

TOTALTHEATRE

MAGAZINE

VOLUME 19 | ISSUE 04 | WINTER 2007-2008 | TOTALTHEATRE.ORG.UK
TOTALTHEATRE - DEVELOPING CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

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A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE GREAT NORTH WEST: LIVERPOOL EUROPEAN CITY OF CULTURE QUEERUPNORTH HOPE ST LTD CEILIDHS IN CUMBRIA
DIVERSITY AND COLLABORATION: COME TOGETHER - CONNECTING WORLDS APART RENEGOTIATIONS BROOKLYN BULL IN APPRECIATION OF
MARCEL MARCEAU: MIME IS DEAD - LONG LIVE MIME VOICES: ANNIE SPRINKLE & ELIZABETH STEPHENS REVIEWS FROM AVIGNON FESTIVAL
X.TRAX SHOWCASE MANCHESTER TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS AT EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE 2007



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Full colour back cover	£265.00	£500.00
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Mime Action Group
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Reg. Charity No. 1052358
Reg. Company No. 3133599



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EDITORIAL

2008 sees Liverpool crowned as European City of Culture, and in this issue of Total Theatre we welcome you to The Great North West, as Beccy Smith, Ric Watts and John Fox give a taste of the region's artistic life – from queerupnorth in Manchester to ceilidhs in Cumbria; experiments in multimedia performance at Hope St Ltd to burlesque on a boat, courtesy of Walk the Plank.

From the docks of Liverpool we sail away to the waterside of Brooklyn, New York to encounter an extraordinary crossover of visual and performing arts. Paso Doble is a collaboration between French-Yugoslavian choreographer Josef Nadj and Catalan artist Miquel Barceló, previewed here before it arrives on our shores for the London International Mime Festival in January 2008.

Another pair of collaborating artists, featured in this issue's Voices, are American artists Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens. They've taken artistic collaboration about as far as you can, and pledged to a seven-year programme of life-as-art, in which they will renew their personal and professional unity each year in a series of chakra-themed civil partnership marriages.

A very different sort of collaboration is documented in a feature that sets the scene for the latest Total Theatre professional development project. Called Renegotiations, it brings together six established artists in a peer mentoring programme. Find out more inside these pages.

Also bringing artists together is a series of ongoing exchanges called The International Training and Performance Residencies, in which artists from Asia and South America come to the South West of England in a spirit of mutual learning, documented in an article by Bianca Mastrominico of Organic Theatre, the artists who initiated the project.

The artist's voice is a key feature of Total Theatre Magazine. In response to the death of Marcel Marceau, the man who brought mime to a world audience, we bring you a very personal tribute from his friend and pupil, Nola Rae.

Our regular sections include Pippa Bailey's Out & About column, which muses on cultural diversity in theatre in the light of an open letter from Iraqi playwright Jawad Al Assadi. In our extended News section, catch up on the Total Theatre Awards at Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2007.

Diversity and collaboration; the artist's voice; reviews, news and previews, and updates from our associated artists and companies – as always an eclectic mix offering perspectives on the contemporary performance scene in the UK and beyond, which we hope will be entertaining and enlightening for theatre makers and audiences alike.

Dorothy Max Prior
Editor

Comments or suggestions?
Email: editorial@totaltheatre.org.uk

CONTENTS

REGULARS

News & Previews	P4
Company Updates	P8
Out & About	P12
Pippa Bailey	
Voices	P19
Annie Sprinkle & Elizabeth Stephens	
Media	P36

FEATURES

Focus on: The Great North West	P14
Beccy Smith, Ric Watts, and John Fox share their knowledge of a vibrant region of the UK	

Brooklyn Bull	P20
Dorothy Max Prior previews Paso Doble	

Come together – Connecting Worlds Apart	P22
Bianca Mastrominico	

Mime is Dead – Long Live Mime	P24
An appreciation of Marcel Marceau by Nola Rae + obituary	

Renegotiations	P26
Pippa Bailey	

REVIEWS	P28
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Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2007
Avignon Festival, France
CPT Sprint Festival, London
x.trax Showcase, Manchester
Plus: Kazuko Hohki in the King's Road Chelsea, Faulty Optic at Manchester International Festival, the premiere of Periplum's The Bell, Acrobat at Circus Front and more...



LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME FESTIVAL 12-27 JANUARY 2008

It's been confirmed that the Josef Nadj/Miquel Barcelo collaboration

Paso Doble will be presented at the 30th London International Mime Festival, January 2008. The piece, presented in collaboration with BITE, will turn the Barbican Theatre into a canvas for a spectacular artwork which redefines the term 'visual theatre'. Another highlight will be Sadari Movement Laboratory (Korea) with *Woyzeck* which won the Total Theatre Award 2007 for Best Physical Performance. Other confirmed artists/shows for LIMF 08 include: BlackSkyWhite (Russia) *Astronomy for Insects*; B.P. Zoom (France) *A Wonderful World*; Faulty Optic (UK) *Dead Wedding*; Gandini Juggling (UK) *Downfall*; Gecko (UK) *The Arab and the Jew*; Hiroaki Umeda (Japan) *Duo/While Going to a Condition*; Mossoux-Bonte (Belgium) *Nuit sur le Monde*; Sarah Wright (UK/Germany) *Silent Tide*; Teatro Corsario (Spain) *Aullidos*. There will also be a Total Theatre Lecture at the Mime Festival, delivered by the National Theatre's associate director Tom Morris (date/venue tbc). For further information and booking details see www.mimefest.co.uk

AURORA NOVA TOURING

From its humble beginnings two years ago in the South East of England, to this year's expansive programme of five shows touring 27 venues across the UK, Aurora Nova Touring's vision has been to present the contrasting and emotionally resonant features of contemporary international physical theatre and dance. This autumn, five award-winning companies taken from the Aurora Nova season of international physical theatre and dance at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2006 bring their extraordinary work to audiences in the UK. *Farm in the Cave*, *Sclavi – The Song of an Emigrant*, *Array* (Darren Johnston), *Outré*, Jo Strømngren Kompani, *The Convent*, CoisCéim Dance Theatre, *Knots*; *Derevo*, *Ketzal*. For dates and venues see www.auroranova.org

PRO-SESSIONAL DRAMATURGY

Pro-sessional is the first British event to focus on practical support, skills sharing and professional development for artists engaged in the dramaturgical development of new work. The programme includes hands-on workshops, open rehearsals and fora led by some of the country's leading theatre practitioners. With a particular emphasis on alternative theatre processes as well as text, this will be an essential event to support your work facilitating creativity. Soho Theatre, Monday 12 November (Central London). Tickets are £30 for members of the Literary Mangers Forum, the Dramaturgs' Network and Total Theatre; £40 for all others. See www.dramaturgy.co.uk

RIFIPI THEATRE AT CPT



CAMDEN PEOPLE'S THEATRE

At CPT this winter there's new work from Daedalus Theatre Company, Collective Janito, La Scene Infernale, The Footprint Project, and Riffifi Theatre with *The Alice Project* (which sold out during Sprint). In the new year there'll be work-in-progress showings from *Top of the World*, and the UK premiere of *A Corps et a Cru*, from Indian Runner, which have both been developed with support from CPT. The venue is also accepting applications for next year's Sprint festival, which will take place May - June 2008. Deadline for applications is Friday 11 January. For more details and info on how to apply, see www.cpttheatre.co.uk/sprint.php?season=1

NEW TERRITORIES, GLASGOW

New Territories, a highlight in the Scottish arts calendar, will run February - March 2008 (dates tbc). Scotland's international festival of live arts includes the National Review of Live Art. Further updates here, or to register interest, email colin_newmoves@mac.com or see www.newmoves.co.uk



DEREVO KETZAL

KOMEDIA

November-December this year Komedia Brighton are hosting two Aurora Nova touring shows – Derevo's *Ketzal* and Coisceim's *Knots* (shortlisted for a Total Theatre Award in 2006) – as well as an extensive line-up of children's shows. In Puppet State Theatre Company's *The Man Who Planted Trees* a French shepherd sets out, with his dog, to plant a forest and transform a bleak landscape. Long Nose Puppets' *Fly Away Katie* follows on from the success of their last show *Shoe Baby* with an inspiring flight of fancy about the power of imagination. For the full programme see www.komedia.co.uk



LOFT

LOFT AT THE ROUNDHOUSE

This Christmas, see a domestic world turned upside down as seven friends escape the monotony of their daily lives. *Loft* is a hilarious mix of breathtaking trapeze, jaw-dropping contortions, aerial acrobatics, frolics, fun and music. The 7 Fingers are former members of the world renowned Cirque du Soleil and will be in London at the Roundhouse for three weeks only with their internationally acclaimed show *Loft* following a sold-out run at the Edinburgh Festival with their show *Traces*. An incredible theatrical event that will thrill and amaze adults and kids alike. Box Office: 0870 389 1846. Tickets £10-£25. See www.roundhouse.org.uk



EVERYBODY'S KITCHEN

EXETER PHOENIX

Winter '07 at the Phoenix sees a strong programme of live art and dance. Tom Marshman's *Everybody's Kitchen* is an innovative and intimate piece, using smell and taste to investigate the powerful and often subconscious emotional connection people have with food; Retina Dance Company's *This Is Not A Body* is inspired by 20th century artists who urged people to interpret art through the subconscious rather than intellect, and features breathtaking partner-work and extreme physicality combined with projected art and music to challenge our perception of the body; Marcia Farquhar's *12 Shooters* is the result of a collaboration with twelve artists who filmed a selection of Farquhar's new and familiar work, including monologues, visitations, a Humpty Dumpty seance and her famous lifesize Punch & Judy show. See: www.exeterphoenix.org.uk



UKULELE ORCHESTRA

TOYNBEE STUDIOS CHRISTMAS PROGRAMME

For the six weeks before Christmas Artsadmin has a programme at Toynbee Studios with a definite festive feel. Forkbeard Fantasy return to the Studios with their latest work, *Invisible Bonfires* – a combination of surreal comedy, spectacle and invention, film and cartoon – and ending with two weeks of performances from the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain. A funny, virtuosic, twanging, singing, awesome, foot-stomping obituary of rock-n-roll and melodious light entertainment featuring only the 'bonsai guitar' and a menagerie of voices; no drums, no pianos, no backing tracks, and no banjos. Forkbeard Fantasy 20 November – 1 December (not Sun 25); Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain 12-15 & 19-22 December. Box office 020 7650 2350. Book online at www.artsadmin.co.uk

NEW DIRECTOR AT CORN EXCHANGE

In the New Year, long-time director of the Corn Exchange Martin Sutherland will be replaced by Nick Giles, currently deputy director of Oxford Playhouse and chairman of Hextable Dance. Nick will be joining the organisation at an exciting time: the digital micro cinema, opening this autumn, will be in its first season; audience figures have increased 25% over the last three years to 107,000 per year, and the 2007 Newbury Comedy Festival was highly acclaimed in the national press. Martin will go on to work as Chief Executive of the Royal & Derngate theatres in Northampton. See www.cornexchangenew.com



VEDA AT PUSH

INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

PERFORMA07, NEW YORK

Performa07, the second biennial of new visual art performance, opens on October 27 in New York City, launching a four-week programme of performances, exhibitions, screenings, symposia, and live events including ten major PERFORMA commissions by Carlos Amorales, Sanford Biggers, Nathalie Djurberg, Japanther, Isaac Julien, Daria Martin, Kelly Nipper, Adam Pendleton, Yvonne Rainer, and Francesco Vezzoli. PERFORMA07 features the work of over ninety international artists at more than fifty leading cultural institutions and venues throughout the city, with the participation of more than thirty curators, and is organized under the artistic direction of its founder, RoseLee Goldberg. See www.performa-arts.org

PERFORMANCE STUDIES INTERNATIONAL

PSi is a professional association founded in 1997 to promote communication and exchange between scholars and practitioners working in the field of performance. The organisation has staged numerous international conference and festival gatherings that have moved between the discourse and practice of performance. The thirteenth PSi conference, *Happening, Performance, Event*, will take place in New York 8–11 November 2007, and is being hosted by the Department of Performance Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University in collaboration with Performa, the performance biennial. For further information email Adrian Heathfield on psi.admin@roehampton.ac.uk or see <http://psi-web.org/>

PUSH IN VANCOUVER CANADA

The annual PuSh International Performing Arts Festival is one of Vancouver's signature events. Produced over 19 days each January, the PuSh Festival presents groundbreaking work in the live performing arts: theatre, dance, music and various hybrid forms of performance. It attracts acclaimed local, national and international artists and their work. 16 Jan – 3 Feb 08. See www.pushfestival.ca

INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL SANTIAGO, CHILE

The international festival of *Teatro a Mil* has presented a varied programme of performance arts to the people of Santiago and its summer visitors since 1995. About 150,000 people enjoy mainstream, experimental, fringe and street theatre, at a score of venues throughout the central area of the city. A headline theatrical festival, it brings some 40-odd important works to the capital, from 30 countries. See www.stgoamil.cl

ADELAIDE FRINGE: 22 FEB – 16 MARCH 2008

Adelaide Fringe Inc presents an internationally renowned, open-access, three-week independent arts fringe festival for artists to present their work and for audiences to engage and interact with the arts. To be a part of the Adelaide Fringe programme, artists pay a one-off registration fee to the Fringe as well as pay the presentation costs of their performance/season/event/exhibition. See www.adelaidefringe.com.au



TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS 2007

Ten years of the Total Theatre Awards at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe – and the consensus is that the 2007 Awards were the best yet! We were fortunate this year to have sponsorship from a number of organisations, without whose generous support it wouldn't have been possible, namely: the Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre (CETT), based at the Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London; the University of Winchester; and the University of Chichester.

Furthermore, Total Theatre's new venture for 2007, Giving Something Back, brought an exciting new element to our month in Edinburgh with a series of free workshops and networking events for artists, including an Open Space session led by Improbable's Lee Simpson; a workshop on site specific theatre led by Ben Harrison of Grid Iron; dance classes and warm-ups; and an inter-company volleyball game.

After an intense process of assessment and judging, the winners were announced on 23 August at a ceremony held at the Assembly Hall Rainy Bar – a memorable occasion attended by a host of artists, producers and presenters, members of the Edinburgh glitterati and representatives of arts organisations from across the world. Speakers and Awards presenters included Jon Morgan, Director of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe; Louisa Bolch, Clore Fellow and former Commissioning Editor for Science at Channel 4; Ben Harrison, Artistic Director of Grid Iron Theatre; and Nick Dodds, Chief Executive of Brighton Festival and Chair of the British Arts Festival Association. Entertainment was provided by the divine Meow Meow, star of the Spiegelgarden, who brought a little bit of late night decadence to the sun-kissed morning event.

With a record number of nominations this year (400 – around twice as many as in 2006), it was a tough job to find our shortlist and winners. The first stage assessing for the Awards was carried out with great commitment and energy by a team of 30 or so reviewers and representatives of the theatre and arts industry. The dedicated team of judges for the Total Theatre Awards included critics (Lyn Gardner of the Guardian, Donald Hutera of The Times and Mary Brennan of The Herald); academics from Central School of Speech and Drama (Nick Wood), the University of Winchester (Professor Anthony Dean), and the University of Chichester (Robert Daniels); artists (Ben Harrison, Beccy Smith); festival director Christie Anthony of the Adelaide Fringe and creative producers Kate McGrath (Fuel) and Martin Sutherland. Total Theatre was represented by its editor Dorothy Max Prior and the organisation's creative director Pippa Bailey, who chaired the judges' meeting. We extend heartfelt thanks to everyone whose work contributed to the assessing and judging process.

Here then are the winners of the Total Theatre Awards 2007:

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR BEST EMERGING COMPANY

Proudly supported by University of Winchester

1927 for *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Underbelly)

Shortlisted: Precarious for Druthers (Zoo Southside); Unpacked for Funeral Games (Pleasance Courtyard); Analogue for Mile End (Pleasance Dome); The River People for The Ordinaries... In an Awkward Silence (Bedlam Theatre); Present Attempt for Attempt 3.4 (C-cubed)

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR BEST ORIGINAL WORK BY A COLLECTIVE/ENSEMBLE

Proudly supported by University of Chichester, MA Theatre Collectives

Rude Mechs in association with Erich Jungwirth and Richard Jordan Productions for *Get Your War On* (Assembly Aurora Nova)

Shortlisted: Chickenshed for As the Mother of a Brown Boy (Zoo Southside); Tangled Feet for Game? (Gilded Balloon Teviot); Tbilisi Marionette State Theatre for The Battle of Stalingrad, (Assembly Aurora Nova); Vanishing Point for Subway (Traverse Theatre); Bottled for Return to Reason (C soco)

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR BEST PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE

Sadari Movement Laboratory in association with AsiaNow Productions for *Woyzeck* (Assembly Aurora Nova)

Shortlisted: Song of the Goat for Lacrimosa (Assembly Aurora Nova); Biuro Podrozy for Macbeth: Who is that Bloodied Man? (Old College Quad); Signal to Noise for Longwave (Underbelly); Adam Read for Eclipse (C soco); Pasodos Dance Company for Sorry, Love (C Chambers)

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR EXPERIMENTATION

Ontroerend Goed for *The Smile Off Your Face* (C soco)

Shortlisted: Little Dove Theatre Art for Six Women Standing in Front of a White Wall (C soco); Rotozaza for Etiquette (Assembly Aurora Nova); Chris Goode for Hippo World Guest Book (Pleasance Dome); Au Cul du Loop for Score (Assembly Aurora Nova); science made simple for Visualise – The Beauty of Science (Venue 13)

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR BEST SMALL SCALE WORK

News From Nowhere for *England* (Traverse at the Fruitmarket Gallery)

Shortlisted: Adrian Howells for An Audience with Adrienne (Traverse Theatre); Fraser Hooper for Funny Business (The Spiegel Garden); Hoipolloi for Hugh Hughes in Story of a Rabbit (Pleasance Courtyard); Organic Theatre for Sheepskin (Pleasance Courtyard); Playgroup for The Art of Swimming (Traverse Theatre)

TOTAL THEATRE AWARD FOR SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION

Awarded to Complicite founder member **Jos Houben**, here at the Fringe 2007 with his performance-lecture *The Art of Laughter*. Jos had fittingly been a winner at the first ever Total Theatre Awards in 1997 as writer-director of *The Right Size* show *Do You Come Here Often?*

A special feature of the Total Theatre Awards 2007 was the Wildcard vote by audiences:

WILDCARD WINNER
Precarious for *Druthers* (Zoo Southside)

Congratulations go to all our winners, and commendation to the shortlisted companies. Reviews of winning shows appear in this magazine. Other Edinburgh Fringe shows reviewed on our website: www.totaltheatre.org.uk

Photos by Gabriel Foster-Prior

PERFORMER & COMPANY UPDATES

PEOPLE SHOW



TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE | VOL. 19 | ISSUE 04 | WINTER 2007

1927

1927 are doing a three-week run of their multi award winning Edinburgh show *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Total Theatre Best Emerging Company, Fringe First 2007, Herald Angel 2007, Carol Tambor Award, Arches Brick Award). Using mime, live music, and a mix of film and live 2D animation, the show is a cornucopia of lush visuals that evoke the year of the company's name, 1927. The show runs 15 October – 3 November at Battersea Arts Centre in London. See www.19-27.co.uk

BOTTLEFED

After performing *Return to Reason* at the Edinburgh Fringe and completing Creativity Matters (a research project run for the Engine Room and University of Arts London), Bottlefed are back in the studio to train and work on new ideas. Additionally the company are going to run several workshops for performers in order to widen their ensemble for future projects. See www.bottlefed.org for future performance dates of *Return to Reason* and workshop details.

BRIGHTFX

Following the success of *Circus Tatovski* in the UK and Europe, brightFX have been commissioned to adapt the street show for a theatre audience. In collaboration with Tina Carter from Expressive Feat and Ian Owens from Albert and Friends, this will be an action packed show for all the family. BrightFX has also been invited back to produce the Reading Oracle Riverside Spectacular for a second year. This spectacular show combines choreographed fire performance and aerial acts with stunning lighting effects and pyrotechnics. Email tat@brightfx.co.uk or see www.brightfx.co.uk

CHICKENSHED

Since the successful run of *As the Mother of a Brown Boy* at Edinburgh a filmed version of the show has been broadcast on several occasions by Sky Arts. This filmed version has picked up more plaudits to add to the critical acclaim of the Fringe. Through the production itself, Chickenshed made great contacts with organisations such as Smart Justice and the Prison Reform Trust. The company now hopes to bring the show to a wider audience, including prisons and ex-offenders, as well as more traditional theatregoers. Meanwhile some members of the cast are working on a new production of *A Christmas Carol* which opens in November this year. See www.chickenshed.org.uk

CHIPOLATAS

The Chipolatas are this season taking their *3-Style* circus show to Festival Internacional de Circo, Caracas, Venezuela (28 November - 3 December); and the World Buskers Festival, Christchurch, New Zealand (17-27 January). An Australian tour is being finalised for February and March: check the website for details. Other than the updated www.chipolatas.com website, the company also have new Myspace and Youtube portals: www.myspace.com/thechipolatas & www.youtube.com/thechipolatas

CHOTTO OOKII



CHOPPEDLOGIC

Inspired by real events, ChoppedLogic's *Double Negative* is a dynamic new theatre performance which holds an unsentimental lens up to the reality of Britain's sex trade. Combining bold original writing, dance, movement and puppetry, the show explores the seamier side of suburbia and the slippery edges of contemporary society. A charged, poetic exploration of people trafficking and the complex desires which fuel it. Oval House Theatre: 16 October - 3 November 2007, Tuesday - Saturday, 7:45pm. Written and directed by million-watt theatre luminary Dorcas Werber. Box Office: 020 7582 7680 or online sales at www.ovalhouse.com

CHOTTO OOKII

This summer Chotto Ookii successfully completed their new show *THUS FAR and no further* thanks to the support of Bradford Theatre in the Mill. The show will premier as part of the autumn season at Bradford University on 7 December (Box Office 01274 233200) before touring the UK in the spring. In an explosion of wax, fluff and flour *THUS FAR and no further* takes the audience on a journey to a chaotic world where something has broken down and everyone is lost. To find out more join the Chotto Ookii mailing list by sending your address to chotto_ookii@fmail.co.uk or see www.chottoookii.co.uk



DNA

DANNY SCHLESINGER

This autumn/winter Danny will be performing his solo show *Lighter than Air* at various venues around the country. Enter the bizarre and strange universe of a wild balloon tamer where skilful, surreal and stupid things happen. The show combines physical comedy, circus skills and eccentric dance with a medley of other skills. Dates include: Chipping Ongar (3 November); West End Centre in Aldershot (15 November); Greentop Community Circus in Sheffield (16 November) with a workshop in physical comedy the next day; and Redbridge Drama Centre East London (22 November). Please come along to support Danny and the venue as this show is not funded. See www.circoridiculososo.com

DANTE OR DIE

dANTE OR dIE have just returned from the Dublin Fringe Festival, where *Caliper Boy* was nominated for the Spirit of the Fringe Award. In the show a 189 year-old 12-year-old boy is searching for the answer to his lifelong question: "Why aren't I like the other children, Mother?" Joining forces with a range of acoustic folk musicians, dANTE OR dIE bring you a tale of freaks, fright, folk song, flying burgers and frantic underground whispers. *Caliper Boy's* endless urban existence is illuminated through an evocative live score, distorted body parts and tales that disorientate and perturb. Check the website for upcoming tour dates: www.danteordie.com

DELL'ARTE

The Dell'Arte Company is proud to present two of its most poignant productions in two of California's most culturally rich cities this winter. In San Francisco in November, *Land of the Grasshopper Song* is a historical, musical comedy that explores the journey of two women who set out in 1908 to be 'field matrons' for the Karuk Tribe of Northern California. In Los Angeles in February, *The Golden State* is a raucous, sexy farce inspired by Molière's comic gem *The Miser*. This is Molière with the heat turned up, the stops pulled out and the women on top. Call 1-707-668-5663 or email info@dellarte.com or see www.dellarte.com



DNA

DNA is pleased to announce an award of nearly £5000 from Arts Council England North West to further develop its innovative interactive performance for early years, *Ball Pond Bobby*. DNA will now commission bespoke seating, remake the set and add to the overall aesthetic of the performance for its autumn 2007 tour. DNA will also supply additional supporting materials for families to enhance their understanding of the experience. The company is very excited to be working closely with Early Years Specialist Joanne Albin-Clark to evaluate the project, and with Ludus Dance who will work with dancer Tids Pickard to further develop the choreography. See www.dynamicnewanimation.co.uk/Bookings.html (click on the Google Calendar for tour dates).

EXPRESSIVE FEAT PRODUCTIONS

Expressive Feat Productions make unique aerial work. Using fresh air as their stage, the company conjures dramatic, humorous and thought-provoking stories. Their latest show, *Park Life*, falling somewhere between *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Keystone Cops*, was performed as part of a showcase day for the University of Kent's Practice as Research MAs in drama and film earlier this year, and is currently available for indoor and outdoor performance. See www.exfeat.com

FAULTY OPTIC

He tries to remember, she tries to forget. Ripped apart by the fickle Bacchae, Orpheus has found most of his strewn body parts except his legs. All that remains is for Eurydice to remarry him, but she is desperately trying to wash something terrible away. The only hope is Elysium, but Elysium beckons only for some, and only after they yield to complete amnesia. Faulty Optic's latest show *Dead Wedding* tours through autumn/winter, visiting Lakeside Nottingham (10 October), Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (21 November), The Sage, Gateshead (1 December), and the Barbican for its Bite Festival (22-26 January '08). Email faultyoptic@ntlworld.com or see www.faultyoptic.co.uk

FITTINGS MULTIMEDIA ARTS

Fittings Multimedia Arts' medical musical extravaganza *Welcome to the Institute* is a satirical sideswipe at the fag end of the health service, a medical musical showdown between the forces of evil and the forces of good. Think *Green Wing* with songs, think *Kafka* with gags. Directed by Garry Robson, Composed by Leigh Stirling, designed by Jo Pocock. Touring throughout October and into November. Liverpool, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Manchester, Telford, Penzance, and London. For details contact Deborah Wintle at Fittings on 0151 708 8858 or info@fittings.org.uk or see www.fittings.org.uk

FOURSIGHT THEATRE

After almost ten years, Naomi Cooke will be stepping down as Artistic Director of Foursight Theatre. She will continue working in a freelance capacity as an actor and director. Frances Land and Sarah Thom have been appointed as Joint Artistic Directors of the company, alongside Michelle Knight, their newly appointed General Manager. The new Foursight team will be in place from 1 October, supported by Naomi Cooke as Associate Director, and Lisa Harrison as Education and Outreach co-ordinator. The company looks forward to a new era going into its 21st birthday in 2008. See www.foursighttheatre.co.uk

GREEN GINGER

Green Ginger's *Rust* is hitting the road for a final time; the culmination of 24 months of European touring, this award-winning production was recently described in the Norwegian national press as "part-Sex Pistols, part-Monty Python and with a touch of The Young Ones". Touring Belgium, Poland, Germany, Norway, France and the UK; see the website for details. Green Ginger is also coordinating Toast in the Machine, a rolling programme of Bristol-based professional development and mentoring for young puppeteers and other theatre and film makers. For more info call +44 (0)117 9225599 or email mail@greenginger.net or see www.greenginger.net

LEFT LUGGAGE THEATRE

Left Luggage Theatre will showcase *Day Return* at Shunt Lounge (London Bridge) 19-21 September, 7.30pm - 12am) before performing at the show's spiritual home at The Festival of Bathing Beauties on the Lincolnshire coast, 23 September 10am-4pm. *Day Return* is a promenade journey to Skegness through the dreams and memories of an old lady, Ivy. The performance uses different types of puppetry, live performers, soundscape and installation to recreate the nostalgic world of the British seaside. *Day Return* creates humorous, melancholic and touching moments within its narrative, exploring issues of memory, identity and the relationship between people and the spaces they inhabit. See www.bathingbeauties.org.uk or www.shunt.co.uk or www.myspace.co.uk/leftluggagetheatre

LITTLE DOVE THEATRE ART

The Little Dove flock has flown and scattered throughout the world. Most will reform to perform works for The National Multicultural Festival Fringe 2008 in Canberra, Australia, which company director Chenoeh Miller is Artistic Director of. Having survived Edinburgh with invitations from theatres and festivals around the world, Little Dove Theatre Art will tour *Six Women Standing in Front of a White Wall* to NYC, Vancouver, Marseilles, Berlin, London and Jerusalem in July and August 2008. The company is currently seeking official invitations and madly applying for funding. See www.myspace.com/littledovetheatreart

MIME THE GAP

Mime the Gap is a silent comedy theatre company now celebrating its 10th anniversary. The company is currently developing its new show *The Next Act*. Previous shows have included: *The Medical Show* and *The Magician's Nightmare*. *The Next Act* will have its first run in 2008. See www.mimethegap.com

NOLA RAE

Nola Rae will be taking *Exit Napoleon Pursued by Rabbits* to the Masca Theatre in Bucharest for two performances and two workshops 2-5 November. *Mozart Preposteroso* will be at Castellon de la Plana in Spain 16-18 November. Nola will also pay her first visit to Greenland for performances of *Upper Cuts* in Nuuk on 30 November and 1 December. The newest show, *Home-Made Shakespeare*, will have more performances in Sweden in Uppsala and Karlskrona on 7 & 9 December. See www.nolarae.com or for bookings contact Valerie West on 0208 444 6248

ONTROEREND GOED

Total Theatre Award winners Ontroerend Goed, who were awarded in the 'experimental' category for *Smile off Your Face*, will be performing the show at the Adelaide Fringe, 22 February - 16 March 2008. After that, the company will be coming to London at the end of March. Dates are not yet fixed, but keep checking the website for updates. After their extraordinary success in Edinburgh 2007, the Belgian experimental theatre makers have plans to return to the Fringe in 2008 with a new show. See www.ontroerendgoed.be



PAPER BIRDS

PAPER BIRDS

Having returned from Edinburgh the Paper Birds have dived back into a million and one exciting education and outreach projects, including a trip to Jersey with the company's last show *Accidentally Waiting to Happen*. The Paper Birds will shortly be beginning research and development for a new show, to be devised in the new year. In the meantime they will be continuing to develop their current show *40 Feathered Winks*, which will then be touring nationally in spring 2008. See www.thepaperbirds.com

PEOPLE SHOW

Meet the white-faced clown and the melancholy baby. Eavesdrop on dancing boxers, share the fantasies of the roadie, and 'live the dream' with the washed-up stand-up comic. A promenade performance, *People Show 118: The Birthday Tour* features live music, multimedia imagery and deception. A new work based on the original Birthday Show created to celebrate the company's 40th anniversary. On national tour from October (see website for details), then at People Show Studios, East London 6-10 & 13-18 November. Tickets £14 (£12 conc). Capacity is strictly limited, so book early. Call 020 8858 7755 (Greenwich theatre box office). See www.peopleshow.co.uk

PICKLED IMAGE

Winner of the People's Jury Prize at the Belo Horizonte Puppet Festival in Brazil, *Houdini's Suitcase* is the brand new show from Bristol-based puppetry company Pickled Image. Created last spring in the depths of north Norway, *Houdini's Suitcase* is a stunning piece of visual theatre that fuses live performance, puppetry, and a haunting soundtrack. Unique, poignant and funny, *Houdini's Suitcase* is a sensory feast aimed at audiences 12 years+. The show tours the country this autumn, with venues including the Met Theatre, Bury (1 & 2 November); MAC, Birmingham (3 November); and the Frensham Heights Performing Arts Centre, Frensham (19 November). See www.pickledimage.co.uk

PICKLED IMAGE





PRECARIOUS

Precarious had a successful Edinburgh run this year with their new physical theatre and multimedia show *Druthers*. During the festival they were crowned Total Theatre Wildcard Winners and nominated for the Emerging Company Award (not to mention taking the Total Theatre Volleyball Champions title!). Precarious are now making plans to tour *Druthers* in Spring 2008. If you are interested in booking the show or receiving more information or a DVD, please contact Karla at info@precarious.org.uk or see www.precarious.org.uk

PRESENT ATTEMPT

Present Attempt will begin a year-long residency at the Centre of Excellence for Training in Theatre (CETT) based at the Central School of Speech and Drama in October. The company is currently working on a small-scale site specific piece which will take the form of an audio tour. On their return from Edinburgh company members interviewed a range of various practitioners as research for their MA in Advanced Theatre Practice. This included previous Total Theatre Award winning companies NIE and Hoipolloi as well as Improbable and Forced Entertainment. They plan to make a new piece of work in January. See www.cssd.ac.uk

PROTEUS THEATRE

This year Proteus celebrates over 25 years of making work for and with diverse communities with two shows: one old, one new. Back by popular demand, *The Elephant Man* is the moving, poetic and ultimately uplifting story of the life of John Merrick, whose life and tragic destiny is as relevant today in our image obsessed culture as it ever was. Proteus's new show, *Below Zero*, tours 21 April - 25 May 2008. Using the company's distinctive fusion of circus, film and physical theatre, this is an exploration of modern attitudes toward our own bodies and the obsession with perfection at any cost. See www.proteustheatre.com



SHAMS THEATRE

Shams Theatre relocated to Cambridge this summer, where they are developing *Black Stuff*, a wicked comedy about the end of oil and climate change, due to tour across East England in March 2008. The show draws on the company's work with Clown through Mask, and Jonathan Young will be running an intensive four-week course in London 7 January - 1 February. See www.shamstheatre.org.uk or contact info@shamstheatre.org.uk or call 07740 475 879

SHEER LUNACY

Young, UK-based company Sheer Lunacy featured two original pervasive games in this year's Come Out and Play festival, which took place in Amsterdam on the 28 & 29 of September. Sheer Lunacy are a collective of performers, artists and creators who aim to share a little playful chaos and perception-altering fun with anyone who'll let them. See www.sheerlunacy.com for more.

TANGLED FEET

Tangled Feet were delighted to be shortlisted in the Best Original Work by an Ensemble category at this year's Total Theatre Awards for their show *GAME?* It was particularly gratifying as the company has been working within the same ensemble for four years now. *GAME?* will tour the UK in Spring 2008 before Tangled Feet start to devise their ambitious new project... watch this space! www.tangledfeet.com

THÉÂTRE SANS FRONTIÈRES

Three touring shows at Théâtre sans Frontières: *Como agua para chocolate* - *Like Water for Chocolate*, Laura Esquivel's magical tale of simmering passions and food to stir the senses, visiting UK theatres in spring and summer 2008 (Spanish 15 years+); *Conte Dorés*, two captivating folktales from French-speaking Canada, touring schools in spring 2008; and *Around the World in 80 Minutes*, an action-packed adventure introducing children to the French language and Francophone countries, touring UK theatres this Autumn (English & simple French). The company is also developing a show *Lipsynch*, an epic celebration of language and voice co-produced with Robert Lepage & Ex Machina (English, French, Spanish & German partially subtitled). See www.tsf.org.uk

THIRD ANGEL

Still basking in the warm glow of a series of lovely reviews for *Presumption* in Edinburgh, and a place on the shortlist for the Carol Tambor award, Third Angel is squeezing in an international collaboration, *Off the White*, with Paula Diogo from Lisboa's Teatro Praga, before unpacking *Presumption* for an autumn tour starting in Firenze, Italy. Find all the details at www.thirdangel.co.uk, which will soon be undergoing a complete redesign and will, finally, have lots more room for archived projects, video and current work.

UNPACKED

With little time to empty the Edinburgh suitcase, Unpacked hit the road with *No Obvious Trauma* in October - don't miss the last date of this tour at the Lakeside Theatre in Colchester on 15 November. Unpacked worked on puppetry for the Tangram Theatre and Southwark Playhouse production of *Richard III*, also in October. And following success in Edinburgh, *Funeral Games* will be touring the UK in April 2008. In the meantime the company continues to work on their new project. For more info visit www.unpacked.org and if anyone has a spare Bison please get in touch.

ZECORA URA

A Brazil/UK co-production presented by Zecora Ura Theatre, Urban Dolls Project and Real Live Cinema, *Hotel Medea* will be developed into a full production for Aurora Nova premiering in 2008. In a myth driven by deeds not thoughts, sacrifices have to be made. Using striking linguistic and musical contrasts to set off the alienation of Medea, the project examines the character by recognising that technology is reinterpreting our relationship with myth. Work-in-progress to be shared at the Shunt Lounge, London on 16 & 17 November. For more details contact Nwando Ebizie on 07916 278949 or nwando@para-active.com or see www.Medea.Tv



OUT & ABOUT

VIVE LA RÉVOLUTION! SAYS PIPPA BAILEY

Guardian Theatre critic Michael Billington, in an article bemoaning the state of the West End (the Guardian, 2 Aug 2007), called for a revolution: 'Theatreland is in dire straits. Second-rate musicals rule, new drama is dying, and the venues are falling apart. The time has come for a revolution'. I suspect Michael Billington and I have very different visions for what a theatre uprising might look like and achieve, but as a call to arms I say, bring it on. Vive la Révolution!

An essential part of my revolution would be a greater focus on diverse theatre practices. In September I attended an international symposium, part of the decibel showcase in Birmingham. Decibel is an Arts Council England initiative (running 2003-2008) to raise the profile of culturally diverse artists, through a cross-artform programme of projects and events. The Birmingham showcase was a not-to-be-missed opportunity to see the very best performing artists and companies of African, Asian and Caribbean descent based in England. Mem Morrison Company presented *Leftovers*, in which the full English breakfast is given a citizenship test, and Myung Hee Han presented *A Dream of Butterfly*, an object theatre live art performance, exploring life and death, illusion and reality in an installation made entirely of paper.

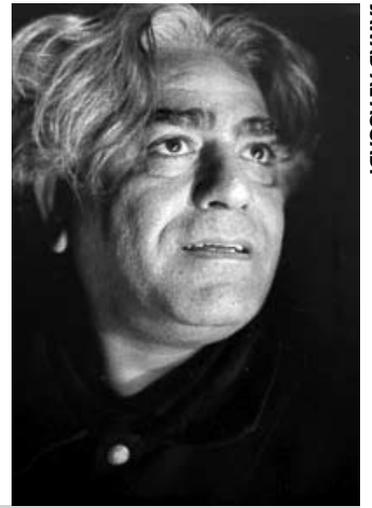
Artists with new ideas, such as 30 Bird Productions and Mamoru Iriguchi, were able to pitch their shows. The showcase closely followed the Edinburgh Festivals – sadly, the Fringe seemed remarkably lacking in cultural diversity this year, perhaps due to the proximity of these events.

The complex connections between British culture and the rest of the world has informed the decision to extend Total Theatre's international focus. High quality international practitioners come to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Several international companies received 2007 Total Theatre Awards and we are discussing ways to develop the Total Theatre Awards in other countries so that we can start to explore how work and standards of excellence vary across the world. Is it appropriate for us to use our own standards when judging work from elsewhere? Is it possible to separate personal taste from ideas about quality? And how can we build new relationships and cultural understanding through this process?

During the Fringe I attended an introduction to Arab Theatre, produced as part of the British Council Edinburgh Showcase. This session was an opportunity to glimpse a very different theatre-making world. In the Arab states, generally speaking, theatre has largely been an imported artform operating since the 1960s. There are 320 million people living in 22 countries and the cultures vary enormously. Taoufik Jebali from El Teatro in Tunisia spoke of the rise in interest in visual theatre because image-based work could get past the censors. Sulayman Al Bassam, a political theatre-maker who has lived and worked in the UK, spoke about the difficulties for artists in Kuwait and touring work across that region. But the most powerful message was delivered by Jawad Al Assadi, missing from the panel due to the death of his brother and nephew.

Jawad Al Assadi, originally from Iraq, is a leading director of theatre in the Arab world. His innovative vision of theatre means he devotes energy to training young actors and employs a unique style in directing plays by a wide range of Arab playwrights. He has written poems, essays on theatre, studies on rehearsals, and several plays, which have been translated into English, Russian and French, including *Forget Hamlet*, *The Bench* and *Women of War*. Jawad Al Assadi has spent 25 years as an exile, moving between different Arab countries and contributing to the development of progressive thought and dialogue in the region.

Jawad sent a letter to the meeting (printed here) and the voice of this respected artist should be heard. What is cutting edge theatre? How do we define innovation and what relationship does it have to our cultural sensibilities? These questions are brought into sharp relief by Assadi's tragic loss.



AN OPEN LETTER FROM IRAQI PLAYWRIGHT JAWAD AL ASSADI

I felt an unprecedented bitterness during the rehearsal for my most recent play, *Baghdadi Bath*. The play depicts the lives of two brothers who daily drive a passenger bus between Damascus and Baghdad. The text of *Baghdadi Bath* is, in fact, a biography of these two brothers, with a touch of fantasy that dominates the theatrical action.

Both in the written text and in the performance, the characters face sudden violations (or intrusions) during their daily trips, especially after passing the Iraqi border on the way to Baghdad, where hundreds of passengers and drivers are subject to attack, kidnap, looting and bloody murder.

What I described in *Baghdadi Bath* has unfortunately become real in life. My brother and his son were kidnapped as they were driving their bus. This time, however, the incident that was theatre has become a reality. My brother and his son were stopped by ten armed men in the area of Radwanieh, not far from the infamous Al Rasheed Camp, then driven to a remote area in dense palm tree forests, where armed militia have sprung up in an unprecedented manner.

The strange thing is that after the escalation of killing, Iraqi drivers, both Sunni and Shiite (my brother and his son among them), have got used to carrying two passports; one with a Sunni name to be handed to Sunni militia, and the other with a Shiite name to be handed to Shiite militia. But the bloody dramatic trap that my brother and nephew fell into lay in the following: their kidnappers appeared in the costumes of Shiite militia, so my brother and nephew handed them their Shiite passports, thinking that their rescue was guaranteed, only to discover a few moments later that the kidnappers were actually Sunni.

This is the perfect Iraqi theatre of blood. It's the theatre of masks, which leads to brutal slaughter. My brother and nephew were indeed kidnapped, interrogated, forced into investigation and tortured for days, then brought to a surreal trial with a mock judge, who asked the kidnapped to pray because their death in dawn is inevitable. Irtiqa Al Assadi was slaughtered in front of his father, Hussein Al Assadi, followed by the father who was also slaughtered. Both were thrown into a large hole with many other dead bodies. The boy, who had hardly reached his teens, and the father, who had gone out to earn his daily bread, were thrown into a hole.

The palm trees were the only witness. The large hole their final womb. Which Iraq is this one!

TOTAL THEATRE EVENTS

Total Theatre's autumn activities included a day at the National Theatre, in which members of the public were engaged in spontaneous mini-Salon events. Enticing people into the building with the promise of free tea and cakes, four Total Theatre workers spent the day in illuminating conversation with them. The discussion groups included those who were there to see outdoor events as part of the Watch This Space programme, people who were making a planned visit to see an indoor show, and passers-by. Part of the purpose was to make connections between Watch This Space and the NT indoor theatre programme; another purpose was to explore attitudes to contemporary theatre, and see how theatre fits in (or otherwise!) to people's lives and leisure activities. Total Theatre has run numerous salons, talks and symposia for professional theatre-makers. This was our first such event for the general public, and we hope very much to repeat the exercise soon.

Future plans include an event as part of the London International Mime Festival, January 2008; further details to be announced on our re-designed website. See www.totaltheatre.org.uk



WELCOME TO THE GREAT NORTH WEST

BECCY SMITH
CELEBRATES
THE RICH
PICKINGS TO
BE FOUND IN HER
HOME REGION

For a region that has been responsible for some truly earth-shattering cultural moments, the North West can appear uncharacteristically coy about its theatre. A smattering of small- and mid- scale touring venues amongst the regenerated mill towns have long been stalwarts for companies travelling from across the country, their audiences subsidised by the excellent universities in the area. But for too long the national sense of the region's cultural vision has been of an inward-looking reflection on the grim wet reality of the northern experience.

However, if this stereotyping was ever true, in the past twenty years the region has experienced an ever-accelerating sea change in its artistic landscape. To cite a few seminal moments: the foundation of the greenroom in Manchester in the 80s opened a space for experimental practice and the support of younger, emergent artists in the city (an agenda wholeheartedly embraced by subsequent student/professional theatre crossovers with Contact Theatre, Alsager Arts and Nuffield Lancaster). Together they have supported work in the region by such companies as Doo-Cot, Dynamic New Animation and Quarantine. Hope Street Ltd, founded in Liverpool in 1988, pioneered the holistic teaching of collaborative, physical theatre – a model which has influenced national teaching policy ever since.

In Ulvertson (Cumbria), the agenda-defining creative projects of Welfare State International (and its successor Lanternhouse) have set the bar for broad stroke community engagement through work of artistic and political integrity. In Rossendale, Horse and Bamboo have been innovators in visual theatre, mask, film and puppetry since 1978.

Despite the weather, Manchester has established itself as one of the headline destinations for street arts, with festivals such as Streets Ahead which has not only presented work from round the world, but also nurtured local companies such as Walk the Plank, Artizani, Avanti Display and Whalley Range All Stars. Its sister festival, the Garden of Delights, and the annual xtrax showcase continue to present UK street arts and cross-artform companies to international promoters, and have also worked in tandem with the Arts Council's decibel initiative to foster the development of a more culturally diverse arts practice. Also in Manchester, the queer arts agenda has been championed nationally and internationally since 1992 by queerupnorth, Europe's leading festival of queer arts.

NOWT AS QUEER AS FOLKS UP NORTH

RIC WATTS ON THE NATION'S LEADING FESTIVAL OF LESBIAN, GAY & QUEER PERFORMANCE



The response to the 1996 IRA bombing of Manchester prompted an extraordinary flowering of the city centre, one crucial side effect being the regeneration of the damaged Royal Exchange building, to include alongside its established, often establishment, large-scale space a purpose-built studio opening the theatre to a dynamic programme of smaller scale work. The space has supported work from emerging visual theatre companies such as Mishimou alongside experimental new writing from the likes of Jackie Kay and Duncan Macmillan. In 1998 the refurbishment won the organisation the title of Theatre of the Year in the Barclays Theatre Awards. A massive reinvestment in the city has transformed its economic as well as urban landscape and attracted cultural investment in the form of the new Manchester International Festival (with considerable commissioning clout attached to its remit to programme only new work) and the large-scale Lowry in Salford Quays.

In Liverpool, winning the European City of Culture award for 2008 has stimulated a comparable period of unprecedented growth. Regional networks such as the Live Art Network established by Tamsin Drury have done vital work joining up venues across the North West to support programming and development, whilst creative programming from mid-scale venues such as Unity in Liverpool has ensured a continuous stream of nationally acclaimed theatrical experiment into the region.

As we see evidenced throughout this special feature, The North West is currently a hotbed for unique artist-focused initiatives, and one of the country's fastest-growing artistic regions. New opportunities to import larger scale work into the region will provide fruitful artistic stimulus, whilst many venues have realised the importance of forging key national, as well as regional, partnerships to foster the export of their work.

An essential date in the North West's cultural calendar is the annual queerupnorth International Festival, which takes place throughout Manchester every May.

Queerupnorth is Europe's most infamous festival of lesbian, gay and queer performance, and since 1992 has been commissioning, producing and presenting a wide range of theatre and performance work, alongside an eclectic programme of film, music, visual art and literature.

The festival was originally born with an identifiable queer aesthetic based on club culture, underground performance and identity politics, personified in artists such as Ursula Martinez, Duckie and Split Britches, all of whom contributed to the early festivals.

In more recent years, the artistic make up of the festival has diversified, reflecting a broadening of audible queer voices which has been

facilitated by the shifting political and social climates of the past decade. This year's festival presented a mixed theatrical bag, placing Ronnie Burkett's masterful puppetry alongside Polish live artist Leon Dziemaskiewicz, Rikki Beadle-Blair and his hip-hop inspired work, New York club sensation Taylor Mac (pictured), and Mojisola Adebayo's one woman show.

Alongside importing world class artists into the region each year, queerupnorth also develops homegrown talent, recently providing a platform for work by Manchester based artists such as Company Fierce, Quarantine, Doo-Cot and David Hoyle (the artist formerly known as The Divine David), to name but a few.

The festival is embraced by the full range of Manchester's theatres and performance spaces, with work programmed into venues from The Lowry to greenroom, via The Comedy Store and Contact Theatre and more inbetween. Beyond these traditional spaces, the programme has fully infiltrated Manchester and performances have sprung up in every corner of the city. In 2006 and 2007, work has been placed in spaces as diverse as Harvey Nichols brasserie and the Museum of Science and Industry, Canal St gay clubs and Northern Quarter jazz bars, libraries, cinemas, museums, and a Malmaison hotel room.

Under new artistic director Jonathan Best, queerupnorth is currently going from strength to strength. With an increasingly diverse programme, a growing strand of commissioned new work and strengthened relationships with the region's artists and venues, the festival is definitely one to keep an eye on.

See www.queerupnorth.com

LIVERPOOL 08 – EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

In a far-reaching programme of events, public art and public participation have been flagged up as key elements in Liverpool 08. One of the biggest free events will be a new project by Artichoke, the company who brought *The Sultan's Elephant* to London. Theatre, dance and performance highlights will include *Ghost Sonata*, an epic promenade produced by The People Show. Homotopia's *Liverpool Is Burning*, and *Three Sisters On Hope Street*, which sites Chekhov's story in the road that links Liverpool's two cathedrals. British Dance Edition will be held in Liverpool for the first time in 2008. Walk the Plank's theatre boat, The Fitzcarraldo will host a monthly platform event for new work in comedy, burlesque, magic, theatre, installation and impro, a programme specially commissioned for the Capital of Culture year. Walk the Plank's creative producer John Wassell is also working with artistic directors Nigel Jamieson and Jayne Casey and the Liverpool Culture Company for the opening ceremony of the Capital of Culture which will take place early 2008. See www.liverpool08.com

LIVE IN HOPE



HOPE ST LTD IS AN AWARD-WINNING ARTIST TRAINING CENTRE WHICH HAS PLAYED A FORMATIVE PART IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UK PHYSICAL THEATRE, CARNIVAL, YOUTH AND PARTICIPATORY ARTS. BECCY SMITH MEETS CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT CO-ORDINATOR, ALAN RICHARDSON

I meet Alan in a sunny streetside café in a stretch of Liverpool which feels continental on this warm July afternoon. The streets are busy with people, many of whom seem to be artists Alan knows or has worked with, who stop to greet us. It feels, immediately, worlds apart from the sprawling arts scene of the capital; brighter, more vibrant than I had been expecting. Growing up in the North West, my memories of the theatre scene are as a world remote and stridently middle class. Alan is at pains to point out that we're in the 'cultural quarter' and the experience here isn't necessarily characteristic of the place as a whole, but nevertheless it is clear that this is a city whose arts scene is present, vocal and multifarious.

Hope St Ltd occupies a three-storey block near the centre of town. The building includes two large rehearsal spaces, a basement workshop, and a 'common room' resource area, as well as the offices of both the school, its profit-making wing Culture Inc. and a number of supported companies, many of whom are graduates of their course. What makes the training offered by the school special is its longstanding commitment to collaborative, company-led creating. The model Richardson describes – of 20 apprentices per year, who together build a rounded collective of specialisms – is now *de rigueur* for much advanced theatre training, but what comes across clearly as he speaks is the rigour with which the school approaches this model. 'If we don't find the right level of competency at audition, we simply don't fill those places,' explains Richardson. It's a scrupulousness many other drama courses could learn from and in part explains the special atmosphere of the school – one graduate describes her experience there as both being 'part of a family', a feeling that persists long after graduation.

The emphasis is on a professional level of output. The three to five projects that student work on during their time there are all put out to a public audience in real venues, including the Unity Theatre (whose close partnership is a lynchpin of the course's structure). The production showing during my visit was *Sugar and Spice*, a theatrical examination of the slave trade led by Hilary Westlake (the internationally renowned director who, with David Gale, founded Lumiere and Son) working in collaboration with local filmmaker Mike Wight.

Westlake, when I met her later, expressed concerns about the breadth of the material, up against the contingencies of working on a relatively short process with students learning to engage with the new tools they wished to play with for the show. But *Sugar and Spice* played to a full house at the Unity, who engaged hungrily with the informative content and playful shifts in tone. This close engagement with their audience, perhaps reinforced by a longstanding commitment to community-focused art-making, as well as closely nurtured regional partnerships, is what grounds Hope St's artistic ambition, ensuring their work isn't simply about creating artists but also about communicating with audiences.

It's no surprise then that the course has spawned many successful long-term collaborations. Graduating companies include Big Wow, Ullaloom, Rejects Revenge Theatre Company and Fool's Proof Theatre. Momentum Theatre Company have built a name as one of the UK's most successful physical theatre companies touring across the country and abroad, recently collaborating with Derevo artist, Tanya Khabarova. Associate artists Company: Collisions have twice been showcased at the prestigious London International Mime Festival.

Recently, the school set up a programme called New Work Workshops, throwing together ten lead artists to develop ideas for cross-artform collaborations. Of the ideas formed, three or four per year will be selected, with these projects then forming the meat of the course offered to students. It's a bold decision – the content of the courses year on year might not be discovered until a matter of weeks before it begins, but it situates creativity and risk at the heart of the teaching process – qualities which capture the nature of the artform but are too often lost to the bureaucracy and obsession with quantifiable results that plagues both arts teaching and management. This licence to experiment has attracted artists of the highest calibre – this year alone boasting projects led by Hilary Westlake, John Fox, Andrea Earl and Kal Ross.

Recent funding changes have meant a shift from regional exclusivity. 25% of apprentices are now drawn from outside the NW, and Alan hopes further to build a more international team. Meanwhile his colleague, Hope St's director Peter Ward, is on a sabbatical, researching the impact that being European Capital of Culture has had in other cities, and investigating the possibilities of establishing a European style Creation Centre in Liverpool. Yet a definite emphasis on feeding the region remains at the heart of the organisation's ethos. Alan hopes that those who travel to attend the course will consider staying in the city.

A national pioneer, looking internationally for new models to fuel its artistic exploration, Hope St remains a quintessentially North-Western organisation, keenly aware of the value of the vast resources on its doorstep.

For further information about Hope Street and for details of their apprenticeships, please see www.hope-street.org or contact Alan Richardson on alan@hope-street.org

MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

MIF is the UK's first festival dedicated entirely to commissioned new work. Planned to run as a biennial, it aims to build Manchester's partnerships with key international venues and festivals. The inaugural Manchester International Festival, June–July 2007, focused particularly on music but brought with it some exciting theatrical highlights, which included: *Dead Wedding* by Faulty Optic; *Monkey: Journey to the West* by Damon Albarn, Jamie Hewlett and Chen Shi-Zeng; and *The Pianist* by Wdalyślaw Spillman. See www.manchesterinternationalfestival.com

- 01 | WALK THE PLANK'S THEATRE SHIP THE FITZCARRALDO DOCKED IN LIVERPOOL
- 02 | TAYLOR MAC. PHOTO STEVEN MENENDEZ
- 03 | SUGAR AND SPICE AT HOPE ST LTD. PHOTO ROBIN RICE
- 04 | THE ART CAR PARADE IN MANCHESTER

PANDA

THE ARTS ORGANISATION, NOT THE ENDANGERED BAMBOO-EATING BEAR. RIC WATTS EXPLAINS ALL

A major source of support for Manchester's emerging artist scene comes from a modestly sized but wide reaching organisation called PANDA – a catchy acronym for the more cumbersome Performing Arts Network and Development Agency.

PANDA was established in 2002 as a pilot model to provide business support to the booming performing arts sector in the city, which was being bolstered by a variety of showcase and developmental opportunities for emerging and established practitioners. To support an increasingly rich performance scene, a formalised network and development service was created, providing a source of sound business advice for those making work in the area. In the five years since its inception that organisation has thrived, and is now an integral part of the city's arts infrastructure.

PANDA supports the burgeoning performing arts sector in Manchester through an array of schemes and strands of work, all of which are designed to support artists at all levels of their practice.

The organisation runs an active network with over 650 members, who are offered weekly newsletters with training, platform and employment opportunities, alongside regular networking events, such as the annual (and infamous) Christmas party. More structured developmental work includes programmes of seminars and masterclasses taught by industry leaders, and the opportunity for tailored one-to-one advice surgeries, offering young companies in-depth discussion and advice around their business needs.

PANDA also 'incubates' artists, providing a two-year programme of structured development work, helping to turn fledgling performance companies into sustainable creative businesses. Previously incubated companies include Quarantine and Company Fierce, who collaborated on last year's acclaimed *Susan and Darren*. This year, the current Incubated Companies were offered the rare chance to showcase their work to the industry as part of the inaugural Manchester International Festival.

PANDA's work is now imbedded deeply within Manchester's artistic landscape, with many of the region's artists drawing on its support at some stage. Its remarkable success story is largely down to founder and director, Liz O'Neill, who has worked tirelessly and enthusiastically to establish the organisation. Liz has provided a support structure for many key artists in the region, and is a constant champion of new work emerging from Manchester – ensuring that the region continues to influence creativity in the twenty-first century.

For further information on PANDA see www.panda-arts.org.uk



04

OVER YONDER HILL

JOHN FOX REFLECTS ON SOME NORTH WEST ALTERNATIVES

There is a lot going on in the North West that doesn't receive much publicity. Much of it on the ground in the cracks between the big guys. Take Solfest for instance, a joyous music festival held every August Bank Holiday for the past three years, up near Silloth in North West Cumbria 10,000 people, mainly families, assemble in carnival guise for a celebratory weekend of bands and booze which is inspirational.

Then there is More Music in Morecambe under the artistic direction of Pete Moser, which has for a decade been a largely unsung flagship of community music/participatory arts – currently reaching well beyond Morecambe with *The Long Walk* an ambitious and healing musical work that brings together Chinese and local musicians in an invocation of the deaths of the 22 Chinese people who died cockling in 2003.

Whitewood and Fleming are another powerful force. Since Tim Fleming and Elaine Whitewood moved their company from Yorkshire to the Rusland Valley in South Cumbria a couple of years ago they have generated workshops and videos with 'looked after children' and produced numerous participatory events, bringing theatre with a world flavour to schools and halls around Barrow, Penrith and the West Coast.

In Barrow in Furness, The Ashton group directed by Rachael Ashton have been plugging away for 17 years with local actors such as John Hall, writers like Sarah Miller, and guest directors such as Noeline Kavanagh. Their theatre is well received on occasional circuit tours of established venues but they regularly maintain a local and exhausting creative focus with talented young people in a town still more dedicated to weaponry than wonder.

Other people in Barrow offer primary creative escape routes whether it is Art Gene with their international programme of mixed media contemporary visual art, Shoreline films with a steady input of training for local film-makers, or Ali Rigg the ex choir leader of Welfare State International, an exceptional singing teacher and performer with Tongue Tied & Twisted.

I have to declare an interest in Dalton in Furness (also in South Cumbria) as BoomDang, their street percussion band is run by my son Dan Fox and his work partner Therese Johnston. BoomDang have been around for nearly ten years and are a rigorous highly choreographed outfit who play tight raunchy sambas and more, and are in much demand at festivals locally and internationally, from Brussels and Belfast to Barcelona.

This is just a brief trawl though a few of the lesser known companies and people I am in touch with. It excludes major showcase and significant producing organisations like Grizedale Arts, the Ruskin centres at both Brantwood and Coniston, Abbot Hall, Blackwell, Cumbria Institute of the Arts, the Theatre by the Lake in Keswick, and The Duke's Playhouse in Lancaster who all produce vital necessary work.

'There is a palpable passion for experimentation in the North West. A close network of venues has thrown its doors open to new and challenging performance makers while increasing numbers of artist-led initiatives are putting on anything from anarchic cabarets to international exchanges for live artists.'

Richard Kingdom
Performance Programme Manager,
The Bluecoat Arts Centre, Liverpool

'I think the range of opportunities for new artists in this region at the moment is extraordinary. There's still space for new thinking on how artists might be assisted in their artistic development beyond the opportunity to show their work, and there needs to be more support for established artists to ensure that the role models are there, but it's hard to imagine a better landscape for new artists with strong work stepping out into professional practice.'

Neil MacKenzie
Artistic Director,
Alsager Arts Centre, Salford

'There's no doubt that the North West is one of the most active and vibrant regions for theatre in the country. The artists and organisations in this profile testify to that. Over the next few years we will build on this and make the most of the new opportunities that lie in the region's growing international profile. Major events such as Liverpool City of Culture 2008 and the Manchester International Festival provide obvious examples, but alongside this the work of organisations such as Quarantine and the Nuffield Theatre prove why the North West's reputation is so strong, and its influence is expanding on the world stage.'

Roddy Gauld
Theatre Officer,
Arts Council England (North West)



QUARANTINE BUTTERFLY. PHOTO SIMON BANHAM

Of the bigger venues The Nuffield Theatre at Lancaster originate and receive quantities of innovative work outside the mainstream – Forkbeard Fantasy are appearing there currently (October 2007).

Finally there is Littoral, the socio-political art based group working partially from their lump of woodland in the Langdales in mid Cumbria. Last week they presented an imaginative and unique mix of lectures and events to celebrate Kurt Schwitters. In the vacuumed relic of his last Merzbarn (desecrated or rescued, depending on your viewpoint, by Newcastle University in 1966) there was a sound installation (by Dan again as it happens) containing a recording of maybe Schwitters, performing wild generic sound poetry. It had me reaching for the brandy flask, for how many of us will be listened to in fifty years time?

John Fox is the founder and co-director of Welfare State International, which he archived on April Fool's Day 2006. He is now working both as a solo artist supported by Arts Council England, North West and collaboratively with his new company Dead Good Guides which he has started with Sue Gill. See www.deadgoodguides.com

Voices

ANNIE SPRINKLE & ELIZABETH STEPHENS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

We've been working together as artists since our first date, which was in July 2001. We had known each other's work for years and had met previously, but our first kiss on our first date was our first artistic collaboration. We then had sex for three days, a continuation of our collaboration. We are two artists in love. The Love Art Laboratory is the name for our current collaborative work. It is a lab: a bunch of experiments.

The first seven years of our project are based on the themes and colours of the chakras. This seven-year structure was inspired by Linda M. Montano's *14 Years of Living Art*. We get married every year, and each wedding takes a colour that corresponds to a chakra (the seven sacred sites of the body). We have had a red wedding in 2005 (security and survival), an orange wedding in 2006 (sexuality and creativity) and a yellow wedding in 2007 (courage and power). In 2008 we will hold a green wedding, with many people taking part in a mass 'domestic partner' ceremony. Green is the colour of the heart chakra, representing love and compassion. The green wedding will take place as part of a major event in Santa Cruz which will bring together many different artists who are rethinking the relationship between art and social practice.

This may be the end for *Exposed: experiments in love, sex, death and art* which has been touring for two years as part of The Love Art Laboratory (recently seen in the UK, Chelsea Theatre September 2007, as part of the International Workshop Festival); we feel ready to move onto something else. The work was created at a time when we were dealing with breast cancer, with survival, and we perhaps need to leave that time behind. We welcomed the opportunity to look death in the face, to deal with it, to make fun of it. But then it was for real, and now we feel it is more and more like 'acting' the memory rather than living it. We are not actors; we know shit about theatre and acting!

Love is the taboo subject nowadays, not sex.

Art about love has become stereotyped, trivialised. We are bored of art about sex. Thirty years on, sex based performance art has become mundane, the norm. It is everywhere. The students we teach are obsessed by blood and guts. We are now interested in art about love. Love is the new sex. Love is a political weapon. We make love bombs: weapons of mass seduction. We are not interested in engaging in any sort of way with George Bush. George Bush is an ... 'asshole' is too much of a compliment. George Bush is a haemorrhoid. You can quote us on that!

We will continue to speak against the war, to focus on love rather than killing people.

If you are against war, why make images of war?

Why stay with the problem? Why focus on the violence? It's no longer radical; we need new strategies. We want to model our beliefs about political intervention.

Age changes us. When you are older, your focus shifts. Sex stays important, but the enjoyment of 'married life', of companionship even more so.



LOVE ART LAB. PHOTO JULIAN CASH

We are interested in making interventionist artworks, making more work outside of theatres and galleries. Our Kiss piece is being performed for the first time as a group artwork, in public, on the Kings Road, as part of the International Workshop Festival.

Teaching is vital. Universities remain just about the only place you can have a radical stance and make a difference, despite the clampdowns on education. We are interested in sharing and learning.

Being married and working together is really good.

We have both previously worked in artistic collaborations with lovers, with various degrees of success, but this works well. We take risks together. We live away from the city (in Boulder Creek, California). We currently travel a lot, but would like to spend more time at home. The year of our green wedding will be an opportunity to explore the heart, and to investigate environmental issues for artists. We are mostly interested in art as life, and life as art.

The big issues for us are love and equality:

political equality for all; racial and sexual equality. We are anti war; we believe in the power of love.

Annie Sprinkle is a performance artist whose many works include Public Cervix Announcement, Annie Sprinkle's Herstory of Porn, and Post Porn Modernist, the last (which came to the UK in the 1990s) documenting her 'sex positive feminist' journey from 'whorehouse to arthouse' via the creation of her alter-ego Anya, the sacred prostitute. She has the interesting distinction of being the first porn star known to have earned a Ph.D.

Elizabeth Stephens is a multimedia artist working in performance, sculpture, installation, web-based media and photography. In one of her most recent projects she acted as a 'travel avatar' for other people, investigating the US geographical, and political and social landscape. She is currently the chair of the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) Art Department where she teaches intermedia and sculpture.

Together, Annie and Elizabeth have created the Love Art Lab, an ongoing project. For current and future events, see www.loveartlab.com

Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens talked to Dorothy Max Prior at Chelsea Theatre, September 2007.

BROOKLYN BULL



WHAT ARE THESE TWO MEN DOING WITH ALL THAT CLAY? DOROTHY MAX PRIOR HEADS TO NEW YORK TO FIND OUT

It's Saturday night and the sun is setting over the waterfront. I walk back through the Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park with a last glance over to the Manhattan skyline, blue-steel buildings gently lit by the fading red sun, framed on either side by the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges; now walk along cobbled streets, past graffitied warehouse fronts to Water Street. A couple are kissing under a streetlamp. From a bar beneath the Brooklyn Bridge comes the chorus of *Night Fever*. Sometimes life is just like the movies...

This area (known, rather bizarrely, as DUMBO – an acronym for 'Down Under the Manhattan/Brooklyn Overpass') was requisitioned by New York artists when Manhattan became too expensive; the abandoned warehouses transformed into living spaces and artists' studios – although judging by the number of chic restaurants down neighbouring streets I'd say not for much longer.

"ART COMES AND GOES – IT IS FINE TO MAKE
& THEN TO DESTROY" MIQUEL BARCELÓ

One of these buildings is St Ann's Warehouse, an arts centre which moved here in 2001. In its earlier incarnation it had been predominantly a music venue, but artistic director Susan Feldman took the opportunity that the new space offered to create a unique cross-artform venue. Acclaimed past productions have included Lou Reed and John Cale's *Songs for Drella*, the Mabou Mines *Dollhouse* and numerous works by The Wooster Group. (New York's premiere experimental theatre company, finding their own premises on Manhattan's Wooster Street a little restrictive for larger scale work, use the space at St Ann's to create and preview new work.) St Ann's has also gained a reputation for its presentation of prestigious and innovative European work.

Tonight's offering is *Paso Doble*, the acclaimed collaboration between French-Yugoslavian choreographer Josef Nadj and Catalan artist Miquel Barceló.

This genre-defying work – the creation of a series of living artworks as Nadj and Barceló engage energetically with a set made of red clay – was first seen at the Festival d'Avignon in 2006, when Nadj was the 'artiste associé'.

IT IS HARD TO THINK OF ANYTHING THAT FITS THAT
TERM VISUAL THEATRE BETTER THAN PASO DOBLE

There, it was created/performed (it is hard even to find the right verb for the process of enacting this work) in an old chapel, the Celestine. It is not what you'd call an easily tourable piece of work – 1,000 kilos of French clay are needed for each outing – and the artists are pretty picky about where it gets presented: so far, the only other places it has been to are Paris (at Peter Brook's Bouffes du Nord) and here at St Ann's. The next place that this show will be going to in this rather exclusive and limited 'tour' will be London. It will be a highlight of the London International Mime Festival 2008, presented in collaboration with BITE – taking over the pristine environment of the Barbican Theatre for a week in January.

So here we are, local New Yorkers and a gaggle of eager British press representatives, gathered up on this lovely September evening, keen to see this extraordinary work for ourselves. As we enter the space, we see, on the low stage, what appears to be a free-standing slab of white-coated clay, at right angles to a red slab carpeting the ground. The lights dim, but there is no sound or movement. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, the back wall starts to bubble. Low-key swampy sounds become more urgent, the movements of the now blistering and cracking wall of clay accompanied by what sounds like slurping quicksand. Two men in dark suits appear, one tall and lean, one short and stocky. They fetch tools and start work. The stocky one (Barceló) works industriously, creating a field of little mountain peaks. The lean one (Nadj) is more anarchic, stomping around, gouging out lumps of clay which he forms into balls and throws at the back wall.



"HOW DO I BREATHE WHEN COVERED
IN CLAY? I DON'T!" JOSEF NADJ

A kind of contest is set up, with each man seemingly following his own path, each urgently clawing at the back wall, forming shapes and patterns. Images arise, associations abound. Grotesque face, lone eye, sunburst, skeleton, tree.... Cave paintings, mythological beasts, sacrifice, archaeological digs.... Like watching clouds scurrying by, just as you determine an image it changes. At one point Barceló brings on a hose full of the white clay slurry and covers up the red, only for the two to start in again, clawing away the white to reveal the red below. There are moments of stillness, when just for a few seconds the clay remains as a 'finished' 3D picture; then, like Picasso's sand paintings in the Ray Bradbury short story, the image gets washed away, It existed, we witnessed it, and now it's gone.

Next, each artist in turn fetches a ready-made clay pot (unfired clay, I hastened to add) and places it over his head, squashing the clay into a grotesque mask. More and more pots are brought on, each larger than the last. The dynamic between the two shifts: suddenly, we have a hunter and a hunted, a matador and a bull. Nadj is now looking like the Minotaur in the centre of the labyrinth, his head ridiculously large; monstrous but vulnerable. Barceló corners Nadj, placing ever bigger mounds of clay over him until he is absorbed into the back wall, overpainted white, a living statue, a body stone-frozen in lava...

After the bows and applause, the audience takes a while to leave, hovering around the stage and poking at the clay. The artists look bizarre close up, the suits wrecked, hair a tangled mess, every bit of visible skin dyed red. Barceló is happy to chat to people, but Nadj looks wiped out. Only the promise of a post-show discussion persuades the excited audience to leave them alone and move out of the auditorium.

The 'Q and A' session is an odd one: the artists, now washed but somewhat slightly dazed, stand on one side of the bar, and the audience make a semi-circle in front of them. It's an informed audience, and one that seems to divide up into people with a 'visual arts' sensibility and those with a 'theatre/performance' awareness. We learn that the process started after Josef Nadj had seen Barceló's work. There came the idea to work with walls of clay, using bodies. Initially, the idea was workshopped with lots of dancers, but Nadj found this 'ugly – like Las Vegas'. He convinced Barceló that it should be the two of them 'performing', Barceló confesses that until that point any involvement in 'theatre' had not occurred to him, although he feels that 'painting can be very theatrical too!' We learn that every night is different, but essentially the piece is tightly choreographed (and isn't it odd that people think that work of this sort isn't carefully orchestrated; that it somehow just happens?) with variations mostly in the 'masks' section: 'because we can't see what we are doing!' The soundscape is created live by Alain Mahé, mixing recordings from previous performances with sound generated in the moment. The title of the piece? A reference to the dance based on the moves in a Spanish bullfight. Someone asks Nadj: How do you breathe when you are covered in clay? And he answers 'I don't!'. The most interesting part of the discussion circles around the ephemeral nature of the piece. Those of us who work in the performing arts are used to the idea that something exists temporarily.

For most visual artists, the idea that there will be an artefact that remains as the end result of the process is still current (witness the furore around Damien Hirst's leaky tanks). Some of the audience seem almost upset by the idea that the work is of the moment, then gone. But to Barceló, this is not something he is bothered by: 'art comes and goes' – it's fine to make and then destroy, to erase the work. Although they photograph each night's final outcome, they – like land artist Andy Goldsworthy – see these photographs as something other. What happens on stage is the art; a shared space for the artists and the audience. Like the narrator of that Bradbury story who moves on from frantically trying to preserve the sand art from the incoming tide to realising he was honoured to have been the witness to something unique, it is good to learn that everything changes and the temporary is to be relished; what happens is for whoever is there.

The images that remain after the show – in photographs or in the mind's eye – are an evocation, a memory trace; but really, you have to be there. If you have the opportunity to see the piece at the coming London International Mime Festival, seize the moment. The term visual theatre is used to describe all sorts of work, but it is hard to think of anything that fits that term better than *Paso Doble* – visual art and time-based performance meeting head on; a fleeting moment in time not to be missed.

The US premiere of Paso Doble, a production of the Festival d'Avignon by Josef Nadj and Miquel Barceló, was presented by The Institut Ramon Llull in association with St Ann's Warehouse and the Cultural Services of the French Embassy. For further on the venue or this presentation, see www.stannswarehouse.org

The UK premiere of Paso Doble will be a joint production of the London International Mime Festival and Barbican International Theatre Event (BITE) 2008. It will be presented at the Barbican Theatre 16–18 January 2008. See www.mimefest.co.uk

COME TOGETHER - CONNECTING WORLDS APART

BIANCA MASTROMINICO ON A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT THAT CROSSES CULTURAL DIVIDES

WHEN BRAZILIAN DANCER AND CHOREOGRAPHER

AUGUSTO OMOLÚ arrived in London last May from Denmark (where he works with Odin Teatret), accompanied by his wife, the Italian writer and journalist Lisa Ginzburg, he didn't think that they would have had to spend almost an hour at Heathrow airport being questioned by British police. He didn't speak English, but she did, explaining that he was an artist who had come to Britain to lead a workshop. The police seemed not to believe him and asked for physical proof, which he didn't have, so they searched his luggage and fired off remarks such as: how could Augusto lead a workshop in the UK if he doesn't know the language? So why exactly did this highly skilled classical dancer, born and raised within a family tradition of the Brazilian Candomblé, attract the attention of the Heathrow police? Because of his black skin? Let's hope not!

Augusto came to the UK, invited by Organic Theatre, for a five-day workshop in Bristol from 7–12 May 2007 as part of our International Training and Performance Residencies programme. 'The key to achieve things is freedom,' he said at some point in the workshop, 'and to achieve freedom you need respect, will and love.'

Almost a revolutionary slogan in the working space of the Tobacco Factory, at the heart of a vibrant western city still coming to terms with its obscure past as a major British port for the African slave trade, especially with the Heathrow incident in mind – a confined episode, but one which reflects the present state of UK society, celebrating diversity yet in growing danger of becoming pre-emptive and control-freakish, wary of strangers and strangeness.

For his part, Augusto Omolú, under the direction of Eugenio Barba, has already accomplished a successful 'intercultural exchange' with British theatrical heritage through his performance *Ôro de Otelo*, a version of Shakespeare's *Othello*, based on the movements and steps of the traditional Orixá dances, from which he presented an extract at the end of his residency. 'This work,' says Augusto, 'originated in my work sessions with Sanjukta Panigrahi, the late Odissi dancer. As we didn't speak each other's language, we began to improvise using non-verbal communication, letting our feelings and bodies speak; until we found a dialogue through dance, where Sanjukta was dancing according to her Indian music and gods, while I found a correspondence with my Orixás'.



'ONLY ART CAN BRING CULTURES TOGETHER,' writes Kottakal Sasidharan Nair in his biographical notes on his life as a Kathakali, BharataNatyam and Kuchipudi dancer, teacher and choreographer for over 40 years.

When he arrived in London for the first time, he had never left India and couldn't speak a word of English. Sasi had been chosen to perform with a western group by his school of Kathakali dancing in Kottakal (Kerala), where his parents had brought him at the age of eight, too poor to feed their youngest and last child after donating everything to Gandhi, to raise funds for the freedom struggle. 'Many boys ran away from the school as they didn't like the rigorous and disciplined work of studying postures and mudras from early morning to late at night.' But he stayed, got to like it and became very good.

That's why he was in London, where he experienced his first cultural shock in the form of a bizarre meeting. Searching for a post office, he was walking down the street, wearing a white shirt over his wrap-around lunge, and his first pair of shoes (shiny black leather shoes with ribbon-like laces, bought just before embarking for Europe) when suddenly a woman started to shout at him, and when he tried to run away, began to follow him. Like in a Satyajit Ray film, the bewildered young Indian dancer, awkward in his stiff new leather shoes, is chased by the perseverant English lady, who finally reaches him and pushes him down, then pulls off both his shoes, picks up one and puts it back on his foot. 'But not on the one it had been on; and so she did with the second shoe, then she pointed at her own shoes and showed me, a dancer, how I should walk... She took my hand and we went to the post office, after which she brought me back to my new lodgings... All I could do to thank her was to bow in Indian fashion, my hands joined together, with grateful tears in my eyes.'

01 | SASI NAIR
02 | MILÓN MÉLA
03 | AUGUSTO OMOLÚ. PHOTO FLAVIA DOMINGUES D'AVILA

We met Sasi in the UK two years ago. At one of his demonstrations of Kathakali for university students, I noticed that two people had watched the whole performance with their feet on the back of the chairs in the front row, right in his face. I asked him if he had found it a disturbance; he said he had seen the feet, but that in his tradition you never question the audience's behaviour. This wasn't the first time he faced a similar casual approach by students of the western world – where, following his first visit to London, he has taught and performed extensively. In Los Angeles, at the Pomona College of Claremont University, during the initial days of training for a production he was directing, 'some students lay down, some dozed, some chewed gum, some smoked... To me, accustomed to strict discipline and order in behaviour for years of learning, this was strangely disconcerting...' But through the work, the Californian students were taken by the fascination of Kathakali, endlessly questioning him about how it had evolved out of a combination of song, music, dance and acting by body language and gestures, as well as about the styles of acting out emotions.

'They worked hard to imagine the Gajagamana (the movement of the elephant), the Sansagamana (the movement of the swan); the western mind, once decided, is able to achieve anything,' he says, but being used since childhood to learning by watching in silence, he found that '...indeed, the mind and the conversation together was very difficult...'

Sasi Nair will lead a residency in Bristol from 12–16 November 2007.

THE OBSERVATION OF SILENCE AS A WAY TO ACHIEVE ALERTNESS, settles the mind through self-observation and increase awareness of being in an environment, is one of the most important basic rules given at Theatre House - Khele Danga (Village of Red Earth), in Bengal. This international work-centre, created by Indian director Abani Biswas just a few miles from Shantiniketan, north of Calcutta, is a project and a place inspired by his work with Jerzy Grotowski in the multicultural Theatre of Sources project, in which Abani participated from 1979 to 1983.

The centre hosts Milòn Méla, literally translated as 'the coming together fair', which involves traditional artists from various Indian performance disciplines and of differing cultures and religions – Hindu Bauls and Muslim Fakir musicians, Chau and Gotipua dancers, Kalaripayattu martial artists, Patua storytellers and painters – invited from artistic communities in the rural and tribal zones of India; 'cultural reserves' whose life is in constant peril. Since its launch in 1986, Milòn Méla has created conditions to encourage original and creative work from the participating artists, as well as providing them with material resources for their daily life, and that of their families and communities.



The group of sixteen artists will make their first ever visit to the UK in May 2008, in what will be the third and major residency of the project, in collaboration with The British Grotowski Project at University of Kent, and the School of Art and Performance at the University of Plymouth. They will present workshops, performances and parades in Bristol.

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE

RESIDENCIES focuses on the body in performance, through the crossover between traditional non-western performance practices and contemporary western physical theatre. They provide an opportunity to learn from artists who live in their body and whose bodies are the living presence of disappearing traditions; masters who have chosen to transmit their practice while embracing a personal journey of creative challenges, confronting their roots and their identities with other cultures different from theirs, in an endless process of learning, researching and valuing the essence of their art.

The link between the practices of Augusto Omolú, Sasi Nair and Milòn Méla lies in the importance given to the artistic path as a means for spiritual growth; the belief that art can be a life-changing experience; the cultural values of practical knowledge and technique; the need of rituals to connect with our inner sense of self and creativity.

For Organic Theatre it means that as theatre-makers we should constantly try to sustain a unified artistic vision capable of bringing people together to enjoy and celebrate themselves. Above all, creating the conditions for things to happen – connecting worlds apart.

*Bianca Mastrominico is a performer, writer and co-director of Organic Theatre www.organictheatre.co.uk
The International Training and Performance Residencies are organised in collaboration with Tobacco Factory, Asian Arts Agency and Theatre Bristol, supported by Bristol City Council and funded by Arts Council England. To book or to find out further information please contact Bianca on info@organictheatre.co.uk*

MIME IS DEAD -



NOLA RAE
PAYS TRIBUTE TO
FRIEND & MENTOR,
MARCEL MARCEAU

LONG LIVE MIMÉ!

My father took me to see Marceau perform in London at the Apollo Theatre when I was 16. The memory of the audience in the balcony that night, leaning forward with rapt, almost breathless, concentration, focusing on the ageless and timeless man in white on the large dark stage, endures even now, so many years later. Wonderful! I left the theatre not wanting to break the magic by speaking. Marceau had made words redundant. My father and I walked to the Tube without saying a word and I don't think we said anything until we got home.

I later met Marceau in Malmo in Sweden where I was working as a dancer. I asked him if I could join his school. He simply said 'yes'. In Paris, I found Marceau was a man of many words. In fact he was quite a linguist and would often start a sentence in French, switch to English and finish in German. He had a way with words and his turn of phrase was poetic and profound. As a teacher he was very patient and always encouraging. He would find something good to say, even about our most abysmal improvisations, and then he would work his magic by showing us how we could have done it better. We could only stand back in awe. His students adored him, as did his audiences.

Marceau once told me that it took him ten years to silence his audiences. He started playing in Paris in small cafe theatres where the public was unused to silence. To hide their unease, they would whistle tunelessly. From these small beginnings Marceau went on to conquer large stages in some 100 countries, made possible by his great artistry. He made you forget that he had not spoken a word, because he always had so much to say.

Marceau had a disconcerting way of becoming a character he was discussing. He once described Harpo Marx to us and for a moment Harpo was in front of us – we all gasped. He had party pieces that involved speaking *Grammelot* (the gobbledygook language developed by the Commedia del Arte). He could 'speak' even difficult languages like Danish and Swedish and he had a character to go with each 'language'. His 'Frenchman' was a Parisian taxi driver. Marceau has influenced countless performers and he has had many imitators. I asked him if this worried him and he said simply: 'What can I do about it?' I will always remember him as a very human man, poetic, driven, with an electrifying energy and a wicked sense of humour. He had a strong sense of integrity and was a generous and courageous performer and an artist without peer.

We have lost a unique man of the theatre and he will always live in the memories of those who were lucky enough to have seen his elegant and beautiful *Pantomimes du Style* and his endearing clown Bip, the signature with which he signed his letters.

'I WAS TOUCHED BY THE SOUL OF CHAPLIN'



'MIME IS NOT AN
IMITATOR BUT A CREATOR'

MARCEL MARCEAU, MASTER OF 'L'ART DU SILENCE', HAS DIED.

He was born Marcel Mangel, on March 22 1923, in Strasbourg in France, the son of Anne Werzberg and Charles Mangel, a kosher butcher. When war broke out, and France was occupied by the Nazis, the teenage Marcel fled to South West France, changing his name from Mangel to Marceau to escape detection by the Gestapo. He was a great fan of Charlie Chaplin, and the first inklings of his immense talent emerged as, hidden with other children in safe houses, he entertained them with his impersonations and silent sketches. Later, he joined the Resistance, helping Jewish children to escape France to the safety of neutral Switzerland. His war efforts sadly could not help his own father, who was arrested, deported and eventually murdered in Auschwitz concentration camp in 1944.

After the war, he enrolled as a student in Charles Dullin's School of Dramatic Art in the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre in Paris, where he studied with Dullin and the great master of corporeal mime, Étienne Decroux, who had also taught Jean-Louis Barrault. Marceau joined Barrault's company and was cast as Baptiste (the role Barrault had interpreted in the legendary film *Les Enfants du Paradis*). Marceau's performance won him acclaim and encouraged him to present his first one-man silent play or 'mimodrama', as he chose to call them.

In 1947, Marceau created the character that would remain his best known and loved for the rest of his life: Bip the clown, a white-faced naïf in a striped top and a black silk opera hat sprouting a red flower. This was a departure from the austere classicism of Decroux's corporeal mime technique, which eschewed costume and music: in effect, a return to the romance of the 19th century Pierrot tradition established by Debureau – although it can be argued that the discipline of Decroux's technique gave Marceau the physical dexterity that informed his work. His silent exercises, much parodied in later years as world fame came to him, include *The Cage* (in which he struggles out of one invisible enclosure only to find himself in another), *Walking Against the Wind* (the acknowledged inspiration for Michael Jackson's Moonwalk, in turn the influence on liquid dance and body popping), *The Mask Maker*, and his exploration of the ages of man: Youth, Maturity, Old Age and Death.



'IT'S GOOD TO SHUT UP SOMETIMES'

'THE PEOPLE WHO CAME BACK FROM THE NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS COULDN'T TALK ABOUT IT; THEY DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO EXPRESS IT... MAYBE THAT HAS COUNTED SUBCONSCIOUSLY IN MY CHOICE OF SILENCE'

From the 1950s until his last appearances in 2006, Marceau performed all over the world: North and South America, Africa, Australia, China, Japan, South East Asia, Russia, and Europe. A notable UK appearance was at the London International Mime Festival in 1995. Although he had performed as a solo artist on many previous occasions, this was the first time that he had appeared in this country with an ensemble. The production was a new version of Gogol's *The Overcoat*, a piece first staged in 1951 by the Compagnie de Mime Marcel Marceau. He also gave a fascinating and memorable lecture - the first time that British audiences had had the opportunity to hear Marceau speak in public.

Over the years, he made many TV and film appearances; films include *First Class*, in which he played 17 roles; *Shanks*, in which he played a deaf and mute puppeteer; as Professor Ping in *Barbarella*; and in a cameo as himself in Mel Brooks' *Silent Movie*, in which, with intended irony, he is the only actor with a speaking part, uttering a single word – 'Non!'

In 1978, Marceau established his own school in Paris: École Internationale de Mimodrame de Paris, Marcel Marceau. In 1996, he established the Marceau Foundation to promote mime in the United States.

'TO COMMUNICATE THROUGH SILENCE IS A LINK BETWEEN THE THOUGHTS OF MAN'

'I HAVE SPENT MORE THAN HALF A LIFETIME TRYING TO EXPRESS THE TRAGIC MOMENT'

'WHAT SCULPTORS DO IS REPRESENT THE ESSENCE OF GESTURE. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN MIME IS ATTITUDE'

The French Government conferred its highest honour on Marceau, making him an Officier de la Légion d'Honneur. In November 1998, President Chirac named Marceau a Grand Officer of the Order of Merit; and he was an elected member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin, the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, and the Académie des Beaux-Arts of the Institut de France. America has always honoured and respected Marceau and the art of mime: he holds honorary doctorates from Ohio State University, Linfield College, Princeton University and the University of Michigan. In 1999 New York City declared March 18 to be Marcel Marceau Day.

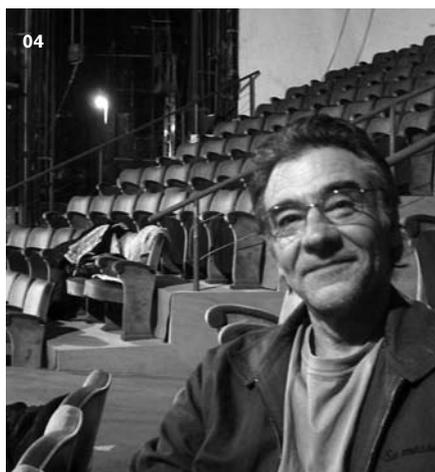
Marceau passed away on 22 September 2007. He died of a heart attack in his home, age 84.

Obituary by Dorothy Max Prior. Additional information and help: Joseph Seelig & Helen Lannaghan, directors London International Mime Festival.

01 | MARCEAU UNMASKED! JEANINE THOMPSON WITH MARCEL MARCEAU. PHOTO KEVIN FITZSIMONS
02 | COMPAGNIE MARCEL MARCEAU IN *THE OVERCOAT* AT LIMF 1995. PHOTO SYLVIA MERCIER
03 | MARCEL MARCEAU AS BIP. PHOTO SYLVIA MERCIER



RENEGOTIATIONS



PIPPA BAILEY INTRODUCES TOTAL THEATRE'S LATEST PROJECT

Renegotiations is a peer mentoring project for six established practitioners: Siobhan Davies, Rose English, Tyrone Huggins, Dick McCaw, Ian Spink and Lois Weaver. Started in Summer 2007, the project will evolve over the next year and while this project is developing, we will follow its progress through talking to the participants.

I meet Dick McCaw in his garden. It is late summer and he offers me tea and an apple – a fabulously crisp, sweet and sharp apple. It seems deliciously apt. Dick helped develop the renegotiations project with former Total Theatre director, Felicity Hall. He named the project and speaks passionately about the motivation behind it. 'It was conceived as a vehicle for development; one can become stale without development. Health and creativity are both vital for practitioners; we must have an ability to bounce back, a plasticity, an essential give. There is also an ethic behind renegotiation. I am in my fifties but I can't sit back with imaginary pipe and slippers and stop changing.'

Dick is living proof. He left the International Workshop Festival after nine years as director and was in his mid-forties when he decided to retrain as a Feldenkrais practitioner. He underplays the bravery of this decision and is enthusiastic about this new stage of his life. 'I can do things now that I didn't even know before, it is simply wonderful.' And yet he is conscious of the fact that this move in his own life is at odds with traditional ideas about hierarchy and power. 'I am interested in horizontal rather than vertical relations. All is in movement and in constant renegotiation. But power structures are based in stasis rather than in movement. I want to know about the state that is emerging, rather than the "state" as a fixed notion.'

The renegotiations group are a formidable collection of artists with a vast amount of skill and knowledge between them. All of them are or have been mentors. In Greek mythology, Mentor was a friend of Odysseus, the Greek king of Ithaca and the main hero in Homer's epic poem, the *Odyssey*. When Odysseus left for the Trojan War he placed Mentor in charge of his son, Telemachus, and of his palace. This is the source of the modern use of the word mentor: a trusted friend, counselor and guide. 'Within the group there is such knowledge, that you learn so much by talking with, or even watching a show with any of its members. A conversation with Tyrone has helped me understand the mechanics of human movement from a new perspective simply because he was trained as an engineer.'

Renegotiations is funded through the Cultural Leadership Programme, a two-year Treasury funded investment in excellence in leadership across the creative and cultural industries in the UK. By supporting an ambitious range of activities and opportunities, the programme aims to nurture and develop world class, dynamic and diverse leaders for the 21st century. 'Leadership' is one of the buzzwords flying through the cultural sector, but this project is significantly different because the idea of peer mentoring, artists leading and learning from each other as equals, challenges the traditional relationship between mentor and protégé. Dick muses, 'I have never done anything by myself. When I started the Mediaeval Players with Carl Heap, we agreed that sometimes I led him and sometimes he led me, it was like a relay between us. I have started things and so I was that force that made things happen but always with other people. Now, I am less keen to be a leader, I want to support people who want to lead. My job when mentoring is to allow people to live through difficult moments, to encourage them, because fear and doubt are very creative.'

At the first meeting of the Renegotiations artists, some time was spent trying to determine how this new model of shared learning might work. This exploration is at the very beginning and so much is still unknown. Discovering how will be an ongoing part of the process.

'The conventional image of a leader is of someone out in front. I have always liked to lead from the side or from some distance behind. There is an inappropriateness of leading someone by showing them your back. If you want to lead from the front then the beauty and danger is to lead by holding out your hand, and then advancing backward into the uncertain future, but your eyes on your partner with an occasional glance to the path.'

I wonder why there seems to be such anxiety about cultural leadership. Dick responds, 'Of course people are looking for the way. There isn't a way. You find your way by walking it, listening to the process, finding where things creak, how they run and flow. It's a continual relay between experience, modelling, testing and then off you go again. But I could never do you as well as you do you. There is a fabulous non exchangeability about human beings.'

Finally, inspired in that beautiful garden with apples and tea in the August sunshine, Dick summed up why the opportunity to renegotiate is so valuable to him, 'I have tramped through the desert of no money and no recognition. This project is an oasis, a beautiful pool in which to look at your reflection. All we can do is offer time and space to each other, in which we can all reflect on where we want to go and where we have been. None of us know each other very well and we are on a journey together'.

THE RENEGOTIATIONS ARTISTS

Dick McCaw was a co-founder of the Actors Touring Company (in 1979) and The Medieval Players (in 1981) for whom he produced until they closed in 1992. In 1993 he was appointed Artistic Director of the International Workshop Festival (IWF) and in 1995 began a series of seven themed festivals under the general title of A Body of Knowledge, each of which addressed one fundamental theme of performance: Energy, Movement, Voice, Dialogue, Rhythm, Character and Space. In September 2001 he left IWF to write up a PhD Thesis on the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 - 1975) and his influence on Eastern European Theatre. He was awarded a Doctorate in December 2003 and in that year he also began training to be a Feldenkrais practitioner. He teaches movement and theatre at Royal Holloway College, University London. His book, *An Eye For Movement* was published by Brechin books in 2006, and he has been commissioned by Routledge to edit and introduce a *Companion to Rudolf Laban*. In 2005 he edited DVD ROM documentations on Phelim McDermott and Clive Barker, with ones on Warren Lamb and Geraldine Stephenson in 2006.

Siobhan Davies (CBE) is a distinguished choreographer. She has worked with London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Second Stride, Rambert Dance Company, the Royal Ballet and English National Opera. In 1988 she established the Siobhan Davies Dance Company and this year the Siobhan Davies Studios were completed.

Rose English has been writing, directing and performing her own unique performances for over thirty years in venues as varied as Tate Britain, Serpentine Gallery, Royal Court Theatre, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Lincoln Centre New York and Sydney and Adelaide Festivals. Her performances have ranged from early site-specific collaborations, to acclaimed solos, to large-scale spectacles.

Ian Spink is a renowned choreographer and director. In 1982, he co-founded Second Stride with Siobhan Davies and later became sole artistic director until 1996. Since then Ian has continued his freelance work, including choreography for Rambert Dance Company and directing with the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow. He is currently Artistic Director of Citymoves Dance Agency in Aberdeen.

Tyrone Huggins is a writer for theatre, dance and radio, including *Choo Choo Ch' Boogie*, *The Carver Chair* and *Emigrating Home*; as well as *Garrett Augustus Morgan* for the Science Museum, London. In 1987 he founded Theatre of Darkness, currently producing his Inheritance *Quartet of Caribbean* diaspora. He has also written essays on culture, theatre, race and memory

Lois Weaver was co-founder of Spiderwoman Theatre, the WOW Theatre in New York and Artistic Director of Gay Sweatshop Theatre in London. She has been a performer, director, and writer with the Split Britches Company since 1980. Her interests include live art, solo performance, feminist and lesbian theatre, performance and human rights, and performance and technology.

- 01 | SIOBHAN DAVIES. PHOTO GAUTIER DEBLONDE
- 02 | DICK McCAW
- 03 | ROSE ENGLISH. PHOTO HUGO GLENDINNIG
- 04 | IAN SPINK
- 05 | LOIS WEAVER
- 06 | TYRONE HUGGINS

REVIEWS FROM EDINBUR



Sadari Movement Laboratory
Woyzeck
Aurora Nova St Stephen's

**Winner: Total Theatre Award
for Best Physical Performance**

A large ensemble of performers – and chairs! – bring us an exciting physical interpretation of Georg Büchner's famously unfinished 19th century tragedy, *Woyzeck*. It's all here: the madness, the murder, the seductions, the medical humiliations, the eating of peas... all set to the tango music of Astor Piazzolla.

There is wonderful ensemble work, with precise choreography that is strongly rooted in European mime and movement theatre tradition (although the company is Korean): sometimes, in its use of repeated gesture and tongue-in-cheek humour, reminiscent of Pina Bausch, and at other times, in its acrobatic encounters with the chairs and the use of them as frames for the human body, reminiscent of Josef Nadj (who also created a physical theatre interpretation of *Woyzeck* a decade or so ago – it is a popular choice). The engagement with the physical space and wonderful lighting design are what we would expect of a director who has trained in Lecoq's renowned scenographic method at the Laboratoire d'Etude du Mouvement (LEM). But mostly it is its own good self. The piece could possibly be subtitled '1,001 things to do with a chair' – if you think that you've seen everything in physical theatre that involves a combination of human body and chair, think again... in *Woyzeck*, the chairs are worked relentlessly: they divide the space, become buildings or cages or beds, or percussion instruments, or dance partners – particularly lovely is a military cha cha. The only quibble is with the use of surtitled quotes from the play, which seem unnecessary – the minimal amount of spoken text (in Korean and English) seems enough without the added reinforcement of these scene-setters.

Dorothy Max Prior



**1927 Between the Devil and
the Deep Blue Sea**
Underbelly

**Winner: Total Theatre Award
for Best Emerging Company**

The lights catch the eye of the bowler-hatted pianist (Miss Lillian Henley), poised adroitly at her instrument, surveying the audience with a pursed smile. A key is struck and the show begins. Using mime, live music, and a mix of film and live 2D animation, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* is a cornucopia of lush visuals that evoke the year of company's title, 1927. Brilliantly crafted vignettes fly off the stage and into our subconscious – and it is funny as hell too. Although the piece owes much to sketch comedy in its construction, it also borrows heavily from the dark imagery of Surrealists Georges Bataille and Man Ray. Each new tale slithers from the stage with equal measures of hilarity and vicious glee.

There's careful attention to detail and a sinister strangeness as we are taken to a macabre land of creepy twins, dismembered athletes and ghost cats and dogs.

We are led by the hand into this strange world by Miss Suzanne Andrade and Miss Esme Appleton; both performers of this Breton-esque sideshow straight out of a Christian Schad painting. Almost stealing the show are the films and animations created by the fourth member of the company, Master Paul Bill Barritt.

1927 are a force to be reckoned with, winning a Total Theatre Award amongst a host of other accolades (Fringe First, Herald Angel and the Carol Tambor, which will send them to New York in 2008). A brilliant show from a company to watch out for.

Glyn Roberts



News From Nowhere
England
Traverse at Fruitmarket Gallery

**Winner: Total Theatre Award
for Best Small Scale Work**

We are in an art gallery. Look, it's beautiful. Two guides, one male, one female, welcome us into the space – this clean, pure, bright, light space – and into other imagined spaces: a white-walled duplex; Southwark Cathedral; a doctor's surgery; Guy's Hospital; a private treatment centre in the English countryside; a hotel in an unnamed Arab country, where the female recipient of a new heart meets the 'donor's' widow... everything, we learn, can be bought and sold, and if it can't be bought it can be taken. It helps to have a rich boyfriend.

This is a story of art and culture and cultural appropriation and 'otherness', played out through a story of international art dealing and health tourism. It is a play in two acts. The first act, Dabbing, has a fluid structure: free movement through the space for the two actors and the audience; an ambient soundtrack that pulses then swells and drops; spoken text that has the rhythm and flow of poetry. Act 2, Wringing, shifts gear dramatically to a terrifyingly intense confrontation between the two performers (who switch back and forth between heart patient and interpreter) and the now-seated audience, who – collectively – are the wife of the deceased who 'gave' his heart (or had it stolen). You could hear a pin drop, such is the silence and stillness of the audience.

England is a perfectly realised amalgam of text, site and intense physical performance (from writer Tim Crouch and Hannah Ringham of Shunt collective), taking contemporary theatre into new territories that dissolve the worthless divide between new writing and physical/devised theatre – a worthy recipient of a Total Theatre Award.

Dorothy Max Prior

GH FESTIVAL FRINGE 2007

REVIEWS



Ontroerend Goed
The Smile Off Your Face
C Soco

Winner: Total Theatre Award for Experimentation

The Smile Off Your Face is a theatrical and multi-sensory exploration of intimacy. Combining original staging with audacious performance techniques, the production questions the very art of theatre and forces its audience to question not only their own happiness but also who has the right to challenge it. Audience members experience the production individually, blindfolded and bound by the wrists in a dungeon-type setting and wheeled round the set through a series of sensual vignettes. The play exploits audiences' vulnerability, giving them little option but to face up to their own existential realities and re-examine the meaning of their relationships with others. The 20-minute journey builds up to a clever reveal, where the blindfold is removed... but to say more would give the game away, and as the show will be returning to the UK soon, no more will be said.

When I saw this production in the first week, the company was struggling admirably with the inadequacy of a half-built venue in a show that captured perfectly the spirit and ambitions of the Edinburgh Fringe. (Editor's note: a situation that improved as the Fringe progressed, with the show ultimately becoming one of the hottest tickets for the festival.)

It is to be hoped that this talented, experimental performance group from Belgium continue to push the boundaries of theatre and cross the Channel more often.

Ben Walmsley



Rude Mechs
Get Your War On
Aurora Nova St Stephen's

Winner: Total Theatre Award for Best Original Work by a Collective

Get your game on, get your guns on, get your fear on, get your rage on, GET YOUR WAR ON! Yes! Operation: Enduring Our Freedom to Bomb the Living Fuck Out of You is in the house!!!

In the Rude Mechs energetic and unashamedly agit-prop production, a comic about a war becomes a play about a comic. The comic which gives its name to the show is the Internet cult hit by David Rees. Like the comic, the show is a round-the-water-cooler tale of office life; Joe and Jane Public's response to Mr President's war on terror, from Anthrax to Afghanistan, via Saddam's execution. Appropriating the trappings of office life proves to be a clever way to incorporate the comic's artwork into the action, mostly through use of overhead projections. The five-strong cast, armed with little more than a few sheets of acetate, bombard us with an awesome armoury of quips fired from the hip, and painfully funny faux-introspection laced with lethal doses of irony. 'So if you're not with us, you're against us, huh? I like it! So nice and simple! When do we start bombing Western Europe?'

Yes, it is on one level a preach-to-the-converted anti-Bush tirade (although with added frisson from the fact that the company hail from Austin, Texas). But what I like most is that the Rowan and Marty Laugh-In tone of cheery cynicism is shown to be as much of a mask as the gung-ho pronouncements of the Bush administration; underneath it all is a desire for something better. A moment in which a character suddenly says: 'I have a feeling we'll find Osama Bin Laden soon!', delivered with childish enthusiasm, of course raises a laugh – but the underlying pathos and hope shocks.

Dorothy Max Prior



Precarious
Druthers
Zoo Southside

Winner: Total Theatre Wildcard (Audience Vote)

Precarious' second production has an ambitious brief – to explore through performance the existential state of anxiety, to tell a story using archetype and emotion as characters, and to give words to their world by reappropriating some of the more celebrated speeches of Beckett and Shakespeare.

Yet they temper this pretension with some real performance élan. Digital sequences – a window opening, balloons being blown up on the backdrop of a door – form a playful frame to the unwieldy inner metaphorical worlds of the scenes, compensating in their delicacy for the heavy-handedness of the concept. The dance sequences, particularly the exhilarating chorus work to a trip-hoppy score, are performed with panache; the choreography which combines mask work, contact, acrobatic and contemporary dance is diverse and expressive, the aerial and mask work well integrated.

The staging is never short of inventive – a tiny projection dances in a mirror, bodies duet with their own images on projected screens, a rogue white helium balloon ascends suddenly upstage. If you can get beyond the irritation of being preached at to seize the day reiteratively for an hour then there is vision and ambition here to celebrate.

Beccy Smith

Reviews of shows shortlisted for Total Theatre Awards and of many other shows seen at Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2007 and assessed for the Awards appear on our website: www.totaltheatre.org.uk

AVIGNON FESTIVAL, FRANCE JULY 2007

Sasha Waltz *insideout*

Theatre du Soleil *Les Ephémères*

Rodrigo Garcia *Approche de l'idée de méfiance*



To see *insideout* you take a bus to Avignon's large and rather bleak exhibition centre – a collection of three large industrial buildings close to the city's airport. When you enter – all the windows are blacked out – you are struck by the vastness and the emptiness of the place. Right in the centre of the building, under the apex of the roof is a collection of stairs, tin caravans, blockwood walls and metal grating – like a human settlement dropped in the middle of nowhere. The dancers are changing in full view as the 'backstage' is all round the central construction. Also on the perimeter there are telescopes attached to balloons to play with, and right in the distance, on the walls and roof of the building there are biographies and photographs of the cast. You don't have to entangle yourself in the maze of encounters and mini-scenarios that are being played out, but to begin with everyone does, squeezing past each other to get a better view of an upstairs scene, or to peer through a hole in a wall to see a single performer uncurl and start to move. *insideout* is a frenetic cacophony – live video, atonal music, glass cases in which dancers writhe and pose for the spectators. Performers with megaphones ask who you are, how old you are, what your name is, but never stop for an answer. *insideout* is a crazy cabaret, a happening played to postmodern rules.



insideout lasted an hour and twenty minutes – by contrast, *Les Ephémères* started at two in the afternoon and finished at ten that evening. On the same exhibition site but in a theatre built especially for this show, two banks of seating face each other. A long stage corridor is flanked on either side by grey curtains, which are pulled aside to allow circular wooden floors to be pushed on and off. Each of these floors contains a set – in complete detail – for each scene. It is an ingenious device that allows the audience to see scores of different situations and events. *Les Ephémères* starts from the proposition that all humans will disappear at some point. Once gone, what remains? This performance is testimony to the power of all those small encounters between people that sum up both the beauty and the fragility of humanity. It is an amazing tour de force. Ariane Mnouchkine creates momentous drama out of a peasant farmer dying suddenly of a heart attack at the start of his regular evening meal of soup and bread. His daughter doesn't know what to do, so continues to eat her soup. An elderly couple cower in their flat as an enraged grandson desperate for cash to buy drugs is trying to punch their front door in. In both scenes we don't know how it ends, we never see those characters again, but they are moving and mesmerising.



Delayed by a freak downpour of rain, Rodrigo Garcia's performance spanned the hour or so around midnight. A huge video screen is showing something strange, and it takes a few minutes to work out that it is coming from a tiny camera attached to the back of a small water turtle paddling around a glass aquarium on the edge of the open stage. Garcia is Argentinean but is now based with his own company in Madrid. He works with a dense text, which in this case is projected onto the screen for the audience to read, except for one passage that is spoken by an actor. He is going to sue Dunkin' Donuts if he contracts cancer, and to make sure he has a case he has been eating them for 26 years every day, and filming himself so that he has cast-iron evidence. Garcia collides this commodity crassness with elemental sensuality and physicality. The performers are hosed down, play with hens, get covered with milk, earth and honey. A land flowing with milk and honey is rich. One covered with mobile phones and McDonald's most definitely is not.

Barry Edwards

01 | SASHA WALTZ. *INSIDEOUT*

02 | THEATRE DU SOLEIL.

LES EPHÉMÈRES

03 | RODRIGO GARCIA.

APPROACH DE L'IDÉE DE MÉFIANCE

01



Bill Aitchison
24/7/52

Bill Aitchison begins by explaining that we may be needed to help the piece to function by passing him props, holding tape-recorders and helping him to fulfil the myriad tasks which make up this performance – also inviting us to leave and use the bar when we please. The first of ten tapes begins and Aitchison eagerly proceeds to perform the task subscribed to that sound: washing his hair. The sound ceases and another begins. A tape-recorder is thrust into my hand as Aitchison places himself in front of me and begins a series of movements. Throughout the next hour, the soundscape builds, as do the multiple roles which Aitchison performs with focus and energy. We meet a priest recounting the tale of Noah's Ark, a romantic holding a bunch of flowers, a man preparing a meal for a date, a weather forecaster, all of whom begin to overlap with one another and take on attributes of each other's objectives. When my tape-recorder begins again, I suddenly feel responsible for adding another element to Aitchison's growing task list, as a man takes him up on his offer of going to the bar: we are all in this together. *24/7/52* is an amusing, enjoyable experience which thrives on the element of chance. It is these exquisite moments of uncertainty which Aitchison needs to own more: we're with him, and will happily sit in silence if we are allowed to enjoy it as much as the rest of the show.

Terry O'Donovan

01 | BILL AITCHISON. *24/7/52*
02 | CORPUS SOMA.
THE KRAPP OF MY LIFE
03 | KNAVISH SPEECH. *BED*



02

Corpus Soma
The Krapp of My Life: Toward a Poor Imitation of Samuel Beckett

Corpus Soma's re-imagining of Beckett's short masterpiece of identity, mortality and regret was satisfying on every level. As an adaptation the production intelligently transposed the key ideas, articulate in its sense of disconnection, regret, and the (theatrical, existential) no-man's land of introspection. Re-casting Krapp's tape machine as an interaction with the internet sounds hackneyed, but the company's rigour in pursuing the parallel yielded unexpected pleasures: the increasingly frantic physical exploration of a huge projected desktop, interacting directly with its icons and culminating in the performer ricocheting around the stage cavern of cyberspace as the human cry of Elgar's cello concerto was distorted and enlivened through electronic beats, was a sequence of pure theatrical pleasure. In many ways, this show addressed central preconceptions of Beckett's work. Geometrical translations of action, the pushing of the performed body to its limits, a snapshot of the essential state of contemporary man focused through the lens of drama. So an intelligent engagement with Beckett's ideas, but a production which never lost its sense of playfulness. A witty use of objects, some cheeky audience interaction and a very pleasing riff on the random balanced the more provocative self-recognition asked of the audience. It is the job of an adaptation to at the least fully meet its original, as well as to justify its re-presentation. To engage with Beckett, to push his ideas further into the contemporary, is a deeply impressive feat – and to transpose them with such wit, thoughtfulness and panache may even have gestured toward surpassing that.

Beccy Smith

03



Knavish Speech
Bed

Time for bed, and Knavish Speech invite us to join them. The invitation is a little awkward (many companies find this transitional moment difficult, unsure of whether they are in character or not). But the moment eases over as we enter the main space at CPT to discover a dormitory of double beds, some occupied, some not. We are encouraged to find a comfy spot and settle down. What follows is a 'play' on beds and bedtimes, a romp through every possible association that can be imagined, from nursery to girlish sleepovers to first loves and beyond. The ensemble of half-a-dozen (male and female) performers use a mix of theatrical devices: there's spoken monologue and short scenes of dialogue; wordless solos or duets or trios, using a post-Bausch gestural dance mode. The space is used well, with attention moved from bed to bed by the clever use of lighting, or sometimes by a performer moving into a bed occupied by someone else – perhaps another performer, perhaps an audience member (leaving them with the interesting decision of whether to stay or go). In some ways, the piece felt a little raw: a selection of workshop exercises that had not yet 'cooked', and although there were some excellent performances, the delivery of text was a little erratic – some of the company were not native English speakers and I found myself longing to hear more of their own languages. But despite these reservations, an enjoyable show, packed with ideas and full of promise.

Dorothy Max Prior

X.trax/FEAST

Platt Fields Park, Victoria Baths & Manchester City Centre

Manchester

June 07

Mimbre *The Bridge*
Wired Aerial Theatre *Glimpse*
The Alexandras *Priscilla Queen of the Deaf World*
Avanti Display *Stormbringer*
Artizani *Desert Island Discs*

X.trax is an annual showcase of (mostly) outdoor performance, geared towards the street arts industry but presented alongside Feast! (produced by MIA – Manchester International Arts – as part of their Enchanted Evenings programme), a celebratory arts extravaganza for the people of Manchester. In fact, for the most part they are one and the same thing, raising the interesting question of how a performance is framed and viewed. So whilst most of the people watching the 40 or so shows at the lovely lakeside of Platt Fields Park are there for a public picnic, taking in a bit of ‘free’ street theatre along the way, others are strolling around wearing an x.trax delegate’s badge and making notes in their promoter’s special booklet. But ultimately it is the same for everyone: the sun is shining and it is a delight to be entertained in such a pleasant environment.

And mingling with the lakeside crowds, taking in the walkabout performances and enjoying the good smells of samosas and jerk chicken sizzling on the food stalls, I will say too that some folks talk ‘cultural diversity’ in audiences; others do it. By moving the main presenting space for the festival out of Manchester city centre to a park in a culturally diverse suburb, selling it with the byline ‘All ages, all cultures, all weekend’, x.trax/MIA have managed over the past few years to build up a local audience for this event, which feels like the global village family has all come together in one place. You would have been hard pushed to find a more diverse audience at any arts event anywhere in the UK. The other obvious thing is that when a festival dedicates itself to addressing diversity (of age, class, socio-economic group, ethnicity) in its audience make-up, the knock-on effect is an audience that educates itself over the years to the wonderful all-embracing thing that is ‘street arts’.



ARTIZANI DESERT ISLAND DISCS

One of the highlights of this year’s programme was Mimbre’s *The Bridge*, one of a number of shows that were presented at key street arts festivals throughout the country as part of the Without Walls initiative (a consortium that comprises Streets of Brighton, x.trax, Greenwich & Dockland, Winchester Hat Fair and Stockton International Riverside festivals). I’ve seen previous work by this three-woman company, and admired their acrobatic skills and playful inventiveness, but in *The Bridge* they have really upped the ante, proving that traditional circus skills and contemporary theatre really can be united successfully. The piece is directed by Joseph Alford of Theatre O, and tells the story of a bridge which has been ‘destroyed and rebuilt a thousand times’. The impressive set (yes, a bridge, with a tower – a kind of cross between Checkpoint Charlie and a distressed children’s playground structure) is the arena for this play on wartime conflicts and personal struggles. Mimbre offer an enactment of archetypal roles: the catalyst, the defender and the one caught in the middle. Acrobatic proves to be the perfect medium for this exploration.

Avoiding the traditional male/female as base/flyer partnerships, this all-woman troupe are free to explore notions of fighting and resisting, giving and receiving, dependency and liberation, which might be more loaded with a mixed-sex cast. The company’s clown skills are also used to maximum effect as the archetypal roles morph into and out of gently humorous character work, and the soundscape merges spoken word, original composed music and pop classics from the past fifty years that evokes a suitably pan-European mix of languages and cultural references. There’s also a very clever use of props in the piece – in one lovely scene a whole host of home comforts, including a lit standard lamp, apparently emerge, Mary Poppins style, from a suitcase. A great piece of outdoor performance and one I hope will stay in Mimbre’s repertoire for many years to come.

Although most events took place in the park, x.trax also included a number of showcase performances programmed elsewhere in the city. Wired Aerial Theatre’s *Glimpse*, for example, was a beautifully enacted aerial dance piece presented in the gorgeous setting of the Victoria Baths (subject of a multi-million pound restoration).



The audience were placed in the swimming pool (empty of water, I hasten to add) and the two aerialists (one male, one female), clad in watery blue costumes, performed a marvellous duet of flirtation and seduction, acceptance and rejection, all on bungee ropes. Ably assisted by riggers who take on a role almost of marionettists as they tug on ropes and pulleys, the performers swoop up to the skylights far above, dip just above our heads or occasionally land at our feet. Simply perfect.

Another piece seen outside the confines of Platt Fields Park was The Alexandras with *Priscilla Queen of the Deaf World*, which was presented on a stage in the heart of Manchester's shopping district. It is certainly something different: an 'all dancing signing troupe belting out iconic classics in a style that only three deaf queens can'. I'll confess to not really getting it when I saw it at Streets of Brighton – it seemed to be nothing much more than a bit of camp karaoke, good for five minutes but not worthy of too much attention – but I loved it in Manchester. Which first of all offers the thought that critics usually only see anything once, and really once is not enough to know what you think about anything (so don't take any notice of critics!). But more than that, there was something that gave the Manchester show an added frisson, which was director Jenny Sealey's two-minute signing lesson to delegates before we went out to see the show.

We learnt the sign language gestures for 'virgin' and 'angel' – which, as she said, would get us a long way – and so we were expectantly waiting for these to come up (as they did a fair few times) in order to join in. Apparently our positive response to this has led The Alexandras to do a short signing session just before each show and thus have the crowd eating out of their hands.

Meanwhile, back in the park, two Manchester favourites presented work back-to-back. The latter first: the big evening show was *Stormbringer*, presented by Avanti Display – a company that has rather oddly split into two branches in recent years. Bill Palmer is focusing on the walkabout and small-scale static work like *Mr Lucky* (doomed to an eternal rainstorm under his weeping umbrella). Meanwhile, company co-founder Mike Lister has been developing large-scale spectacles like *Stormbringer* – a music and visual theatre extravaganza based on *The Tempest*. On the night I saw it, it suffered from severe technical problems, curtailing the fire-and-water finale, but beyond that, it was the sort of distanced and contained piece that doesn't really reach out to include the audience too much – with the exception of some engaging moments of processing through the crowd by the shipwrecked sailors.

A contemporary take on 'Shakespeare in the Park', basically, so a disappointment from a company whose previous large scale work (such as the marvellous *Hydromania*, which animated Manchester Town Hall with light and water so spectacularly in 2001) has done so much to move forward the cause of street arts.

Just before, performed as the sun was setting, fellow Manchurian Artizani's *Desert Island Discs* was everything that is good and right in street theatre. It features one man (the very able and entertaining James Macpherson), a mound of sand, a hammock strung between a couple of palm trees, and a mechanical lobster that refuses to be dinner. It's a straightforward idea (and in street arts, the simple ideas are often the best ones), the story of a castaway who starts the show determined to keep up standards with his silver service and champagne, waiting patiently to be rescued. Dressed properly for dinner, with stiff upper lip, he is keen to show that he can tame the wild. But of course nature bites back – there's that dastardly lobster, for a start – and our hero turns wildman by fits and starts, rather marvellously portrayed by his ever-growing beard (every time he beds down in his hammock he emerges with another hefty growth of hair). Stuff happens, and eventually he gets rescued by helicopter – delightfully depicted by toy 'copters on long rods, waving in the night air like fireflies. As in his previous solo piece, *Syrovoy*, Macpherson uses all the tricks of the trade in his telling of this simple tale: classic physical clowning that is on a direct line of descent from Keaton and Chaplin; amusing object animation; a minimal but very effective use of slack rope (walking between the palm trees); a clever choice of music; precise timing and confident enactment of the physical comedy gags. But the years of experience and the highly tuned skill shows most in the lightness of it all – he makes it look like anyone could do it, but in truth few can perform with such assurance, or entertain so well, in the public space.

Dorothy Max Prior



Kazuko Hohki
Oh Doh
 Chelsea Theatre/King's Rd, London
 Sacred Season/ InTransit artist-led
 walks
 June 2007

It is about endings: eight rain-soaked 'tourists' standing in the stagelights full of tea and biscuits, wondering how a guided walk turned out so weird. This is the *Oh Doh* (King's Road in Japanese) package deal: interactive, innovative theatre-maker Kazuko Hohki leads a tour about the lives and endings of famous King's Road characters, along King's Road itself. It is true street theatre. Hohki's eccentric Japanese tourist persona is naïve but beguiling; it is difficult to resist her innocent enthusiasm as she takes the group to the changing rooms of *Bluebird*, a punk reunion outside Starbucks, a shortcut to Utopia with Sir Thomas More in a church hall and into a suitably magnificent ending involving a car chase, a cup of tea in a block of flats and a round of applause on the Chelsea Theatre stage. True stories and real people are made bizarre and amusing by Hohki's highly original casting: a smirking female Aleister Crowley in feathers snorting lines of cocoa powder in a specialist chocolate shop is but one of her quirky touches. Between each section of the tour, actors linger among the public, subverting the otherwise sedate street scene with outlandish costume and semi-threatening behaviour. Audiences are expected to keep up, join in and be willing to leap into waiting cars, get turned away from members' clubs, unnerve passers-by and stick with their intrepid, ever-smiling Japanese guide. As demonstrated in this unique outdoor experience, the end is definitely worth it.

Hazel Tsoi-Wiles



Ragroof Theatre
Shall We Dance?
 Winchester Hat Fair
 June 2007

One might have called this year's Hat Fair a Wet Fair, as it was raining so much. Nevertheless, Ragroof Theatre braved the rain with winning smiles and tongue-in-cheek humour. In front of a traditional bandstand, on a wooden (now rather slippery) dancefloor, an ensemble of nine guided the audience through years of social dancing history, from Charleston to Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot and Jive. The period tunes were mixed with the recorded voices of older people, creating a layered soundscape of memories about long-lost partners, and the rituals of ballroom courtship in yesteryear's village halls and glitzy ballrooms. Occasionally, longer sections of text bring us individual stories of small vanities and jealousies, or sad memories of the wallflowers or of the disruption of young love by the ugly wailing of air-raid sirens. Essentially, a danced oral history, the set-pieces supported not only by the sophisticated soundscape, but also by a small cabinet exhibition/ installation called the Documentation Booth featuring photographs, sound recordings and video clips collected during the research period. Although the rain worsened, the company saw it through to the end. The very wet floor curtailed some of the more showy moves in the jive scene, but the company kicked off their shoes and danced barefoot in the puddles. And the audience stayed – huddled under umbrellas. A very satisfying event. Entrance free, there was not even a busker's hat around.... but I lift my hat in respect: Chapeau, Ragroof Theatre!

Hartmut Topf



Faulty Optic/Mira Calix
Dead Wedding
 Library Theatre, Manchester
 International Festival
 July 2007

The challenge to redevelop such an established mythical story (of Orpheus and Eurydice) is an exciting one, and Faulty Optic's theatrical aesthetic is always epic in its invention – more than robust enough to accommodate a radical revision in world-view. But this seemed a confidence that the collaborating artists didn't hold for this show. The cardinal sin for me was its reliance on programme notes, which offered the only 'in' to the complex re-telling. Whilst this is an established convention in opera (the production was framed 'to celebrate the 400th anniversary of opera'), surely expressive tools are available to transcend this necessity? With the responsibility to communicate clearly shunted offstage, the world in *Dead Wedding* became purely expressionistic. The rhythm of scenes felt stilted – sequences seemed overlong with detail loaded into the dextrous, witty puppetry, but its logic unclear. This aggravated by Mira Calix's atonal vocal phrases which underscored throughout and which I found abrasive and tiring. There were some bravura moments – the stop-motion rendition of Orpheus' journey to the Underworld (in a lift, of course), and the failed escape was achingly human in its flashes of primeval fears, nightmare-like frustrations and witty imagery. It felt real, frightening and funny and drew us entirely into Faulty Optic's astonishing world. Counterpointing performed imagery with a musical score is a valid approach to making performance, but why use it if the stated ambition of the project is the sophisticated re-imagining of such a well-known story? For me, this production was an abstraction too far.

Beccy Smith



Periplum
The Bell
Alexandra Park, Hastings/Coastal
Currents
August 2007

How best to engage a large audience outdoors? Hastings' Coastal Currents is a free-to-audiences festival, and this is the opening event. Around 1500 people are here in this pretty park on a balmy summer evening; mostly from the local community but augmented by a smattering of street arts glitterati, here to see whether Periplum – aided and abetted by pyrotechnicians The World Famous – can cut the mustard with large scale work. So can they? The short answer is 'yes'. They've learnt from the French (Jo Bithume, Trans Express) that you can move a big crowd around a space using light, sound and the basic instincts of self-preservation. The beautiful singing of Juliet Russell calls like a siren, summoning us across the field; a sudden burst of sky-scorching red flames draw us in another direction; a large chariot dragged through the middle of the space gets through with minimal stewarding – if a great big thing on wheels is coming towards you, you move; ditto when a line of faceless Dark Wraiths who look as tall as trees tear across the field. It's like being catapulted into the landscape of a fantasy video game, minus the control pad.



They've also learnt from working with the Polish company Teatr Biuro Podrozy that street arts can be used to tell dark tales: *The Bell* is a harrowing story of a town razed by invaders. The survivors rise up from the terror to rebuild their town, their success embodied in the creation of a great bell, a symbol of life's defeat of death.

The clever use of space, fire, and music is enhanced by a poetic text that employs the sounds and rhythms of words beautifully, working in tandem with strong physical performances. There is a good awareness of sightlines. One example is a disturbing image of the dead and wounded on the battleground: rather than place bodies on the ground, we see them up in the air, splayed across a large mesh on a frame; trunks distorted, limbs intertwined, a Goya-esque picture of pain and defeat.

The only section that doesn't quite work is a funeral procession with the audience cast as villagers. The elements are evoked and water, earth, fire, air, and metal must be brought to the centrepiece chariot/pyre. It's the sort of thing that can't be rehearsed; the only way to find out is to do it, and doing it shows that there needs to be some rethinking on how best to create chains of command and spin the action out and away from the central knot of people. This, no doubt, will have been taken on board and will be worked on for future performances.

The Bell, on its first outing, is a success – beautiful, melancholic, thought provoking, well executed. It's a strong show, and one that will grow and grow.
Dorothy Max Prior

Acrobat
smaller poorer cheaper
Roundhouse, London/Circus Front
July 2007

Circus Front was an ambitious and exciting snapshot of contemporary circus from around the world; a range of high quality work incorporating theatre, dance, music, live art, cabaret, burlesque and – yes – incredible circus skills.

Australian legends Acrobat returned to the UK with *smaller poorer cheaper*: a raw and intimate show comprising three twenty minute solos, illustrating that in the hands of masters circus can be as effective at expressing emotional themes and stories as dance. The show begins with Jo Lancaster who presents a powerful solo that explores the compromises, pain and laughs in 'settling down' from a female perspective. The near nudity exposes the sheer physical strength of the performer as she tumbles, turns and somersaults through marriage and motherhood. Mozes follows with a visceral and powerful rope routine that takes us on a journey from non-stop partying camp delights to poignant awareness of mortality. The visual impact of blood pouring from the top of the rope down on to Mozes strong fit physique serves as a powerful and life affirming message of survival. The last routine on a slack rope (by Simon Yates) was weaker than the preceding solos. Although Yates is highly skilled and the piece well performed, it felt, unlike the other two, that this could have slotted easily into another circus cabaret format. There was less exposure of the performer as person and this did not chime with the nakedness – literally and emotionally – of the rest of the show.
Donna Close

MEDIA

Media reviews by Mary Paterson and Dorothy Max Prior

PRINT PUBLICATIONS

Programme Notes: Case studies for locating experimental theatre

Eds. Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine

Live Art Development Agency

ISBN 0-9546040-4-0

www.thisisUnbound.co.uk

£7.50 if ordered through the above website (RRP £10.00)

Contributions by: Lyn Gardner, Tim Etchells, Neil Bartlett, Stella Hall, John McGrath, Alan Rivett, Mark Borkowski, Rose Fenton, Brian Logan, Lucy Neal, Keith Khan, Simon Casson, Louise Jeffreys, Judith Knight, and Toni Racklin.

All the contributors to *Programme Notes* agree on one thing – now is a great time for independent theatre. Experimental, challenging, investigative and just plain different work has started to creep into our mainstream venues (think Duckie selling out at the Barbican) and attract huge audiences (do we need to mention *The Sultan's Elephant?*). This book is a collection of case studies, essays and interviews with some of the people who aided that change, and it's both a thrilling glimpse of practices that helped usher in the new, and a useful springboard for future strategies. There are some warning bells – about funding, and about the conservatism of institutions – but this is a hopeful book. It brims with respect for the audience, building to a consensus that, given education, access and choice, people will continue to embrace independent theatre practice. The contributors' passion and inclusiveness springs from every page so although aimed at professionals, this will make a fascinating read for anyone.

MP

The Producers: Alchemists of the impossible

Ed. Kate Tyndall

Arts Council England/Jerwood

Charitable Foundation

£20 Hardback

www.the-producers.org

Interviews with/contributions from: Marc Boothe, Farooq Chaudhry, Helen Cole, Andrew Eaton, Paul Heritage, David Jubb, Judith Knight & Ritsaert ten Cate, David Lan, Helen Marriage, Michael Morris, Nii Sackey, Joana Seguro, Lieven Thyron

This new book celebrates the lives of fourteen producers working across the arts and aims to provide an inspiration to an emerging generation of creative producers. In many ways it is a development of the work started with the Central School of Speech and Drama/Total Theatre User's Guide to Creative Producing symposium and publication. There's plenty of interesting material, presented attractively (lots of big glossy colour images!), although the format is a little odd; a mixture of first person account, and interview. There is also some inconsistency in choices to include one Belgian producer (of Les Ballets C de la B) amongst a group who otherwise work partly or exclusively in the UK. So quibbles about some of the editing choices; but an otherwise great addition to the rather limited number of publications on this essential cog in the art-making machine, the producer.

DMP

DVDs

Women Writing For Performance: Performing Words and Spilt Britches Lancaster University
£9-99 each DVD, inc. P&P
www.lancs.ac.uk/depts/theatre/womenwriting

Women's Writing for Performance is a three-year, AHRC funded programme of practice-as-research with a focus on ways in which women practitioners 'write' for contemporary performance. These DVDs document two workshop-based projects in the programme. The first is of the Performing Words workshops led by Gilly Adams (director of BBC Wales' Writers' Unit/associate artist of Welfare State International, well known for her work, with Sue Gill on Rites of Passage), and Geddy Aniksdal from Grenland Friteater in Norway. In her introduction, Geddy

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talks of the body having an intelligence of its own, and the need to 'de-learn'. Much of what is subsequently discovered – that theatre/performance is intrinsically 'physical', and that words and movement co-exist in performance – will come as no surprise to Total Theatre readers.

The Split Britches DVD features company founders and leading lights, Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw and documents a workshop that took place January 2006 at the Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster University. Both DVDs are worthy archive material of a seminal programme of events (which has included conferences and symposia, and numerous other workshops, including ones with Marisa Carnesky, Jenny Éclair, Curious, and Bobby Baker). The Split Britches one is intrinsically more interesting, mostly because of the inclusion of interviews with this renowned duo. With both DVDs there is, for the viewer, an odd sense of voyeurism in watching people go through warm-up exercises etc. This somehow feels like an intrusion on the closed space that a workshop nurtures. That said, it is interesting to be the Peeping Thomasina on other people's teaching and learning strategies.

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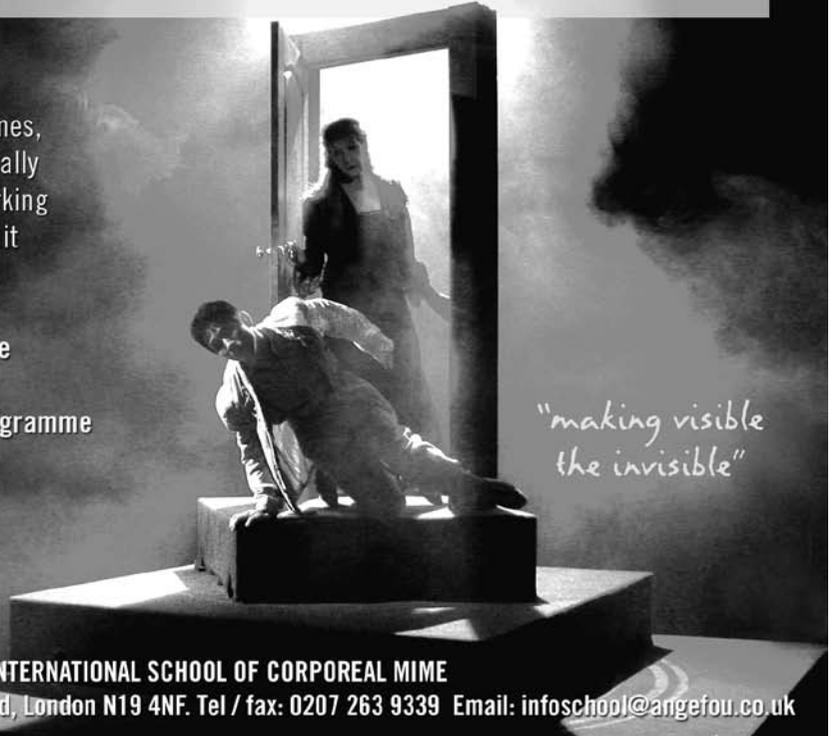
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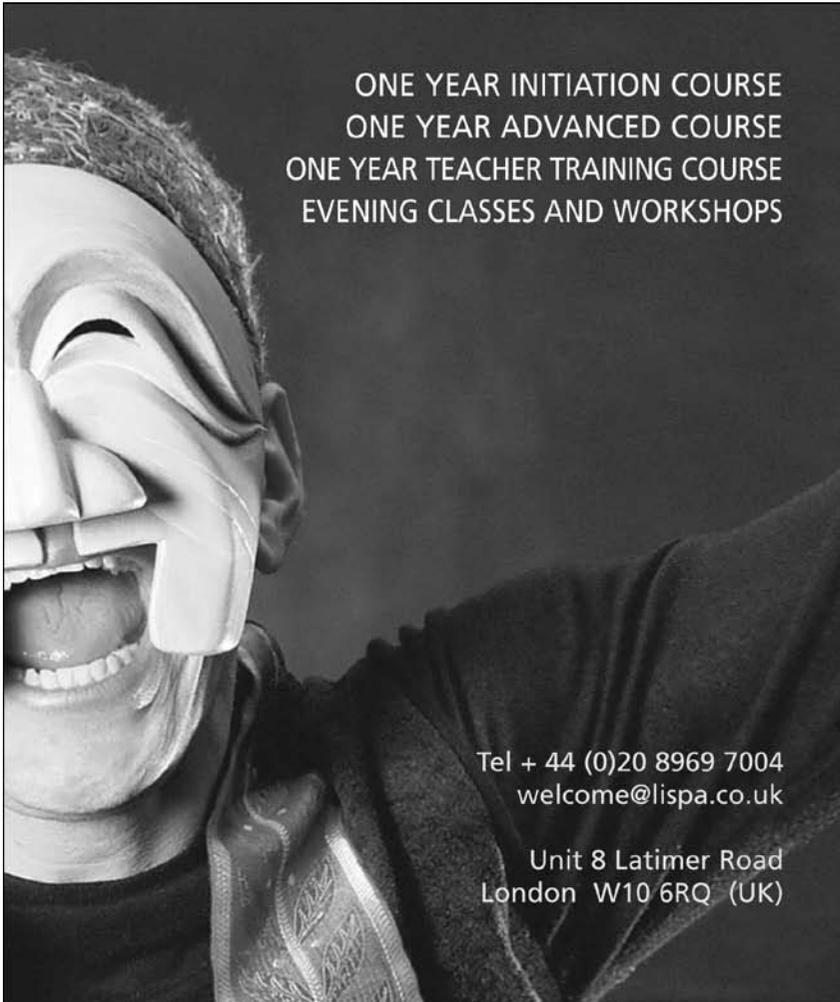
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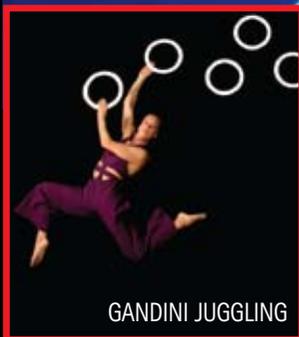
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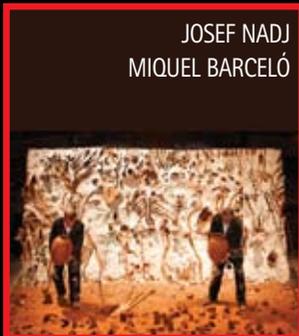
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