragonflies spawning and giant hogweed encroaching. The show will be available to tour in 2008 – look out for video on the website soon. See: [www.hoodwinktheatre.co.uk](http://www.hoodwinktheatre.co.uk)

## MIMBRE

Mimbre are pleased to announce that their new show *The Bridge* has been accepted for the artistic programme at one of Europe's leading street theatre showcases – Fira de Tarrega – after it was seen at the x.trax showcase in Manchester in June. The company and their spectacular show, which was co-commissioned by the National Theatre, Hat Fair and Laban and funded by ACE, have also been chosen as one of eight companies to be supported by the new Without Walls street arts consortium of festivals. For further news on this and dates for touring, see [www.mimbre.co.uk](http://www.mimbre.co.uk)

## PLATFORM 4

After ten years of touring devised work Platform 4 is having a bit of a breather from creating annual shows! The company have just finished an exciting phase of organisational development helped along by arts consultant Graham Devlin, and are now embarking on a four-month project supported by Creative Partnerships. *Our Kingdom* is a development piece which will see the company working with St Monica's School in Southampton. It will follow on from an installation pilot project, *Underwater Picnic*, which explored the natural habitat and urban wildlife of the school pond in Bevois Town Primary. Olympics permitting, the company will be starting research work on their own take on *The Tempest* 2007/08, in partnership with University of Winchester. Touring Autumn 2009. See: [www.platform4.org](http://www.platform4.org)





## PUNCHDRUNK

Punchdrunk has joined forces with BAC in a major co-production, *The Masque of the Red Death*, opening at BAC 17 September. Inspired by the classic tales of Edgar Allan Poe, the production features a cast of 25 and a live band and harnesses the entire old Town Hall site on Lavender Hill, much of it rarely accessible to the public. On Friday and Saturday nights during a four-month run, *The Masque of the Red Death* gives way to *Red Death Lates*, an after-show event with music, dancing and special guests. All tickets: 020 7223 2223, [www.thereddeathiscoming.com](http://www.thereddeathiscoming.com) or [www.nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk) For further information see: [www.punchdrunk.org.uk](http://www.punchdrunk.org.uk)

## DANNY SCHLESINGER

Danny Schlesinger of Circo Ridicoloso invites you into the strange and bizarre universe of a wild balloon tamer where surreal, skilful and stupid things happen. In his solo show *Lighter than Air*, circus skills, eccentric performance and physical comedy intertwine with Danny's unique 'theatre of balloons' to give the audience a funny yet moving show. Performances in October/November. Danny has also been performing at many cabaret nights – including *Finger in the Pie*, *St Magnus in Orkney*, *Whoopee* and at the *Ministry of Burlesque* – and sharing his skills with students at the Escola de Clown de Barcelona and the Richmond Shakespeare Society. See: [www.CircoRidicoloso.com](http://www.CircoRidicoloso.com)

## PANTS ON FIRE

Pants on Fire presented their latest production *Oink!* at this year's Arena Festival in Erlangen in Germany in June/July. This was a co-production with Arena directed by Peter Bramley. Artistic director Hannah Bentley was awarded the Stage One Bursary for New Producers for this production. Continuing their collaboration with

composer Lucy Egger, the show uses live music and song, puppetry and inventive mask and costume. Pants on Fire are pursuing plans to mount the production some time soon in the UK. See: [www.pantsonfiretheatre.com](http://www.pantsonfiretheatre.com)

## HORSE + BAMBOO THEATRE

This autumn, Horse + Bamboo Theatre are presenting their award-winning production *In The Shadow of Trees* at The Dukes Theatre, Lancaster from 11 to 13 October and at the inaugural International Mask Festival in Stourbridge on 24 October. The production is also playing at The LBT Theatre, Huddersfield 14-24 December. Originally produced in association with The Royal Exchange Theatre and directed by Horse + Bamboo's Associate Director, Alison Duddle, *In The Shadow of Trees* won the best new play award at the 2006 Manchester Evening News Theatre awards. See [www.horseandbamboo.org](http://www.horseandbamboo.org) or e-mail [info@horseandbamboo.org](mailto:info@horseandbamboo.org)

## WOLFE BOWART

Following its season at this year's London International Mime Festival, Wolfe Bowart's luminously inventive *LaLaLuna* heads to Australia for a national tour 11 July – 21 November. When the light in the moon goes out, one man overturns the world's attic in his attempts to find a replacement light bulb. A deft mix of theatre, circus, giant moon balloons, flying toilet paper, human-engulfing garbage cans, sinister white rabbits and whoopee cushions, the solution to the conundrum involves an interactive film scene like no other. The tour is courtesy of a federal Playing Australia grant awarded to Bowart for *LaLaLuna*. See: [www.lalaluna.com](http://www.lalaluna.com)

## THÉÂTRE SANS FRONTIÈRES

Théâtre Sans Frontières' newest production and its first in Spanish for children aged 6-11 years old, *La Pelota Mágica (The Magic Ball)*, an Argentinean folktale in simple Spanish, premiered in May. The production, funded by Creative Partnerships Tees Valley, is the culmination of a project the company has been working on with a primary school in a deprived area in the North East. Autumn sees a revival of *Around the World in 80 Minutes*, a hilarious and action-packed search for the missing French language. The production seamlessly blends video shot on location with live stage action, dance, song and lots of audience participation. Opens 20 & 21 September at Queen's Hall, Hexham, followed by 25-29 September, at Northern Stage, Newcastle, then touring nationally. See [www.tsf.org.uk](http://www.tsf.org.uk)

## TARRY THEATRE

Tarry Theatre are currently working on the development of a new piece, *To Break A Man*. Inspired by the writings of American Novelist Paul Auster, *To Break A Man* reflects Auster's ambition to test audience/reader expectations and push the boundaries of the narrative medium. The show will be performed at Chat's Palace, Hackney on Friday 21 September. Tickets will be available on the door (pay what you can). For further info contact Tarry Theatre by calling +44 (0)1273 708083 / +44 (0)7939 670832 or e-mailing [tarrytheatreprojects@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tarrytheatreprojects@yahoo.co.uk)

See also the Edinburgh Supplement with this magazine for updates from Total Theatre performers and companies taking work to the Edinburgh festival Fringe 2007.

# OUT & ABOUT

RICHARD HUDSON



## A NEW COLUMN BY TOTAL THEATRE'S CREATIVE DIRECTOR PIPPA BAILEY

At the time of writing (July 2007) I am eight weeks in post as creative director for Total Theatre – the organisation in which this magazine plays a significant role. It's an exciting challenge during uncertain times. A 35% cut in Arts Council England's 'Grants for the Arts' this year; arts money committed to spiralling costs of the 2012 Olympics; anxiety over the next government spending review – and a new team leading the country. Instability is nothing new for artists and arts companies, but our society boasts its artistic achievements, and we must work to ensure that the creative community can continue to flourish. We have produced a postcard, 'Tell your government you care' to coincide with this issue. If you agree with its sentiments then please send it off. Or see our website to request one – [www.totaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk)

Total Theatre is changing and I have been appointed to determine its path. My focus whilst 'out and about' in May/June has been to collect impressions from people working in contemporary theatre and identify gaps in provision. What do theatre artists and their audiences need now? What could Total Theatre be doing to support them? I am passionate about supporting artists, about connecting with audiences and together, changing the world.

I found inspiration at the Norwich and Norfolk Festival (NNF) in May, attending a visioning day for that city as inhabitants and visitors explored; how could it be selected European City of Culture in 2025? Discussion focussed on what would make Norwich more creatively exciting. I have no ties to the city, yet the debates were fascinating. How can the arts contribute to a sense of place? Why are they important? People left fired up about the opportunities for change, about how society might be different if the arts were able to infiltrate every aspect of daily life. World class facilitators led the day; Charles Landry – advisor to cities across the globe on creative city building; Robyn Archer – singer, writer, artistic director, and public advocate of the arts (mainly in Australia though her reach is global); and Enrique Vargasi, director of Teatro de los Sentidos (theatre of the senses). Teatro de los Sentidos also presented one of the most magical shows for children I have ever seen, The Upside Down World. Enrique said little all day, he listened – which as he said, is a dying art. His few words were the right few words.

Part of my vision for Total Theatre is to develop a useful international network for theatre communities. With this in mind I attended the Prague Quadrennial. This 'scenofest' of scenographers and theatre designers meets every four years. 23,000 visitors took part over 10 days in June and 60 countries were represented; mostly European but also from Australasia, the Americas and Canada. Each builds a temporary installation to present their best designers and compete for prizes. Russia won the Gold Triga for a suitably surreal installation that required wellies to enter as the floor was covered in water. Students from 50 countries also presented work and competed. I was drawn into discussions about how theatre has lost power as a cultural force. Many designers at the quadrennial seemed concerned. The general consensus was that people have been seduced by the 2D screen. I hope we can find new ways to shout about the need for, and importance of, live experiences. And who better than the Total Theatre community? It is early days, but with a fresh approach to supporting artists and developing audiences I hope Total Theatre (the organisation, the magazine, the Awards in Edinburgh and other projects) can grow and have significant influence.

Please get in touch if you have ideas to contribute.

*Pippa Bailey can be contacted  
on [director@totaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:director@totaltheatre.org.uk)*





# PLUS CA CHANGE

## WHAT'S IN A NAME? DONNA CLOSE REFLECTS ON THE NEW ARTS COUNCIL STRATEGY FOR OUTDOOR PERFORMANCE

At this year's Street Arts Meeting (SAM) in Brighton, David Micklem, Theatre Officer at Arts Council England (ACE) National Office, gave delegates a sneak preview of the new national Outdoor Performance Strategy.

The first surprise was the title – 'Outdoor Performance Strategy' not 'Street Arts Strategy'. The term 'street arts' aligns the artform with colleagues across mainland Europe – and with the much more poetic term 'arts dans la rue' which includes visual arts, digital arts and installations. The term 'street arts' has been adopted wholesale by the sector and by cultural policy makers. It will be interesting to see what, if any, impact this semantic shift will have. Will the Independent Street Arts Network and the National Association of Street Artists need to change their names in line with the new strategy? It should be added that increasingly 'street art' is being used in the UK to distinguish commissioned graffiti art and the title change may be influenced by this.

On the face of it, there are few surprises in the strategy. The priorities are (quite correctly) the usual ACE ones: the importance of quality in process and outcome, of strong partnerships, and of internationalism. The change of emphasis and title suggests that artists/ companies who work outdoors will be judged by the same criteria as those who work in venues. Who can argue with that? In many ways this indicates a long fought for recognition that street artists are 'proper' artists and entitled to the opportunities their subsidised venue-based artists enjoy. ACE have given their blessing: are street artists ready to jump through the hoops?

At the SAM breakout group that followed David Micklem's presentation, there was a feeling amongst artists that although an assumption of equality was positive, the playing field is not yet level and more intervention was needed. Street arts has developed largely outside of the mainstream subsidised arts world: 'quality' in that context is harder to judge as there is not yet a fully developed critical language for the work. There was a suspicion that some of the already subsidised and therefore better organised theatre and dance companies will jump on the bandwagon and use their fluency in artspeak to take a big bite of the new 'outdoor' pie. I am sure that this is not intended as a call for a closed shop. On the contrary, it is recognised that it is desirable to attract new artists to the street to encourage a sharing of practice. But there does need to be a balance and a structure for supporting and nurturing existing and emerging artists that work exclusively or predominantly outdoors. This requires of ACE a high level of intelligence about the existing street arts sector, and a clear and consistent mechanism for these artists to communicate with their regional offices.

PLUS CA CHANGE | DONNA CLOSE





ACE has a good track record in intelligence gathering. In 2002, Felicity Hall produced two excellent strategies, for circus and for street arts. These have been followed by commissioned research from Anne Tucker of Manchester International Arts – one of the pioneers of street arts festivals in the UK – which looked at issues around international touring of UK work. David Micklem published his Street Arts Health check in 2004. These reports have created a body of evidence for ACE officers who wish to support street arts, and there are notable individual officers in the regions (particularly in the south east and in the north east) who are supportive and knowledgeable about the sector. There does not, however, seem to be plans to embed street arts in particular officer's job descriptions, or to create a new network of officers and industry professionals to share intelligence. Even post-strategy, funding will remain a postcode lottery for street artists. David Micklem has achieved much in his national role, including helping bring us the Elephant. Unfortunately David is running away with the theatre. We hope that his successor will take up the cause with the same level of verve.

The key issue with the strategy is that it does not carry with it a commitment of ringfenced funding for outdoor work. This was a moot point at the breakout group. There is a fear that we are entering hard times for arts funding and that means hard decisions are going to have to be made. There was a call for ACE to make clear its statement about how much of a priority outdoor performance would be, and where resources could come from, internally and externally. Peter Boyden (SAM chair) made the point that ACE may have 35% less resources, but that still equates to a significant amount of money and that huge changes could happen with a commitment to brave and radical redistribution. He also proposed that the commitment to outdoor performance could be embedded within agreements with existing subsidised arts venues and theatres. Targeted large amounts of resources have made a huge culture-shifting impact: The Theatre Review galvanised the regional theatres, the Urban Cultural Programme has had an incredible positive impact and legacy in the cultural life of the participating cities. Money matters.

ACE's role is much wider than funder, and the sector is looking to them to lead strategically in accessing other resources and capitalising on opportunities that emerge for outdoor performance within the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Lets hope the full strategy addresses this.

*Donna Close is arts officer for Brighton & Hove Council.  
She is the former producer of Streets of Brighton.  
The Arts Council England Strategy for Outdoor Performance will  
be available on the website at: [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)*



# WITHOUT WALLS

**DOROTHY MAX PRIOR  
REPORTS ON A NEW  
CONSORTIUM OF  
FESTIVALS SET UP  
TO IMPROVE THE LOT  
FOR TOURING STREET  
ARTS COMPANIES**



So what's the best way to increase the opportunities for existing good work to be seen, to encourage the development of interesting new work, and to share costs and resources so that the best use is made of funder's contributions?

Enter Without Walls, a consortium of five of the country's 'most strategically significant street arts festivals', with the aim 'to develop and strengthen the landscape of outdoor performance in the UK'. Specifically, to present and develop work from a new and emerging generation of street artists, to encourage artists from outside this sector to venture into the water, and to prioritise the development and presentation of work from culturally diverse artists and disabled artists. There's also an advocacy role within the context of the 2012 Olympics, and an intention to foster innovation, and new collaborations, both within the UK and internationally.

The 'odd quintet' as it has been dubbed (by Frank Wilson) comprises: Streets of Brighton (director Dave Reeves); X.trax Manchester (Maggie Clarke); Greenwich+Docklands International Festival (Bradley Hemmings); Hat Fair Winchester (Sian Thomas); and Stockton International Riverside Festival (the aforementioned Frank Wilson, who made a presentation on the new initiative at the Street Arts Meeting in Brighton.)

Frank explained that it was early days as the group had only just had funding confirmed, but that much had already been done through mostly face-to-face meetings and a commitment from the five to get a programme up and running for 2007. This has indeed happened, with a healthy cluster of artists and companies out on the road.

At the breakout session after Frank's presentation, the Famous Five (or four anyway – Dave Reeves being absent with the reasonable excuse that it was the opening day of his festival) had more to say on their reasons for clubbing together and their expectations. 'There was a feeling from the Arts Council that something needed to happen' said Bradley Hemmings, and 'It was important for street arts festivals to get supported in the ways that indoor theatres get supported' said Sian Thomas. Maggie Clarke felt that it was 'important to have a formal grouping for street arts that is like the dance or live art agencies' and that 'this sector deserves a touring platform'. Frank Wilson summed it up succinctly in saying that 'the most important thing is to create a model of good practice'.

Going on the shows I've seen to date (at Brighton, Manchester and Winchester), the eclectic mix of work gives some indication of both the group's intentions and the real range of work that goes out under the 'street arts' tag. Without Walls 2007 touring artists include installation artists Aswarm, whose tree-inhabiting jellyfish-like sculptures cum sound installations provide a gentle and ambient intervention to the natural environment. Chaser by Motionhouse is a short sharp acrobatic dance piece, full of exuberant flights and catches; Orkestra del Sol are a band of musicians, inspired by the marching bands of Eastern Europe, who play an exuberant mix of tunes – 'the swagger of a Balkan wedding band with the flair of Latin carnival'. Having seen them at both Brighton and Manchester, I can testify to their ability to get the crowd waltzing on pavement or parkland, their work proving that 'theatre' and 'narrative' can reside as happily within song as anywhere else. The Alexandras (appearing at all five of the consortium's festivals) are an example of a company who would perhaps never have taken to the streets without a bit of pro-active prodding. Their director Jenny Sealy hopped up at the end of a panel session at x.trax in Manchester to say, with refreshing humility, that she was on new territory with outdoor performance and would welcome any feedback from anyone on the show. Mimbres' The Bridge is a fine example of the sort of work that both Without Walls and the new ACE strategy own to wanting to support: it's a collaboration between a company with a good track record in street arts performance with an established physical/devised theatre director (Joseph Alford of Theatre 0) more used to working indoors – thus ticking all those boxes on developing the range of work for an existing company, encouraging artists from other areas into street arts, supporting interesting new collaborations.

*Without Walls Consortium 2007:  
Streets of Brighton (10-12 May) [www.zapart.co.uk](http://www.zapart.co.uk)  
x.trax, Manchester (1-2 June) [www.xtrax.org.uk](http://www.xtrax.org.uk)  
Greenwich + Docklands International  
Festival (21-24 June) [www.festival.org](http://www.festival.org)  
Hat Fair Winchester (29-30 June,  
1 July) [www.hatfair.co.uk](http://www.hatfair.co.uk)  
Stockton International Riverside Festival  
(1-5 August) [www.sirf.co.uk](http://www.sirf.co.uk)  
For further information see [www.withoutwalls.uk.com](http://www.withoutwalls.uk.com)*

## THE BIG ISSUE: HOME OR AWAY?

'The most important thing at a street festival is the audience. The very fact that they have turned out in their thousands is an event in itself and people are excited and inspired by the mere fact of gathering together as a community. Therefore, an act from five miles down the road is just as valuable and enhancing to the spirit of a festival as one from the other end of the country, or indeed, from another country. When we are working on a street programme we always encourage festivals to include acts based in their area, or acts touring nearby. The relatively small budget of our own street festival in Exeter gets spent more on shows and less on scattering carbon along our motorways. The industry needs to start to address its environmental impact, and this is one of the ways of doing so.'

Jo Burgess, Fool's Paradise [www.foolsparadise.co.uk](http://www.foolsparadise.co.uk)

'When we perform abroad we get to see how our work connects with an audience who have different cultural references to us. You also discover that those cultural differences are not so great – people tend to laugh at the same sorts of things the world over. If there's an opportunity to stick your head in a large pig they will jump at it whether they are aborigines in Perth, the Taiwanese in Taipei or the good people of Bracknell. Sometimes performing to a foreign audience brings out elements of the show which had hitherto lain dormant as they perhaps pick up on something that the British audience maybe take for granted. In certain countries (France and Holland, for example) the audience are extremely knowledgeable about street theatre, so you see how your work relates to a wider international perspective. Street theatre is often reviewed in these countries so you get taken a bit more seriously. There's a danger of producing work that has a bland global appeal (mime statues, stilt walking aliens) but the best work has a defined cultural identity, yet which allows it to communicate with just about anyone.'

Edward Taylor, Whalley Range All Stars. [www.wars.org.uk](http://www.wars.org.uk)

## STREET ARTS SOUNDBITES

'Street arts needs to stop thinking of itself as the ragamuffin child of the arts. The childlike innocence has to give way to the maturity needed to respond to opportunities up to 2012 and beyond'

Peter Boyden, chair of Street Arts Meeting 2007, strategic consultant (author of The Boyden Report ACE 2002), and chair of Culture South West. [www.culturesouthwest.org.uk](http://www.culturesouthwest.org.uk)

'Improvement in quality is a function of time: we need time to try something out, then time to reflect and to re-do. You have to do something twenty times before it is really cooked.'

Jon Beedel, Desperate Men. [www.desperatemen.com](http://www.desperatemen.com)

'Getting commissioning partners means pester power – the new Bash Street show has eight co-commissioners sharing the financial costs. They get exclusivity in the UK; we get the opportunity to develop the work in the winter with a substantial tour in the summer. We took our inspiration in this from the French street arts sector'

JoJo Pickering, Bash Street Theatre. [www.bashstreet.co.uk](http://www.bashstreet.co.uk)

'We've nurtured our contacts – most people working in street arts are good to know. I'd say work with other artists: go and see work; find people you like and offer to work with them. Share ideas! Take risks! Make shows just for the hell of it; don't stay in one zone.'

Mikey Martens, 3 Monkey Productions. [www.3monkeyproductions.co.uk](http://www.3monkeyproductions.co.uk)

'The agenda for quality needs to be set by the artists. Street artists need time to develop, both artistically and in their ability to promote their work in the right way. Creating larger scale work is risky. There's a tendency to judge work on its first outing, but we should see the first year as work-in-progress. If a show is good, keep it in the repertoire.'

Chloe Dear, National Association of Street Artists (NASA). [www.nasauk.org](http://www.nasauk.org)

'We were encouraged to put The Sultan's Elephant in Battersea Park – so as not to be disruptive. But the whole point was to be disruptive! When I first suggested closing all the roads around Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Palace, I was called "impertinent".'

Helen Marriage, Artichoke, producers of The Sultan's Elephant in London. [www.artichoke.uk.com](http://www.artichoke.uk.com)



'We adopted a culture of yes in place of a culture of no; to persuade people not to be fearful. We did this and everything else by getting people on our side, with the small team principle: keep it small, keep a handle on it all.'

Alan Jacobi, production manager, The Sultan's Elephant. [www.artichoke.uk.com](http://www.artichoke.uk.com)

'Sport is at the core, but building in culture, ceremonies and education was embedded in the 2012 Olympics proposal. We can create a cultural programme between us. We need to see it as a marathon not a sprint.'

Bill Morris, director of culture, ceremonies and education for the Cultural Olympiad 2012 <http://main.london2012.com/en/ourvision/olympism+and+culture/>

'We need to promote quality not quantity. Festivals with fewer shows programmed. The space for site specific companies to take up residence for a week.'

Soren Nielsen, Scarabeus Theatre. [www.scarabeus.co.uk](http://www.scarabeus.co.uk)

'We need to build up quality relationships between programmers and artists. Presenters should be willing to programme work for two years in a row in order to support the development of the work.'

Ednie Wilson, creativity development manager at Gateshead Council. [www.cultureandcreativitygateshead.org](http://www.cultureandcreativitygateshead.org)

'Diversity – cultural diversity, but also the presence of disabled artists, the young, the old – is still a big issue and worthy of more than relegation to a breakout group. We need the sector to share more examples of good practice.'

Indy Hunjan, KALA PHOOL arts development agency. [www.kalaphool.com](http://www.kalaphool.com)

*Street Arts Soundbites taken from presentations and breakout group conversations at the Street Arts Meeting, Streets of Brighton, May 2007. See [www.zapuk.com](http://www.zapuk.com)*



# THE AGONY & THE ECSTASY

## HOW TO RESPOND TO THE BODY ART OF FAKIR? YOU HAVE TO BE THERE, REALLY BE THERE, SAYS MIRIAM KING

Is there a need to witness the primal? The raw nature of the body? In a world in which birth has become industrialized, ruled by technology, and death is hidden away – perhaps so.

There's a question in my thoughts about how the work of 'body artists' relates to body memory and the psyche, specifically a connection with the body memory of birth: flesh, nakedness, blood, 'opening' of the body, an endurance, a sufferance, a transcendence... We are all born through a labour, an endurance, in blood, perhaps in pain, and certainly in a heightened, intense state. Is this body memory of birth what artists evoke and what audiences feel and remember when witnessing this sort of work?

In May 2007, American artist Fakir Musafar made a rare visit to the UK, celebrating his 60 years of 'body play'. The season comprised performances and numerous participatory events, including the Safe Piercing for Performance Masterclass at Corsica Studios, London, which I attended.

Fakir Musafar grew up in Dakota, the founding father of the Modern Primitives. In his work, Fakir has been both the enactor *and* the audience: as a young man his preference was to take self-portraits of his body suspensions and piercing rituals. Beginning in the 1940s, he kept quiet about what he did for 30 years – Fakir is not into shock and awe. This is a form of work that is something you have to experience personally, to engage in fully – art, magic and spiritual ritual all wrapped up together. If it is real, if it is strong, traces are left of what we do – it remains there, something greater than the everyday: it is felt.

The potent energy that surrounds his work is an energy that can be walked into or fled from. He says 'It's your body, do with it what you want. You are performing for the higher part of yourself, expanding your boundaries'. Fakir calls in archetypal and primal energy and is a facilitator to these energies. He pays homage with gratitude and respect to the cultures he has taken practices from: Native American Indian, Hinduism, and the Sufis. For Fakir, it's a way of worship and finding a higher truth. Fakir says there is no such thing as pain, there is body sensation that is either mild or intense, it's down to how you interpret

'MY BODY IS MINE TO USE. IT IS MY MEDIA, MY PERSONAL LIVING CANVAS, LIVING CLAY – TO MOULD AND SHAPE AND MARK AS AN ARTFUL EXPRESSION OF THE LIFE-ENERGY THAT FLOWS THROUGH IT.' FAKIR

the sensation. In his workshop, Fakir invokes the Hindu god Muragan. Through creating a piercing into flesh, illness, distress, and 'dark' can come out. Clean energy? Dirty energy? Powerful energy? It's all energy and that is art. The only bad response is no response. He says that often during the trance state, it happens that one becomes an observer of what one is doing. He suggests fainting is a block in chi energy. He sees his work as akin to yoga, which means union – union with the spirits that we cannot see, using the body to get into a peaceful place, a spiritual place. For example, during a body suspension or flesh pull, it is as if there's another body that lives inside a physical body, and this body,

the 'electrical' body, can walk away, can float out. When you are you, the real pure essential you, there is no time. Body rites or 'body play' take that essential you into other dimensions. Putting stress onto your flesh body separates 'you' from your physical body. Fakir feels that most of us live in a sedated state – going out of your body is a transformative experience. Fakir says he's experienced the 'white light that is love, greater than any love you will feel from a human'.

And what of birth? He believes the spirit enters the body at birth, following that endurance, and at that first breath. This work is an essential human experience of fleshiness and transcendence. Ritualistic? Yes. Recalling birth, death, rebirth? Yes – and the deep body memories that we all carry inside of us.

*Spirit + Flesh UK, the first UK visit of Fakir Musafar and Cleo Dubois in 12 years, took place 18–26 May 2007. See [www.fakirtour.co.uk](http://www.fakirtour.co.uk)*

*Miriam King is an independent artist working in live art, dance and film. She is also a trained birth doula.*

# AN AUDIENCE WITH



## MARIGOLD HUGHES IS INSPIRED BY THE AUDIENCE CENTRED THEATRE OF TIM CROUCH

In navigating a path that follows this precise question, Crouch has created two plays that contribute to answering this, and which in turn ask: What is the place of the actor?

Two activities seemingly converged to facilitate the writing of his first play: *My Arm*, first produced in 2003. The first being that of his storytelling workshops with a jolly band of Woodcraft Folk (secular brownies and cubs with an environmental conscience and crafty/musical tendencies) and of one particular workshop in which a ten-year-old boy refused to take his hand out of the air for the entire session. The second being that of a workshop with acting students in which he experimented with substituting certain actors with objects, so that the actors left on stage would act with say, a lipstick, as opposed to another human performer. This, he explains, makes the audience work harder by empowering them with an interpretative role: they have to activate their imaginations and are responsible for seeing, making characters and believing in them.

Tim Crouch starts his 'presentation' by flicking through the brochure, making sure there is nothing else we would rather be seeing. He has an infectious warm smile and a manner of a man constantly on the edge of mischief: instantly likable and extremely watchable. Once we have all established that we want to be there, he kicks off by talking about his own background and the formative moments in it: the moments that have allowed him to go, from being a "unexpressed artist" to a certifiably "expressed" one.

CROUCH HAS BEGUN TO DEVELOP AN *AUDIENCE* CENTRED PRACTICE AS OPPOSED TO FOCUSING ON *ACTOR* CENTRED PRACTICE

Teaching, leading theatre workshops and writing plays for children appears to have had a crucial impact in forming and developing his ideas. Education,

Crouch states, is all about the student and their needs. Theatre, he states, is the ultimate model of good teaching; bringing its audience into a relationship with ideas, offering up models of thinking and action, providing the stimulus material and then leaving the audience to come to its own decisions. Fusing the unique properties of theatre and education and his strong interests in both, Crouch has begun to develop an *audience* centred practice as opposed to focussing on *actor* centred practice. Art, he argues, should be located within the audience and not exist separately from it. Over one hundred years of focussing on the actor and the internal state of psychological realism has undermined and displaced the role of the audience – the question to which he constantly returns is: Where does the audience fit?



## PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM HAS UNDERMINED AND DISPLACED THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

*My Arm* tells the story of a man who between the ages of 10 and 40 refuses to take his hand out of the air. He commits himself completely to this defiant act of persistent and desperate self-acknowledgement. As the sole performer in the show, Crouch talks about his desire to be nobody else but him: Tim Crouch. He considers it a piece of storytelling, in which he is the storyteller and his fellow actors are objects collected from audience members – a camera, a lipstick, a mirror, a railcard. It is the responsibility of the audience to imbue these objects with character: they are told what these objects are and so that is what they become. Simple.

His second play, *An Oak Tree*, first performed in 2005, was inspired by a work of art called *An Oak Tree*, 1973 by Michael Craig Martin. The exhibit constituted of a three-quarter full glass of water on a high shelf, which Craig states is in fact an oak tree. The glass of water does not in anyway alter its physical substance or properties and it is the intention of the artist to transform it into an oak tree that “precipitates” the change. The spectator makes it what it is.



Crouch cites Craig Martin’s conceptual artwork as an influential text, relevant to theatre. The implications for the actor are pertinent. The actor does not change his physical substance to play a character. When playing Hamlet, his face, head, legs do not change – they are the same. He is named Hamlet, the audience knows that he is Hamlet and therefore he is Hamlet. Also hugely influential in this perspective on character and performance, is a book entitled *Self Mastery Through Conscious Auto Suggestion* by Emile Coué. In the act of suggesting something verbally, it is so: in *telling* the audience that a performer is a character, they believe it.

Linked closely to this is the notion of hypnotism. The hypnotic state, Crouch believes, shares the same state as theatre. Theatre reaches its audience by bypassing the rational part of our mind in order to appeal to the irrational, subconscious part. Furthering the idea of substituting actors with objects, in *An Oak Tree*, Crouch replaces the object with a human: a human that has never seen the script – that is, a performer who knows as little of the play as the audience. *An Oak Tree*, then, tells the story of a father who has lost his child in a car crash, of a hypnotist who is the driver of the car, and of an onstage meeting between these two characters, in which the father has volunteered himself for hypnosis. The hypnotist is played by Crouch, the father by a different actor (male or female) every night.

HE MAKES THE AUDIENCE WORK HARDER BY EMPOWERING THEM WITH AN INTERPRETATIVE ROLE: THEY HAVE TO ACTIVATE THEIR IMAGINATIONS

The ‘second actor, then, is the audience – or as good as. This actor is the audience’s representative onstage. Both are completely new to the production and through the actor, the audience can see itself and is revitalised through their close connection to the performance. This actor is introduced to the audience at the beginning of the production as himself. Crouch then tells him/her about the character they are playing i.e. he is 45, he is 5ft 9 etc. They then begin. As the actor playing the father is completely new to the text, he/she is unable to clutter the role with psychological detail – the audience creates the character.

In this era of cyberspace and virtual reality, we seem to be craving *real* experience and *genuine* interaction. In our theatre, we want to come closer to what is real – and what is most real in a theatre is the audience. The proliferation of site-specific work is an indicator of a desire to be closer to *real* sites and *real* life, as is verbatim theatre, as is live art, as is the communal nature of carnival and circus.



Tim Crouch’s presentation focuses on reconfiguring the role of the actor within an audience centred practice. It is the audience who do the work. Perhaps we are moving closer to a new mode of acting, a mode of acting that is designed to bring us ever closer to an audience and to correspond to the current modes of theatre that require it. Such a mode of acting could help facilitate a model of theatre that primarily looks outwards to *life* and to *audience* for inspiration and not to an indulgent introspection of the *actor* and *art*. Take it away, Tim!

*Tim Crouch’s presentation/workshop was part of How to Act, the first conference hosted by the Centre for Excellence in Training at Theatre at Central School of Speech and Drama, London, 14–17 February 2007.*

*Tim Crouch’s new show England will premiere, within an exhibition of work by Alex Hartley, at the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, as part of the Edinburgh Festival, from 3–26 August 2007. It will form part of the British Council 2007 Showcase. A news from nowhere production, England is A Traverse Theatre commission, co-produced by Culturgest (Portugal) and Warwick Arts Centre, with support from the Peggy Ramsay Foundation. See [www.newsfromnowhere.net](http://www.newsfromnowhere.net)*



## ANOTHER COUNTRY

### TIM JEEVES WAS ONE OF A NUMBER OF DISABLED ARTISTS INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THE M1 SINGAPORE FRINGE FESTIVAL 2007

Singapore is an unusual place. It has no chewing gum, homosexuality is illegal, and the government has executed an average of two people every month since 1990 (the highest per capita in the world). There are four distinct cultures existing side by side with little apparent tension (Chinese, Tamil, Malay and Indian) and every high-rise tower block has to accommodate these different ethnic groups in a similar proportion to the island nation as a whole.

In February 2007 I went to Singapore with the support of the British Council to perform my piece *Should i be in my body?* as part of Singapore Fringe Festival, which brought together twenty-one artworks in different media, from thirteen different countries, under the theme of 'art and disability'.

The theme was very loosely applied. Each piece did give a justification for its relation to disability in the programme, though these sometimes just added to the confusion: we had, for example, talk of 'our disability to communicate'.

It's not criminal to adopt such a broad interpretation of a theme, and it is a thousand times better to do that than be too narrow in portraying the subject matter, but there was something uneasy about taking such an emotive subject and then, to a substantial degree, disregarding it. Of course, such criticism is based on my own experience of disability art in the UK, and local experience does not create a norm.

Singapore as a city seemed well aware of issues of access and disability – lifts are commonplace (even on the metro), and streets well maintained. No potholes and broken kerbs are to be seen unless you go to the outskirts or Little India. But talking to others who knew the city, the sense I got was that this was the result of the government deciding what was right for its people. There is no disability movement as such in Singapore, and, whilst the Necessary Stage should certainly be applauded for raising the issue, I don't think it's an imperialist superiority that leaves me thinking that they could learn things from the way that disability art is made by disabled people in the UK.

### FAT CATS AND RED DUST

Of course, learning is a two way process, and, by seeing some of the locally produced work, I gained plenty of experience in what it means to be a minority in a different culture...

Teater Ekamatra's *How Did the Cat Get So Fat?* was entertaining and insightful in equal measure, or at least that's what I gathered from the reaction of those around me. My problem in connecting with the work arose from the fact that it was a piece that parodied the attitudes of very specific elements of Singaporean society – taxi drivers, business men, maids, etc – which left me somewhat on the outside, whilst the fact that it was performed in Malay with English subtitles left me struggling for comprehension even more. But the audience seemed to love it, and I gained lessons in the dangers of reviewing theatre in a different land and the cultural-specificity of humour, so everyone came away happy.



One of the few non-UK works that corresponded to my expectation of disability art was Very Special Arts and Van Body Theatre's *Red Dust*— another piece where language proved to be a barrier (though this time it was Mandarin I struggled with). Performed and directed by Taiwanese artist Wu Wen Cui, the piece was her interpretation of Singapore artist Chng Seok Tin's experiences of losing her sight some twenty years ago. The lyrics were poems written previously by the older artist, and two of her installations were incorporated into the design. The forty red banners hanging down at the back of the stage, lit so that they came into and out of vision like a soothing hallucination, were stunningly beautiful, as were the sculpted birds hanging over the stage. The actual performance itself was decidedly humdrum – Wu Wen Cui peering into a pool of light, running on the spot and miming a silent scream to the heavens, hardly the most imaginative interpretation of loss of sight – but Seok Tin's installations exemplified a certain ideal of disability art. They were phenomenally beautiful in their own right, but knowing her to be partially sighted added something to them – they were not asking to be excused because they were made by a disabled artist (as much work of lower quality can be), but instead they became an expression of something wonderful that had happened when she had lost her vision. Her artistic vision, her sensitivity to a certain gentle boldness, had developed as it had precisely *because* her eyesight had failed.



## WRITTEN ON THE BODY

And so from audience member to performer... The work I took to Singapore was a solo performance called *Should I be in my bodi?* When I have previously performed this in England, I have stood naked, surrounded by text on my body's medical history whilst three pens hang off me on pieces of elastic. An audience is invited to write a response to the work on my flesh, thus incorporating their response into the work for those who see it afterwards. In Singapore, the licensing board wouldn't allow me to perform fully naked and so I had to wear a pair of pants (this wasn't the only intervention: they had at first asked Monica de Miranda to use the Chinese flag instead of the Stars and Stripes in her piece *United Nations*, a one-to-one performance in which the participant was taken on a ride in a wheelchair decorated with the Stars and Stripes whilst global economics was explored through a series of questions facilitated by de Miranda).



If I had been allowed to perform the piece in its original form I am sure that the reaction to the piece would have been very different: it's possible that embarrassment would have meant more people than did would have reacted with shyness, lurking on the far side of the gallery space and giggling with their friends. Or maybe the extra exposure would have worked to bring other people, who did engage with the work, in closer, and magnify their experience of the piece.

Cultural difference was present in other ways. Key to previous presentations of the work has been communication with the audience through eye contact; even if it was just a glance as they finished writing on me. Of course, one needs to be careful of making such generalisations, but in Singapore there seems a much greater reticence when it comes to eye contact, and I found myself having to present the piece, and myself within it, in a very different way, and the piece perhaps grew weaker for such changes.

In some ways, this is a metaphor for my experience of Singapore. Whilst there was plenty to be learnt from encountering both the city and the work within the festival, I felt that, as a whole, more was to be learnt on how not to present, how not to do things. I was made to feel incredibly welcome by The Necessary Stage (and it was particularly nice to spend a week in February strolling about in glorious sunshine), but there was an uneasiness underlying both the work in the festival, and the life in the city, that meant that I was pleased to come back to London, even if it was cold, dark, and a whole lot more crime-ridden.

If nothing else, at least I could chew gum again.

*The Necessary Stage is a non-profit theatre company committed to developing new works, international exchange and collaboration and is the presenter and curator of the annual M1 Singapore Fringe Festival. See [www.necessary.org](http://www.necessary.org)  
The M1 Singapore Fringe festival 2008 takes place 16 January –27 February. See [www.singaporefringe.com](http://www.singaporefringe.com)*





# LOST GIRLS

**POLITICS INTO PERFORMANCE DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN DULL POLEMIC! DOROTHY MAX PRIOR ON NEW WORKS BY CURIOUS AND CHOPPED LOGIC WHICH EXPLORE THE ISSUE OF YOUNG WOMEN TRAFFICKED INTO PROSTITUTION**

At the end of the new short film (Be) longing, produced by Helen Paris and Leslie Hill, one stark statistic appears on screen: 'One million women and children are trafficked worldwide each year'. Many of those trafficked end up in our very own land of plenty; and if they are female they will almost inevitably be sold or drawn into prostitution.

The film is a *cine verite* piece, showing and telling real life stories of survival. We see three young women of African heritage, filmed on Westminster Bridge. The camera pans slowly from one to the other as the voices-over tell harrowing tales in gentle, almost dispassionate tones. The cinematography is beautiful; simple moving-image portraits of the girls. There is no lip synch; the girls keep their mouths shut (which visually tells a tale in itself) as we hear their words: 'they killed my parents, so there is nothing to miss back home'; 'I had a passport but I don't think it was my passport, they dressed me as a boy'; 'the men who took me here wanted to have sex with me – when I said no they threw me out on the street, and I had nowhere to go, so I ended up selling myself anyway'; 'a lot of people died, a lot of people – they killed a lot, a lot of people'. The juxtaposition of the terrible words and the calm, proud and strong visual images of the girls says 'I will survive' better than any lengthy discussion of their plight.

The three are joined by two others, and they walk along the Albert Embankment, pausing to stare across the river at the House of Commons, as we hear their thoughts on longing and belonging: 'I just want to stay here now, if I went back to Africa there would be no-one there for me'; 'I want to train to be a midwife'; 'I want to be a social worker, to help girls like me'; 'When you've seen people killed in front of you, you don't want to go back'; 'the word "belonging" means to me: where you feel at home. I feel at home here'. The final seconds of the film mix the chimes of Big Ben with a girl's voice singing an African lullaby (or perhaps it is a lament?).

So much has happened to each of them, and yet they are still legally children: all are under eighteen – and as the filmmakers Helen Paris and Leslie Hill point out, all, under current Home Office rules, are due to be deported on their eighteenth birthdays.

Helen and Leslie (who work under the name Curious because 'we like exploring a theme we are curious about') were commissioned to make a piece of work by The Women's Library, who are celebrating their hundred-year anniversary. The starting point was the work of Judith Butler with East End prostitutes, although Helen and Leslie soon realised that they didn't want to approach the sex trade with the usual baggage of clichés, but rather to come at it more obliquely through an exploration of the theme of longing and belonging.

The company's work is unashamedly political and with a feminist agenda, inspired by the activists that they admire, from suffragette Emily Davison (who died for the cause at the Derby, 1913) to the Greenham Common women. The (Be)longing project involved a process of intense research, communication, and exploration of people's real life stories, 'fishing and digging', and has resulted in two interrelated products, a film and a performance piece.

The performance consists of two intertwined autobiographical pieces. Helen and Leslie explain that they felt that they wanted to put themselves through exactly the same process of interrogation as the young women that they were working with. The resulting performance, like the film, exposes personal histories, and flags up longings and desires, some rational, some fanciful.

The lives explored in (Be)longing, film and performance, are very different – an American story of missing fathers and trailers and cowboy dreams; an English tale of middle-class angst about lifestyle and body image and the obsessive pursuit of New Age Nirvanas; African stories of digging vegetables all day, eating sugar cane for lunch, and dreaming of the land of plenty – but ultimately there is little difference in what people want, what they really, really want. Belonging, for Helen, for Leslie, and for the girls they have worked with, ultimately means coming home, feeling safe, being loved.



Chopped Logic have also been exploring the stories of trafficked girls. In their new devised theatre piece *Double Negative*, it is young Asian women who are placed in the frame. It's a tale of two neighbouring houses, the first inhabited by a lone elderly man, who grows increasingly embroiled in the goings-on next door, the second by an indeterminate number of young Chinese women who have a lot of visitors...

*Double Negative* is a beautifully structured piece, a moving and thought-provoking story staged with the audience placed around a set of drifting paper-thin curtains, used cleverly to denote the different residences, and to shade and expose the young women. The man tells his tale through words; the young woman who becomes the focus of his attention acts out her story through a chorus of women of different ages, using a choreographic vocabulary of gestural movement motifs, and spoken word – single words and short sentences in Mandarin which break through the boundaries of semantics, proving the semiotic power of emotionally charged words to cut across languages and cultures.

The play's title references the place of photography in the story. The lone man documents the comings and goings next door with cameras placed ready by his bathroom window. Early in the piece, the first section of which is a spoken monologue, we witness him looking through his family photographs – except that these bear words in place of images: 'my class at school', 'my grandfather's garden', 'my daughter'. The two worlds collide when an escapee from next door takes refuge in his house, and in a moment of beautifully enacted cultural miscommunication and confusion, the man shows the young woman his

'photos', attempting with more and more words to explain what she is seeing, whilst she stares and nods in polite incomprehension at what she sees.

Unlike the Curious project, which stays with the autobiographical, Chopped Logic use a fictional narrative to tell their tale of lost girls. Different strokes for different folks – there are many ways to tell true stories, and I'm appreciative of both companies for having the courage to tackle this potentially difficult subject matter, and for having the talent to create work that has political bite and artistic merit.

There are some who find it hard to appreciate that political theatre can be more than the polemical tracts of Pinter or the verbatim work of Tricycle Theatre – (Be)longing and *Double Negative* prove the power of other means. In both cases, it is the carefully crafted exposition of emotional truth which is the key to the success of both as art, making the work more than mere propaganda.

*Curious perform (Be)longing 20 to 25 August 2007, 10pm daily, at Theatre Workshop as part of the British Council Edinburgh Showcase 2007. See [www.placelessness.com](http://www.placelessness.com)*

*The (Be)longing DVD (35mm colour/10 mins) can be purchased from the Arts Admin shop, price £7. See [www.artsadmin.co.uk](http://www.artsadmin.co.uk)*

*Chopped Logic perform Double Negative for three weeks in October 2007 at Oval House Theatre, London. See [www.choppedlogic.co.uk](http://www.choppedlogic.co.uk)*



# EMMA RICE, DIRECTOR OF KNEEHIGH THEATRE, IN HER OWN WORDS

**I make work as Emma Rice, not as 'a woman'.** Nicholas Hytner's intervention [in support of Kneehigh, accusing critics who had slated *A Matter of Life and Death* of misogyny] was valiant but took the debate into territory I'd never planned to enter.

**I feel very strongly that the biggest block to anything creative is fear.** Everyone is frightened, and it is a useless emotion. As a director, I do as much as I can to remove fear from the process, to make it easy, and to protect people from the bits that aren't. They do the most scary part – getting up on stage in front of people – so I do feel it is my job to shoulder a lot of the rest.

**I don't like fighting** and I'm no good at it. I lose fights. I'm much better at manipulating!

**I am passionate about the collective imagination.** I think that if I give people enough information about the world of the play, if I do my job properly at the beginning of the process, then the collective imagination will become much, much stronger than anything I could come up with on my own... you get this wonderful moment when someone says 'I know this might sound stupid, but...' and suggests something completely brilliant.

**There are key creative decisions which I make at the beginning of the process as author, not as writer, but as author.** So, going back to *The Red Shoes*, I said, 'This is going to be told by a chorus of people with shaved heads, who have seen things they shouldn't have seen.' Originally it was a chorus of the cowards of the First World War. And I knew that the storyteller would be a transvestite, someone who had embraced their red shoes. So none of this was up for debate. I don't want to be part of a co-operative, and having been an actor, I don't think that's what actors want.



**Casting is the hardest thing.** I'm not looking for the greatest actors, but the right people, who may also be the greatest actors. I like people who are interested in the world, who are looking out at the world, instead of in at themselves. I like naughty people. I look for that twinkle.

**For us, the story is key; that is the map.** Most theatre is text-based, and your job is to interpret the text. The text is the map, and without it people feel lost.

**We had two weeks Research and Development for *A Matter of Life and Death*, two years ago.** It was very useful, and I felt that we could have gone into rehearsals then. But the National – who of course have to do this – said 'now we need to see a script' and I said 'I don't do scripts' and they said 'we completely understand, but where's the script?'. With the National, it's like being invited into someone's house, and at some point, you accept the rules of that house.

**When the reviews came out, what did hurt was that the design wasn't mentioned, the music wasn't mentioned.** I've been working with Bill (Mitchell) for 13 years, and this did feel like a magic moment. This design wasn't born out of sweat; it came as a result of two people who totally understood each other. The task to fill the Olivier is huge; there's no point doing Poor Theatre on the Olivier. Though we did start with a completely bare stage, and strip it right back to the back wall at one point, so there are still elements of poor theatre in there.

**I love the Olivier amphitheatre** – though I would prefer it to be a single rather than a split-level – Kneehigh's background is outdoor, amphitheatres, quarries. So we weren't scared of it. We can bellow like bastards, but it is a tricky acoustic.



**This was the first time I had worked with a choreographer** [Debra Batton], and it was brilliant, but not easy. Because I'm very clear about what I want, there's not always a lot of room. I know what I want and I'm absolutely clear in what I dream of. But she was brilliant, with the rope work, lifts. I think we would work well next time on another, more movement-based project.

**I find that stories reveal themselves to you when they're important.** Why did I wake up one day and think 'The Bacchae'? I have never had an urge to create an original story. Partly because I love to bounce off what is there, what is traditional.

**Ten years ago I never thought I would direct.** Maybe this is where gender politics does come in. The girl in me never believed I would be the leader. And I'm very glad I was in my 30s before I started directing, because then I realised: one, I have something to say, and two, I can say it.

**I'm still very romantic.** I believe in love and I believe it can be destructive. And there's the other side, which is about being bad, which I have explored in Lulu and The Bacchae. Love, and being bad.

**There are gatekeepers, I think, who decide what theatre should be, and perhaps don't recognise that it is a fluid artform.** For many conceptual artists, theatre is a dirty word, all about pretence and lying. And I say 'come and see a Kneehigh show, that's not what we're about'.

**There are powerful people who feel that the well-written play, and the well-spoken word, is in danger of dying out.** And they may not be wrong. But this becomes a block to seeing the possibility that what replaces might be beautiful, meaningful.



**On one level, being at the National, at the heart of the establishment, is really simple and it's great.** It is recognition, and your mum and dad can come and see you and everything. On another level, it doesn't feel quite like home. But that brings up lots of interesting questions, about 'what is home?'.

**The work isn't just what people see on stage.** I joined the company 14 years ago and fell in love with the place, the people and the work. Its more than just a collective, because we are experiencing life with one another; marriage, divorce, birth and death. And that is deeply moving.

**The main Kneehigh project now is this touring tent called The Asylum.** In its smallest incarnation it could go up on a school playing field, or its largest sit on Sydney Harbour. This is the future, for Kneehigh. Because we do need to face that challenge, how to maintain our character? How does a company like Kneehigh continue? Not to start playing by other people's rules.

**Kneehigh comes from a very democratic background.** And we want to be able to get a 15-year-old off the street and for them to enjoy the performance. Ask people in Cornwall 'do you go to the theatre?' and they say 'no'. Ask them 'do you see Kneehigh?' and they say 'yes'.

**I'm a bawdy, not an intellectual.** The work is bodily. It is about fighting, farting, loving and fucking. So the tent is called The Asylum. It's the perfect name. It's about madness and shelter.

*Cassie Werber interviewed Emma Rice at the National Theatre, 19 June 2007, during the run of A Matter of Life and Death. See [www.kneehigh.co.uk](http://www.kneehigh.co.uk)*

# NO LIMITS

## BURLESQUE IS BRAVE AND BOLD AND CHALLENGES TRADITIONAL MORES OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY. SO SAYS LUKE DIXON, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP FESTIVAL

On a cabaret stage at London's Drill Hall, Lazlo Pearlman emerges from a giant duffle bag. Until now we have only seen the grizzled face of Sailor Jack but now we can glimpse the whole body as Pearlman does a dance with semaphore flags. As the flags swap positions covering chest and genitals, more is concealed than is revealed until Pearlman chooses to show us everything in teasing flashes that make this transgendered performer one of the most challenging, provoking and entertaining artists working on the UK stage today.

Pearlman's show, *He Was A Sailor*, is steeped in the world of burlesque: a world of arousal and erotica, dress and undress, revealing and concealing, in which the all powerful performer can choose to present their body to the audience in any way they choose. These are no doubt some of the reasons why burlesque has taken such a hold in the world of queer and transgender performance, questioning notions of the perfect body and the limitations of gender identity – from the work of Hilda Eusébio in London to Miss Indigo Blue's *BurlyQ Queer Cabaret* in Seattle, burlesque has always crossed boundaries. Its transgressive nature and its liminal position in the performance world are what have given it much of its power.

Workshops held at the International Workshop Festival in 2002 were one of the catalysts for the current obsession with burlesque. My interest came from meeting Lara Clifton, 'office temp by day; erotic dancer by night', who with Sarah Ainslie was documenting the world of striptease in London's East End in their book 'Baby Oil and Ice'. Here was a world far away from contemporary dance and theatre practice, concealed by a class prejudice that labels the anodyne line up of the *corps de ballet* at Covent Garden as high art whilst a chorus line of showgirls is so low as to be scarcely art at all.



I asked Lara to organise a few workshops on stripping and burlesque. We recreated the dances of Josephine Baker, asked Jo King to demonstrate Six Ways to Remove a Glove and brought in Joshua Sofaer from the live art scene to help people create speciality acts. The response was overwhelming: from dancers, strippers, choreographers, theatre makers and directors. So great was the interest that next year we created the London Academy of Burlesque as an integral part of the Festival including styles and skills that many thought were lost to contemporary audiences. We took in vaudeville and variety as well – sand dancers and monologists stood shoulder to shoulder with nipple tassel twirlers and the still figures of *tableaux vivants*. Lara soon gave up temping and opened the Whoopee Club.

Another workshop leader, Jane Turner, began her career working as a showgirl in Barcelona. On the bill with the dancing girls was a troupe of *crevettes* – drag strippers whose final naked tableau involved their male genitalia being tucked up back and between their legs to give the appearance of femaleness. Jane has returned to her showgirl past in recent years, running hugely popular workshops for the International Workshop Festival and now creating a new work, *Troop*, celebrating the showgirl world (coming to London's South Bank Centre in December).

Burlesque is more than young girls taking off their clothes. It is about celebrating the great women artists of the past like Tempest Storm and Lili St. Cyr. It is about reclaiming theatrical skills and traditions and making them new for contemporary audiences. It is about working an audience, and it is about glamour and sex and sexuality and frocks and dancing in heels. With the likes of Miss High Leg Kick, and Arthur and Martha, the wonders of Duckie, and the transgressions of Timberlina, burlesque in all its forms has reinvigorated performance practice in the UK in a way unseen for decades.

Luke Dixon is director of the International Workshop Festival, which will run from 27 August to 26 September 2007. The programme includes workshops on Fan Dancing, Sword Dancing, Making an Entrance, and Erotique Baroque as well as Site Specific Performance, Playwrighting, and the Love Art Lab with Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens. [www.workshopfestival.co.uk](http://www.workshopfestival.co.uk)

Luke is writing in response to Laura Lloyd's article Tassel Hassle which appeared in the last issue of Total Theatre Magazine (Vol. 19 Issue 2 Summer 2007).

# THE PASSION OF PACITTI

## THOMAS WILSON ON THE SYMPOSIUM WHICH FORMED A KEY PART OF THE SPILL FESTIVAL OF PERFORMANCE



The Spill Festival was conceived by theatre-maker Robert Pacitti as 'a passionate polemic for experimental performance' in what he described, in his opening address, as a 'coalition rather than a collaboration' of artists, exploring the process of making work and engaging audiences. The whole event had a practical and purposeful feel about it, celebrating the vibrancy and passion of artists.

Day one saw a provocative exchange between artist Cindy Oswin and curator/writer Adrian Heathfield, chaired by Claire MacDonald (Impact Theatre), exploring the lineage of experimental work. Work referenced included Kaprow/Halprin's happenings, Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* and Patti Smith. The idea of discussing the past itself was examined with an exploration of the linear model of time within which lineage is normally discussed, and observations that new ways of recording work have produced interrupted and fractured lineages with young artists claiming influences from work they have never seen. There was also consideration of how work might be archived and the ethics and implications of that process.

A session chaired by Stella Hall (creative artistic director at Newcastle Gateshead Initiative) reflected upon the natural inquisitiveness of audiences. Artist Karena Johnson pondered the value of work-in-progress events and the careful ways in which these need to be managed when dealing with 'radical' work. This caused a passionate response from some of the audience who asked why we still label the audience a totalitarian 'them', leaving the session with the question: what do we mean by 'developing' audiences.

The liveliest session saw Simon Casson (Duckie producer), Marisa Carnesky (artist/performer) and Judith Knight (Artsadmin founder/director) debating assumptions of accessibility, sustainability and 'unusual' contexts for performance. Knight spoke about the excitement of site-based work and of audiences who feel ownership of these spaces prior to the arrival of artists. There was a passionate exchange between Carnesky and Casson discussing the choice to avoid or accept becoming part of an established context, and discovering new spaces that are publicly and artistically accessible rather than settling into the 'rarefied nature of a Spill festival' as Casson put it.

Day two examined new models and ideas. Angharad Wynne-Jones (LIFT director) presented an outline of how work might purposefully alter while touring. Tilmann Broszat (producer/director) reflected on Rimini Protokol's work, including Cargo Sofia, a truck fitted out to allow an audience to observe their city as it drives them through it. This fluidity of subject matter was reflected in Pacitti's discussion of his Finale project, where artists from the country in which he is working are invited to collaborate on developing a version of the piece with his company at a particular site. He spoke of binding the artists together with manifestos and a working model based on the structure of recipes. Phelim McDermott (Improbable Theatre) then explained the use of 'open space' methodologies to tackle a range of tasks, from making work to discussing problems faced within a community. In this model (used by Improbable in their *Devoted* and *Disgruntled* gatherings) a community 'self-organises around an issue' and engages in multiple group discussions at the same time, with the proviso that the 'law of two feet' is always available, that is, you can always leave your group and go and join another group. This model excited some sections of the audience, who felt that the symposium had been too bound within a lecture style and that it had not challenged the issues with a new structure of discussion. Wynne-Jones was on hand to explain the intended workings of the new LIFT parliament, a mobile and flexible space designed to host performances and meetings.

What the Spill symposium, and the festival as a whole, proved was the vibrancy of the experimental sector; how it has survived and flourished over the last half century as a laboratory for innovation in performance, and is now securing its place in mainstream venues and festivals. The position of experimental practice is now an entrenched part of the arts culture of the UK. But as Pacitti hinted at in his opening address, it will take passion and commitment from artists and agencies to maintain growth, particularly in the tough times ahead. But experimental performance is tough enough to survive – and the potential rewards, for the sector and for audiences, are rich indeed.

*Spill Festival of Performance (London, April 2007) featured international artists including Unreasonable Adults, Raimond Hoghe, and Francoise Berlangier; British artists including Julia Bardsley, Forced Entertainment, Pacitti Company and Sheila Ghelani, three feasts (meals over which audiences and artists could meet) and a Symposium around experimental practice. SPILL Symposium took place at Soho Theatre, London, 12–13 April 2007. See also the reviews section of this magazine. Further details at [www.spillfestival.com](http://www.spillfestival.com)*

*Total Theatre and Improbable will present a Devoted and Disgruntled session during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2007. See the free Edinburgh supplement with this edition of the magazine, or go to: [www.totaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk)*



# SPILL FESTIVAL OF PERFORMANCE LONDON APRIL 2007



## REVIEWED BY ALICE ANDREWS, MIRIAM KING AND TOM WILSON

### UNREASONABLE ADULTS THE LAST TO SEE THEM ALIVE: SEX, SLAUGHTER AND THE CITY SOHO THEATRE STUDIO

A kiss from a beautiful female, an innocent female, a singing deranged female, an anonymous female. A man – an infamous man. With a name. A double life. A murder, a murder we do not see, a murder to pour over in lurid detail. A panel. A panel of evidence.

In this provocative and stirring 60 minutes the Australian collective Unreasonable Adults spin a complex tale – meshed of desire, torment, voyeurism and violence. A tale that happens some parts in front of you, some parts inside of you, but always an uncomfortable knife-edge kind of tale. Unreasonable Adults lay bare our representations of sexual acts upon women – violent and tender, forced and consensual, maybe even bribed or programmed. It is never clear upon what ground we stand. Men are singled out in the audience – to be desired, teased, danced with, touched, feared, seduced and rejected. Our desires are toyed with – taken to the point where we can see the moment in which

we can only try and control the biology of this desire. Unreasonable Adults give us a postmodern passion of the contradictions and complexities of our social, cultural and sexual landscapes, providing us with an emotional and piercing glimpse into our society's view of the female victim. A beautifully discomforting and manipulative piece of work.  
**TW**



### KIRA O'REILLY UNTITLED (SYNCOPE) SHUNT VAULTS

Untitled (Syncope) is a performance of rhythms, of breath, and of the spaces inbetween. Syncope (meaning a loss of consciousness, a loss of place) is explored here in this dank and dark underground space, a fitting playhouse for an uncanny flirtation with the unconsciousness.

And flirtation it is: O'Reilly appears slowly, almost imperceptibly, with a measured backwards step, her seductive back retreating towards us, stepping in and out of pools of light. Aside from red high-heels and an elaborately burlesque head-dress, O'Reilly is naked; she exerts a magnetic allure, leading the audience about the space by virtue of knowing smiles and loaded glances alone.

O'Reilly performs a series of actions, accompanied by the slowly increasing pace of a metronome: a clasping of her a ribs, a holding of her breath, revealing to all the constriction of her muscles as they fight this self-imposed restriction, an x-ray vision beneath the corsets of old; a flash of a scalpel on the back of the calf – the red blood, ambling down to mingle with the red shoes – a literal marking of that muscle burn conferred on all those who dare wear high-heels.

A mere eloquent account of the pain imposed on the female body? Or an unsettling account of the desire for this same? This is a performance that uses the very presence of the body to perform the interstice – that most revealing moment of syncope where the body is perceived only in absentia – the present absence.

**AA**

### SHEILA GHELANI COVET ME, CARE FOR ME SHUNT VAULTS

Ghelani's performance/installation comprises three rooms. The first contains anatomical charts of the heart; the second, fifty clear-glass hearts laid out in rows on the stone floor. Each of these contains a covetable item that the artist calls 'mongrel objects'. Some of the glass hearts lie broken into shards. There's the invitation that if you really wish for one of these objects, if you truly desire one, to take one. I do. I take up the glass heart of my choosing, take it to Sheila Ghelani. She attires me in a apron, a helmet with a visor, and long industrial gloves. The glass heart is placed on the ground at my feet, I am given a hammer. With one aim I smash the glass heart into exploding pieces to free the mongrel object, a genuine nurses watch, dressed with ribbons, a small silver heart scratched with an 'x', and a tiny dot of sponge containing one tear from the artist.



Shelia leads me into the third room which is a chamber of care. As I sit, a beautiful woman wraps my gift with intricate care and attention, then places it within a box, which in turn is wrapped and placed within a blue velvet pouch, bearing the words, 'a gift from Sheila Ghelani'. It's a precious moment in which I feel deeply cherished. Quite simply, everything I could want from a performance!

**MK**

**FRANCOISE  
BERLANGER  
PENTHESILEA  
BARBICAN THEATRE**

Berlanger's cataclysmic performance is a grand classical tragedy writ upon her solitary body. This interpretation of the myth of the Amazon queen's taboo love for the Greek hero Odysseus is a visceral and operatic experience, tangibly evoking the blindness, confusion and desperation of the passions of love. Pentheseilea is a solo performance, told in a mix of third person and first person monologues that are sung, intoned and spat out into the audience, Berlanger employs a language that rises and falls across the imaginative landscape. Although I think to get the most out of this piece some knowledge of the original myth is helpful, Berlanger generally sustains the drive of the narrative, whilst the accompanying live sound score provides no respite from the emotional territory into which we have been dragged – her journey into the darkness of the emotional landscape is at times hypnotic. In particular the moment when Pentheseilea recognises her own culpability in front of the body of Achilles is dealt with a fierce and brutal intensity, keenly and purposefully framed in counterpoint to the darker more panoramic embodiment of the other sections of her journey.

This is above all a powerful snapshot of an emotional crisis that employs and deconstructs a classical narrative to find its contemporary relevance, for in Berlanger's Pentheseilea one can see, and more importantly feel, the wives and parents of the victims of any 'violent' act that takes away a loved one.

**TW**

**PACITTI COMPANY  
GRANDE FINALE  
SHUNT VAULTS**

In the Finale an international cast drawn from the Spill programme present a composite series of highly visceral performances, intense images and salacious living portraits abstracted from Zola's novel *Therese Raquin*. Sheila Ghelani as Therese carefully announces her lines as she strokes down her perfect costume: cue T-Rex's 20th Century Boy, heralding prouder-than-proud naked men parading along a brightly lit corridor. They stride in, as if down a catwalk, and dress behind Therese and her cohorts (sultry, glaring, women in evening dress, silently daring us to meet their smouldering eyes). We walk along that brightly lit corridor to witness a meal, held below a twinkling chandelier. Snatches of conversation about and adultery amidst a banquet of rich fruits and corned beef.

As we move on through a multitude of images – some dim, shady, half lit and barely seen; brazen, illuminated and fleshylike drugged bees feasting on a nectar of sensation. piling strawberries between her thighs table is full of gleaming red halved pomegranates handsome having his mouth painted with silver leafwet black wig like draped across the face of a fallen man. All the while live music from the Swiss electronica band Velma lifts and holds the here. On leaving, each audience member has their hands tenderly bathed in washbowls, then dried. We are cleansed of the scenes seen, and released.



# REVIEWS FROM BRIGHTON FESTIVAL MAY 2007



## DANIEL KITSON C90 THE BASEMENT

Having seen Daniel Kitson as a fantastically spontaneous compere in stand-up comedy, I was almost expecting more of the same. Savage but deeply meant put-downs of ignorant hecklers, etc. But this show is a much gentler thing – and that is one of its hugest achievements – a gentle and perceptive, slightly surreal comedy of un-manners.

The audience sits on a carpet on the set, bounded by shelves of abandoned cassette-tape compilations that the protagonist catalogues as they are delivered to him; compilations made for lovers and friends by others who were significant but aren't now. Time has moved on, the need to keep and order these compilations has ceased, and the keeper is on his last day before he is forcibly retired. Add a graduate lollypop lady who adds people's middle names to her salutation of them (because what could be more affirming than to lengthen names rather than shorten them?), and, by the by, makes compilations tapes for people, and you

have a perfect formula for a romance that is signaled and suggested at the end of the show.

Kitson's delivery is fast paced and word perfect, the gentle jokes and puns delivered in a well-maintained congruence with the characters, as he tells their stories from different parts of the installation. This is a show that puts the quirk into quirky, but keeps it meaningful and life enhancing.

**Bill Parslow**

## CORN EXCHANGE THEATRE COMPANY DUBLIN BY LAMPLIGHT THEATRE ROYAL

Set in the 'filth and fury' of Dublin 1904, this is a strong and splendid fusion of naturalistic and commedia dell'arte inspired physical theatre. The makeup is stylized, the movement timed to the split second, and the audience never loses connection with the characters – it is quite a feat to work with an hour's worth of makeup plastered on your face and still be able to transmit pathos as well as slapstick.

The narrative is carried well – you never feel lost in the multiple strands of individual stories and the outside world of politics – veering from the comic to the sinister. (There's a minor scene in the police station which is a perfect mixture of Kafka and Father Ted). It is a very fresh creation, with good pacing and structure – the company have worked hard not only on the individual performances but also on the coherence and energy of the whole.

The heady mixture of Irish nationalism, setting a Yeatsian desire for a national theatre against the shadowy spectre of violent revolution, is played with depth and feeling. It was really impressive to have these themes portrayed and still hang on to the small stories (the poor seamstress; the alcoholic actor stumbling home, hoping to avoid his landlady). And some things never change – the scramble for funding, patrons and sponsors for a theatre, when meanwhile so called 'real life' is full of savagery and bureaucracy!

**Bill Parslow**

## BALLET C DE LA B IMPORT-EXPORT CORN EXCHANGE

Powerlessness. Without defence. Injustice. Cruelty. Threat. Power over others. Unfairness. Meanness. Passivity. Resilience. Powerlessness in relation to world issues and economics. Powerlessness to overcome personal problems.

What an emotional performance for the audience, who are left gasping with laughter, with tears, with anxiety, with discomfort. Yet the space, is used beautifully, the action expressing violence evoked by powerlessness skilfully and subtly offset by a stillness elsewhere. There are gruelling scenes of bullying, yet sparse cherished moments of humour. Passive bodies are flung around like cadavers. There are inexplicable scenes, where bodies move in response to who-knows-what, and tensions mount. There is an extraordinary section where a man has a roaring motorboat engine strapped onto his back.

Import/Export is performed by six international dancer-performers and acrobats (the cast including the choreographer of the piece Koen Augustijnen) who are joined onstage by the co-creator of the piece, countertenor Steve Dugardin and by the all-female Kirk String Quartet, whose French Baroque music is contrasted sharply with the contemporary electronica of Guy Van Neuten.

Augustijnen has a stated interest in investigating the morphology that takes place within all these different modes of performance when they are brought together – so the quartet join in a dance, and the opera singer is there amongst the dancers too...

I was stunned – this is the most powerful and absorbing work I've seen for a long, long time.

**Miriam King**



# REVIEWS FROM BRIGHTON FESTIVAL FRINGE MAY 2007

## MARIA LLOYD & FRIENDS NORDIC NIGHT NIGHTINGALE THEATRE

A curious, engaging and quirky evening, which promised to present Norway in a new light. It certainly did that – in fact, was almost other worldly!

First on the bill, poet Frederic Lloyd, who with chalk, blackboard and oodles of charm told us strange yet true stories from the dark winter months spent alone with villagers on a remote Norwegian island. Petra's Pulse, a visual theatre company, gave us space to breath through their sea-soaked imagery: a wet woman in a red dress with a burning boat; silent men in Wellington boots, yellow macs and hoods haunting our vision. Fishing nets catch a naked man-fish. A forlorn and troubled woman stands with pebbles at her feet. Two men in white suits dance a duet that is both serious and absurd. Further into the bill, a delighted Maria Lloyd gives us Norwegian Feet. She dances eccentric dances in a blue velvet dress, dons traditional old-style curl-toe skis, and translates to simple English Nordic melodrama for us. Our evening of Norwegian curiosities is rounded off by short films Maria has made in collaboration with Magali Charrier. We are an enthusiastic and enchanted audience. Something from a twilight zone, heading toward the Tundra.

**Miriam King**

## UNPACKED FUNERAL GAMES (AKA IDYLL – A COMIC LAMENT) NIGHTINGALE THEATRE

Unpacked are surging ahead of the pack, guns blazing, with their third production in as many years – a treat of a show (now) called Funeral Games, a two-hander about masculine identity and male relationships played by Darren East and Gilbert Taylor. I liked it so much I saw it twice – work of this calibre from a company so fresh and new is a rare beast.

Unpacked have made their mark as purveyors of 'new puppetry' – and, although there's no actual puppets, the essence of puppetry pervades everything onstage. There's representation of a human character by object – a photo of the absent father whose menacing presence directs the action. Then there's the very interesting use of objects as representations of other objects/spaces: a pair of filing cabinets form the key scenographic lynchpin of the piece, twin towers that are clunked and clattered, clambered upon, and dragged to the ground as they represent, say, a bunk bed (with the help of a prostrate Darren East perched precariously across both, forming a human bed-bridge) or (this being a funeral parlour) a coffin.



There is also a very interesting dynamic in the physical play between the two characters, where one is often literally manipulating the other like a puppet. This is extended to play with the audience, as one audience member finds himself playing the 'dead' father and another (given a ribbon to hold) discovers that she is a horse pulling a hearse.

It's early days for the show, but it feels on solid ground. There's superb performances from both actors, an imaginative use of objects, and a clever use of light, sound and space.

The performance circles around some pretty heavy themes in its investigation of sibling rivalry, taboos around death, and the residues of childhood abuse. But Unpacked never forget that comedy and tragedy are two sides of the same coin; there are sinister undertones lurking with the ghosts in the shadows, but always there is humour to ease us through.

**Dorothy Max Prior**

## EMMA ROBERTS AND JULIAN MARSHALL SHAPING THE INVISIBLE UNITARIAN CHURCH

A trail of pink rose petals, a mound of smooth white chalk pebbles, a grand piano adorned with two lilies, a performer powdering her limbs in the corner. This is a physical performance-improvisation, through the body, with piano accompaniment by Julian Marshall. With a supreme presence, Emma Roberts draws shapes, sounds, songs and atmospheres from around and within her. Dancing with a directness, a rawness, and an immediacy, a meeting with the internal into the external manifests before us revealing nuances, frailties, strengths, imaginings, perceptions. Emma has a rare connectedness to herself, the stories inside, the space around, to the emotions of the audience, who wept and laughed. With her open face, deep face, quizzical face, so moving in her honesty, Emma, grounded and present, is a trigger for buried emotion.

**Miriam King**

# SITE SPECIFIC THEATRE AT BRIGHTON FESTIVAL

NEIL BARTLETT  
THE MAIDS –  
DIAMONDS AND  
SALIVA...  
OLD SHIP HOTEL

SUSPECT CULTURE/  
NATIONAL THEATRE  
OF SCOTLAND  
FUTUROLOGY: A  
GLOBAL REVUE  
CORN EXCHANGE,  
BRIGHTON DOME

HYDROCRACKER  
THE NEW WORLD  
ORDER  
BRIGHTON TOWN HALL

KOMPLEX  
KAPHARNAUM  
PLAYREC  
TRAFALGAR STREET  
ARCHES

Brighton Festival has over the past few years dedicated itself to presenting site specific work as a key element of the festival, often very successfully – but I do wish they would stop bandying the term ‘site specific’ around with such gay abandon!

Example: Neil Bartlett’s new translation of Genet’s *The Maids* is sold as ‘a site specific staging’. This is palpable nonsense. It is staged in an attic room in the Old Ship Hotel, but if setting something in a space not usually a theatre makes something site specific, then 90% of the shows in the Edinburgh Fringe could be classified thus. It’s a good translation, the staging is attractive (I like the way the audience is placed in traverse, either side of the stage area, so that we stare into the eyes of our opposite numbers), Jonathan Swain’s faded-glamour design of strewn flower petals, bare light bulbs and metal beds is beautiful. But it is, when it comes down to it, just a competent version of a well-known play. My main gripe with the production is the gimmicky decision to have the three performers (Kathryn Hunter, Hayley Carmichael and Geraldine Alexander) swap roles each night. Why? Unlike Genet’s original staging instruction (which was to have the three female characters played by men to emphasise the meta-theatricality of the piece, the playing of the plays within the play), Bartlett’s wheeze is a conceptual idea never really experienced by the audience as anything other than a programme note – unless I suppose you see it nine times in order to witness all the possible

permutations. On the night I was there, Hunter was a magnificent Madame, Carmichael an engaging Claire, and Alexander a somewhat hesitant Solange, with a number of noticeable line fluffs that put me in that horribly nervous state as an audience member, where you are worrying for a performer like an anxious mother at a school play.

Two different productions used the notion of audience as attendees at a conference. First up, Suspect Culture’s *Futurology: A Global Revue*, produced in collaboration with the National Theatre of Scotland. What can I say? Years of experience, loads of dosh, nine (nine!) associate directors, lots of highly competent performers. But politically naïve, an awful script, a very passé idea of characters bursting into cringe-worthy musical numbers (Nigel Charnock ten years ago, and everyone else since) or doing variety acts instead of conference speeches (Shunt did this so much better in *Dance Bear Dance*). And the ‘audience taking part in a conference’ idea? An unfulfilled promise: once the audience get in, clutching a ‘delegate’s pack’ which is nothing more than a show programme, the premise is dropped and we sit through a couple of hours of fourth-wall-intact theatre that fails to inspire.



Hydrocracker’s *The New World Order* was a great deal better. Based on a fused quartet of short plays by Harold Pinter, it was set in Brighton Town Hall, the space used to maximum effect. We are led through marbled halls and up majestic staircases into the gilded glory that is the council Chambers, where we are seated, then greeted by a seductive and engaging speaker. There’s a moment of genuine theatrical surprise as the session reveals that some of us in the audience are not all that we appear to be. We are led into a boardroom, where we discover that the charismatic ‘leader’ is a 1984 O’Brien type character – as his victim is led into the room, to sit with us at a long mahogany table, we see that the smile curling his lips is that of a wolf. The fifteen minutes that follow are a brilliant enactment of intimidation and mental



torture. It is a tribute to the skills of both actors, and the power of the setting (invited in as guests, sharing this table, we are placed as complicit witnesses), that I did actually feel an almost irrepressible urge to intervene, and thus end it all here and now. There follows a series of scenes set throughout the building that become ever more harrowing in their stark depiction of the horrors of oppression and torture. It's a brilliant piece of political polemic – a kind of living advertisement for Amnesty. But as a piece of theatre? Well, I suppose that depends on what you think theatre should be. It's hard to fault it on the terms and conditions it sets itself: to be politically hard-hitting and to use the Town Hall effectively to this purpose ('this happens here, now, is sanctioned by our political leaders', is the unspoken message). The acting is superb, every detail of the production – including the use of the ushers/security-guards and the manoeuvring of people around the space – well thought through. But to play Devil's Advocate: is this enough? If there is nothing that happens in a theatre production that couldn't be predicted from



the first twenty minutes, is that OK? And is there any point in preaching to the converted? The jury's out.

So finally to *PlayRec*. Commissioned by Zap Art, this is a vast outdoor installation-performance created by French company KompleX Kapharnaum who describe themselves (fairly enough it seems) as 'archaeologists of the 21st-century'. It occupies the whole length of a narrow high-walled street that backs on to Brighton Station, a space that provides a wonderful location for a work which includes still and moving image projections, animated sculptures, graffiti writers and stencillers creating instant street art, live music and sound art, and even a trampolinist whose body casts magnificent shadows on the walls. The 'text' of the piece is the history of the very space that we are occupying, once the site for the Isetta Bubble Car factory (at one point an original bubble car appears from one of the railway arches and drives slowly through the space!). The company take their time with this two hour piece: the first twenty minutes is very low key, basically a few projections which are 'talking head' verbatim accounts of life in

the factory, and other site-related stories (its previous use as a locomotive works; battles of local residents against a new hypermarket). The show builds and builds as layer upon layer of visual and aural effects and physical actions emerge, merge and mulch into a city symphony of sound and light. It is a feast for the senses but never merely sensational. There are marvellous things to discover as you wander up and down the street. An automated junk sculpture with a dismembered umbrella at its heart becomes a 'screen' for projection, the film catching itself on the umbrella spokes, turning the image of a talking man into a ghost in the air; a film at one end of the street showing the construction of a miniature paper car turns out to be really happening at the other end, a camera relaying the action to screen with live feed video. I stand admiring the carefully constructed soundscape as I watch giant human silhouettes bound along the wall, then as I progress further down the street realise that what I had taken to be a pre-recorded soundtrack is in fact being made by laptop musicians working with the street sounds and the clanking trains and blowing whistles from the

neighbouring station, the sounds then merging with the saxophones and guitars of the 'real instrument' musicians. Meanwhile, figures in white overalls haul ladders along the length of the street, continuing with their mission to cover every available space with screenprinted posters and stencilled and spray-painted statements.

So it is a theatre of effects and images, but it is also a political theatre, yet devoid of the polemic of New World Order: we reach our own conclusions – on the loss of community, capitalism versus socialism, the oppression of heavy labour, the power of positive action, the need to reclaim public space – by absorbing the many reflections and evocations of these thoughts. Perhaps, as one audience member said afterwards, it is a shame that we have to rely on a French company to show us our own history. But maybe that's how it often is: the eye of the outsider, the archaeologist who unearths the hidden treasures. To me, it feels like a beautiful tribute to Brighton, and a marvellous artistic exploration of a site that holds an enormous repository of memories. Site specific indeed.

**Dorothy Max Prior**





# REVIEWS FROM THE MOVING PARTS FESTIVAL AT MAC

**DARKIN ENSEMBLE  
AUGUSTINE**

**TRESTLE THEATRE COMPANY  
LITTLE INDIA**

**MAC, BIRMINGHAM  
MARCH 2007**

In *Augustine*, the journey into the 19th-century La Salpêtrière asylum is experienced physically – the show starts with a breathing duet bringing the audience close to suffocation and unease. A man talks tenderly to encased violins, which, like him, have been committed. Confined in cells of light, electrical bodies are restrained by splints. Distorted sounds and lyrics such as ‘I want to strike you’ annihilate the false security given by the live



cello and violin music. No experimental apparatus on stage, only the forcing of one body upon another as all the gestures of physical constraint are prolonged into dance. Bath scenes are particularly poignant and highly charged movements account for scientific experimentation, which consisted of inserting tongs into Augustine and her inmates – pinching, twisting, torturing their bodies and thus reproducing the assault which brought them there in the first place.

The narrative is one of regression: via the body, the spectator is forced to trace the origin of the trauma. Apart from snatches of French songs and the name Augustine uttered here and there, the piece is free of text: the six silent dancing bodies alone tell their story. One might regret that the performers did not engage more with stillness, since the case of Augustine – spectacularised by French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and upon whose work on hysteria the show is based – is emblematic of the photogenic nature of hysteria. Like photography, like dance, theatre captures an intensity but unleashes rather than withholds it. By turning the body inside out, Augustine exposes the acute interiority of its characters, and, like all true theatre, brings the spectator in.



*Little India*, a tale of love and loss, mischief and mayhem, is a Western take on a story from the Mahabharata. This adaptation emphasises the absent father-son relationship. Torn between his sylvan surrounding and an attraction for the wider world, the boy Bharata lives in the forests on the margin of a big city with his single mother. The fighting between mother and son perhaps stretches the original tale too much, and the use of martial art *kalaripayattu* seems at times merely illustrative. On the contrary, *mudras* – hand gestures – are particularly effective in their intensity, as are the rhythmic vocal patterns of *Konnakol* to summon the past.

When Bharata leaves his mother and the forest to reach the Yellow City in search of his father, the soundtrack is that of a contemporary UK street. The interaction between the live actor and the typecast voice-offs fails to convey the atmosphere of a dangerous city. In a rare poetical moment, the urban space materialises via simple lighting and recorded raindrops, as an isolated figure appears trapped in the rain. The poetry of the text, which had been sustained throughout in the adaptation, then draws upon streetwise rimes, but lacks both the creativity and the energy of slam or rap. The material and potential at disposal is huge and this type of storytelling will probably get better as it engages with audiences – I will be curious to see the result when the show returns to MAC as part of its tour this autumn.

**Fred Dalmasso**

**MOJISOLA ADEBAYO AND THE  
ANTARCTIC COLLECTIVE  
MOJ OF THE ANTARCTIC:  
AN AFRICAN ODYSSEY  
GREENROOM, MANCHESTER  
MAY 2007**

This was a virtuosic solo of storytelling-performance – an epic tale of empowerment, exploration and (self) discovery delivered with real theatrical grace. Despite dealing with serious themes – the Abolition of Slavery bicentenary, issues of transgender, the shrinking icecaps – the perspective is a delightfully absurd one. As the African narrator who frames the piece states, with the discovery of earth’s relation to the Sun, we are all bound to progress through life elliptically.

The story’s premise is the ancient myth uniting Africa with Antarctica, poetically resonating their split with parallels of black and white, east and west and other political binaries. Moj’s journey, which moves apace through cautionary tales of exploration via adventure, chase caper to character comedy and finally geographic apotheosis, is a sprawling one. Yet its physical and literary delicacy prevents its aspirations – to give narrative shape to the experience of the slave trade, to decry the turning point of capitalism’s rise to hegemony – running out of control. The language is rich and densely poetic revelling in the materiality and playfulness of words, cracking open complex ideas like eggshells. The physicality and stagecraft were in generous counterpoint, investing the language with movement and presence without overwhelming it. Lyrical choreography invoked sensual lovemaking and to conjure the heaving steaming body of a whale; ritual song was used to great effect in remembrance of the dead. The filmed sequences often felt inexpressively literal by comparison.

**Beccy Smith**

**PEGGY SHAW  
MENOPAUSAL  
GENTLEMEN**

**MARISA CARNESKY  
PHENOMENA AND  
HER CHARMS**

**BAC BURST FESTIVAL  
MAY 2007**

BAC's reinvented Burst Festival (which has replaced Octoberfest) brought us a number of excellent examples of the sort of one-person show that sits between theatre and live art, the two reviewed here in very different ways exploring notions of womanhood lost and found.

In *Phenomena*, Carnesky has taken a 'cabinet of swords' variety act, performed previously as part of the Insect Circus show, and extended it into a 20 minute installation-performance, created in collaboration with artist Sarah Munro, and set in the attic of BAC. The audience is invited to walk through a dusty attic hung with a flotsam and jetsam of objects, fetishised remnants of a lost world of feminine accoutrements. Mirrors, hair brushes, hair clips, costume jewellery, ribbons, tea cups, printed ephemera – all sorts of bits and bobs – are artfully arranged on trays that dangle from the ceiling, or draped around banisters or posts. We are welcomed in to a little den by Phenomena, who greets us with reflections on the 'apocalyptic fairground' world we have entered, in which nothing new gets made and junk is the new currency. The set-piece that follows, in which a giant mutated insect is placed inside the cabinet of swords, loses a little of the magic in the closeness of the audience, but is nevertheless charming and chilling in equal measure.

*Menopausal Gentleman* is a for-one-night-only revival of the renowned solo show by Peggy Shaw, co-founder (with Lois Weaver) of the legendary lesbian-feminist theatre company Split Britches, who made their name with a theatre of personal politics that has eschewed polemic in favour of satire and vaudeville. *Menopausal Gentleman* is a perfect example of the company's ethos in action, a part confessional monologue, part stand-up comedy, part lounge lizard crooning expose of the trials and tribulations of being a butch dyke on the cusp of menopause, and therefore facing the supreme irony of regret over losing something ('femaleness', 'womanly fertility') our heroine has to this point spent a lifetime rejecting. But, as she says: 'What'll I do now I don't have the blood to blame for the anger?' Shaw, a '53 year old grandmother who passes for a 35 year old guy who likes the ladies', creates an extraordinary stage persona: alive with Brooklyn bravado, h/she confesses, cajoles and entertains – a life laid bare, but always with the veil of theatrical skill keeping us so close we can almost touch, but never too close for comfort. With this sort of prestigious one-off revival, I suppose it was inevitable that the audience would be made up of die-hard fans, but she really deserved the tumultuous applause that almost brought the roof down at the end. I wasn't the only person there who felt honoured to have had a chance to witness a performance that has gone down in history as one of theatre's seminal moments.

**Dorothy Max Prior**

**DENDE COLLECTIVE  
AGRESTES - THE  
DRYLANDS  
LYRIC STUDIO,  
HAMMERSMITH  
MAY 2007**

This was a very likeable production in which the charming component parts should have built to something more substantial, yet somehow didn't succeed in doing so. I was surprised to discover that the material had been written originally as a play (by award winning Brazilian playwright Newton Moreno) – it read and was staged like storytelling. Perhaps something had been lost in translation?

The folkish story was gentle but gestured toward the mythic – a tale of true love of the most naïve and heart-warming kind, ultimately tarred by the wilful misconceptions of society.

The Dende Collective made good use of a quartet of actors to dynamise their storytelling in-the-round, as well as to express an elegant point about the politics of gender and sexuality. Their theatrical language was a broad one encompassing a pleasurable live guitar and percussion score, moments invoking ritual and some arresting physical expression, although the mask work often lacked physical rigour. Michael Fowkes's evocative design effectively created the arid world of the eponymous region of Brazil whose metaphoric associations greatly enriched the production as a whole.

However despite the arresting opening line ('It should never have happened') the dramatic whole never felt more than the sum of some intriguing parts.

**Beccy Smith**

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**IMPROBABLE/ENGLISH  
NATIONAL OPERA  
SATYAGRAHA  
LONDON COLISEUM  
APRIL 2007**

Following Blind Summit's collaboration on *Madam Butterfly*, Improbable bring their brand of visual theatre to the opera on Phillip Glass's *Satyagraha*. And, as with *Madam B*, it is more than a tokenistic inclusion: ENO have really embraced the mores of visual theatre-making and taken on not only Improbable's design and direction team (Julian Crouch and Phelim McDermott), but also a 'skills ensemble' of twelve puppeteers, aerialists, stilt-walkers, and prop-makers in order to enact the vision. And the end result? Well, it is visually beautiful, an aesthetic of 'poor materials' – corrugated metal, cardboard, paper, cloth – in a palette of rusts and browns, projected text layered over the materials in homage to the power of the word. (This is the story of Gandhi's years in South Africa during which he published a newspaper titled *Indian Opinion* which drove the movement of non-violent resistance called *satyagraha*.)

It does feel a bit like a Cook's Tour of Improbable's greatest hits: Animated sheets of newspaper? Check. Sellotape? Check. Giant papier-mâché puppets that manifest from an assembly of body parts? Check. But all done very well, and perhaps that is enough – I'd just like to see Improbable doing something unexpected, something that had the power of 70 Hill Lane ten years ago!

My main problem with the production is that it is an opera, which is a ridiculous criticism I know. But what I mean is that I like it as a piece of visual/musical theatre – there are instrumental sections where the glorious rising 'ah ah aaahs' of Glass's music works beautifully with the unfolding images, and scenes where a chorus of thirty plus sing, the sight and sound of such a mass of people on stage creating a wonderful image of a united force of human endeavour. But then there are the solos – which just seem to drag it down. I found it all too much really and longed for something simpler, less laboured. But the strength of the music and the beauty of the images have remained with me.

**Dorothy Max Prior**

**RONNIE BURKETT'S  
THEATRE OF  
MARIONETTES  
10 DAYS ON EARTH  
BARBICAN PIT  
APRIL 2007**

How does an auteur, whose work has been hailed around the world, continue to innovate? By setting himself challenges. In *10 Days on Earth* Burkett's challenge was a formal one: to portray a character's experience of absolute loneliness, he had to extricate himself from his normal place in the stage picture – he had to graduate to long string marionetting.

It is a graduation not without its teething problems: long strings require a delicate precision not suited to Burkett's frenetic dramaturgy, too often figures are simply dragged across the stage; the narrow horizontal field limits any dynamism in staging and, offered a split focus, the eye is constantly drawn upwards to the bridge where Ronnie's acting is at times more compelling than the puppetry below.

These are formal complaints and the show itself exceeded them. The writing, particularly the joyful doggerel of the children's story which forms the play-within-the-play, was as extravagantly good as we have come to expect and Burkett's own performance a bravura one. The story, which explores how lonely or singular individuals can shape a place for themselves in the world, dealt thoughtfully with issues rarely seen on stage. In portraying a character with severe learning difficulties Burkett has again found a subject in which puppets can express what would be much more difficult for human actors.

There were problems – the parallels set up in the material between outsiders of vastly different degree and

situation don't bear close scrutiny and the story lacks narrative drive. Yet as an exposition of the possibilities of contemporary puppetry and as the expression of a writer and performer with a singular vision this show remains essential viewing.

**Beccy Smith**





# MEDIA

*Reviewed by John Ellingsworth  
and Dorothy Max Prior*

## PRINT PUBLICATIONS

### REMINISCENCE THEATRE: MAKING THEATRE FROM MEMORIES

**Pam Schweitzer**  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers  
ISBN: 9781843104308  
Paperback £19.99  
www.jkp.com

Having a vested interest in the subject (I'm currently working with a company that creates reminiscence theatre projects, Ragroof Theatre), I looked forward eagerly to receiving this book. It's by a renowned expert in the field – Pam Schweitzer, who founded Age Exchange Theatre Trust, the first full-time professional theatre company to specialise in touring reminiscence theatre across the UK and Europe – and it's full of good sound advice on how to work with older people; taking interviews into scripts; developing verbatim theatre; reflecting a multicultural society etc. But the minimal references to devising non-scripted work, to choreography, to visual theatre, is a fitting reminder of the work still cut out for Total Theatre in persuading the world that there's more to theatre than words! Yes, there are the occasional hints that, for example 'choreographed ensemble numbers can be inserted at relevant moments of emotion... without any feeling of incongruity' but the implication always seems to be that these are add-ons, rather than looking at the possibilities offered by real-life stories as a catalyst for devised theatre/live art, (see for example the work of Curious, referenced below). Nevertheless, if you work in this field, you probably ought to own it, or at least read it – Pam Schweitzer's passion and commitment to her work shines through on every page.

**DMP**

### KENNETH TYNAN THEATRE WRITINGS

**Ed. Dominic Shellard**  
Nick Hern Books  
ISBN 978-1-85459-050-3  
Hardback £20  
www.nickhernbooks.co.uk

Academics who embrace critical theory and performance studies may hanker after the objective critique, but for the rest of us there is no denying that theatre reviewing is ultimately a subjective response. You can couch

that response in whatever fancy words you wish, but in the end it comes down to whether you like it or you don't. And we all know that writing about things/people/performances you don't like is so much more fun than writing about those you do! Enter, stage left, the magnificent Ken Tynan, drama critic for the Observer, Olivier's dramaturg, and creator of nude extravaganza Oh! Calcutta! It is astonishing to discover that Tynan's writings were out of print until his son Matthew approached publisher and family friend Nick Hern with an offer he couldn't refuse. The book's wonderful – open it at any page and you'll find a gem. Everything is good, but particularly wonderful are Tynan's damned-with-faint-praise reviews of his nemesis, Olivier's wife Vivien Leigh. Sample: 'Miss Vivien Leigh's Lady Macbeth is more niminy-piminy than thundery-blundery, more viper than anaconda, but still quite competent in its small way.' Extant, fighting. Buy it, do!

**DMP**

## DVD

### REARRANGING REALITIES

**ED. DONNA RUTHERFORD**  
£20 (Individuals) / £75 (Institutions)  
www.donnarutherford.org

A DVD of artist-to-artist interviews. Strapline: 'Taking the Personal Out of Itself: the Development of Personal Material in Live Art'. So here are the contributors -- Bobbie Baker, John Carson, Pauline Goldsmith, Mandy McIntosh, Robert Pacitti, Aine Philips, Fiona Templeton, and Lisa Wesley -- talking about autobiography, out of control performance, collaboration, audiences, critics, etcetera. They talk candidly, some of them entertainingly, but what they are saying seems to be a semi-improvised version of theories/views/interpretations deeply entrenched. There's not much push. Donna is back there somewhere, but speaks through voiceovers, reflecting on the content of the interviews without ever being (explicitly) a controlling voice within them. Often they are friendly (Bobbie Baker), or charismatic (Pauline Goldsmith), or unpretentious (John Carson). But it varies according to character. I think someone like Fiona Templeton needs a little confrontation. It might be a matter of personal taste that what I most want to listen to is conversation, or it might be that the push and pull of dialogue represents the greatest opportunity for moments in which people say things they mean and don't know.

I don't think any of the interviewees were surprised by what they said. Robert Pacitti has done this before, and is honed. It can be a little cold. The interweaving of the interviews (under a series of themes) works OK, but is no replacement for the relations & connections that would have occurred if everyone had been put in a room together. Rearranging Realities is worth the price if you want to get a look at the perspectives or working practices of the featured artists (there is a great deal of biographical detail you will want to hear); and if you're not, perhaps try it anyway, make up your own mind.

**JE**

### CURIOUS (BE)LONGING

35mm colour/10 mins  
DVD £7  
www.artsadmin.co.uk

A ten-minute documentary made in collaboration with the NSPCC featuring a group of inspiring African teenagers who were brought or trafficked into the UK and built new lives for themselves in London, despite the threat of deportation on their 18th birthdays under current Home Office rules. The films asks the girls: What do they long for? Where they feel they belong? Simple, beautiful, art meets politics without the polemic. See also the Lost Girls feature in this magazine for more on the project.

**DMP**

## WEBSITES

### WWW.ARTSHUB.CO.UK

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### WWW.THEATREVOICE.COM

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**DMP/JE**

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