

Autumn 2011 Volume 23 Issue 03

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TOTALTHEATRE

MAGAZINE



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TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

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Remarking on the shows seen on the Total Theatre Awards shortlist for Innovation and Experimentation, one of the judges commented that sitting down in an auditorium to watch a piece of theatre presented on a stage seemed to be so rare as to be almost innovative in itself!

Perhaps a tipping point has been reached with ‘interactive’ and ‘immersive’ theatre work, which is now everywhere, including all over Edinburgh in this year’s Fringe. The list of Award winners reflects this, with four of the six shows chosen being ‘offstage’ productions. See the Total Theatre Awards report in this issue for full details of winners and shortlist, and see our brand new ‘reviews and news’ website at www.totaltheatrereview.com for full reviews of winning and shortlisted shows amongst more than seventy shows reviewed at this year’s Fringe. The website has been set up with a clear, clean-cut design and a straightforward search facility, so even a ‘luddite peasant’ like your editor can manage to use it with ease...

One of those winning shows was *May I Have the Pleasure...?* by the man we could regard as the king of interactive theatre, Adrian Howells, our subject for The Works. Adrian’s latest piece brings together his two strands of recent work – the communal experience and the one-on-ones – in a work that casts his audience as guests at a wedding reception, with him as the errant best man who always speaks out of turn...

Also featured in this issue is Hannah Sullivan’s insider-eye view of Proto-type Theater’s *Fortnight*, a two-week-long quasi-game-playing interactive experience staged across the city of Bristol during Mayfest. In our Reviews section, a report from the Norfolk & Norwich Festival picks up on the game-playing theme with a report on a number of works seen that in one way or another manifest a game-playing-with-the-audience mode; and we reflect on the (by its very nature interactive) street arts and site-specific work seen at the Brighton Festival. There’s also interactivity a-plenty in Alexander Roberts’ article about the International Community Arts Festival (ICAF), held in Rotterdam.

Which raises the thought that for anyone working within ‘the community’, the notion of interactivity is as old as art itself. Once upon a time, the distinctions between ‘performer’ and ‘audience’, between ‘professional artist’ and ‘community member’ were of little importance – at least, this was the case outside the privileged echelons of kings’ courts and emperors’ palaces. Storytelling, music-making and art-making generally was for all, not an activity siphoned off to be the concern of one section of the community, who served their paying masters in the creation of ‘books’ plays’ and ‘portraits’. Some may have been better musicians, more gifted storytellers, or handier with an etching knife – but art was for and by the whole community. And theatre’s origins lie in these roots – and in the shared rituals surrounding celebrations, rites-of-passage, and pleas to the gods.

Taking up the baton for what he calls ‘Vernacular Art’, and for the notion of rites-of-passage as key to the creation of art, is John Fox – co-founder of Welfare State International, and now co-director, with Sue Gill, of the Dead Good Guides. He’s the subject for our regular Voices feature.

Meanwhile, back in the theatre – Adrian Berry, director of North London’s enterprising venue Jacksons Lane explains why contemporary circus is his burning passion; and there are reports from two exciting festivals of European theatre: Birmingham European (BE), and the Nottingham European Arts and Theatre festival (NEAT), and a reflection on Marina Abramovic’s first venture onto a ‘proper’ theatre stage at the Manchester International Festival.

So whether on a stage or a street; in hotel room, country park, beach, or bar – there’s theatre of all sorts to read about and ruminate on in this issue of Total Theatre Magazine.

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CONTENTS

FEATURES	
Come Together Alexander Roberts dances the night away at the International Community Arts Festival in Rotterdam	6
I'm Going to Jackson Adrian Berry on North London's finest, Jacksons Lane	10
Immerse Yourself Hannah Sullivan on Proto-type Theater's <i>Fortnight</i> in Bristol	13
Total Theatre Awards 2011 Our special report from Edinburgh	17
'There's a word for people like you, and that word is audience' Charlotte Smith reflects on the audience's role at this year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe	20

REGULARS	
Home Truths The Canny Granny looks at costume	16
The Works The works of Adrian Howells, by Dorothy Max Prior	21
Voices John Fox in the spotlight	24
Being There A threeway view of Duckie's Lullaby	26
Out & About Pippa Bailey	46

REVIEWS	
Housey, Housey! Dorothy Max Prior at Brighton Festival	28
The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic As witnessed by Tim Jeeves at MIF	31
NEAT, NEAT, NEAT Fred Dalmasso at the inaugural Nottingham European Arts and Theatre festival	32
Birmingham's European Feast Emily Ayres and Tony Appleby at BE	34
A Game of You, and You, and You, and You Dorothy Max Prior at the Norfolk & Norwich Festival	36

UPDATE	
Festivals & Autumn Season Preview	
News from Venues & Organisations	
Training & Professional development	
Performer & Company Updates	

Front cover image: Bunk Puppets Swamp Juice, winner of a Total Theatre Award 2011 for Physical/Visual/Devised Performance. Photo Andrew Wuttke. www.mrbunk.com



Come Together

Alexander Roberts embraces the spaces in-between at the 2011 International Community Arts Festival in Rotterdam



It's the closing night and the festival bar has erupted. Remaining on the fringes of the dancefloor, gazing in at the low-swinging, flamboyant hips of the young Brazilians, and the quick dancing feet of the Swedish-Chileans, there is me – a slightly awkward, arm-waving, enthusiastic Brit, absorbing the frenetic pulse that beats between a truly unique gathering of people. There are people from all over the world dancing together to a band that is made up of an ever-changing mix of festival participants – with everyone invited to just pick up an instrument and join in. The music is totally improvised, which results in a constant stream of unexpected medleys, like the particularly memorable merge between a Brazilian's soulful jazz scat, Michael Jackson's Billie Jean (accompanied by South African beat-boxing), and a Dutch rendition of 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes'.

I'm in Rotterdam for the International Community Arts Festival (ICAF) 2011. This closing night is an embodiment of the varied forms of encounter that have taken place over the past five days. There's a tirelessly busy dance floor; flurries of creative ideas for future collaborations loudly shared across tables; musical jam sessions between international musicians, playing to an equally international dance party; and bold critical discussions between artists, audiences, cultural managers and scholars – from Rotterdam, the Netherlands and the rest of the world – all mixed together, all seeking ideological meeting points that bridge the frequent rifts that seem to emerge between the differing perspectives people have on each other's work. For some people, me included I think, it is not always the quality of the work on offer that serves as the true measure of a festival's success, but instead the richness of the encounters that occur spontaneously in-between. In the case of ICAF 2011 the value of the 'un-programmed' moments cannot be overstated. The five-day-long festival began everyday at 10am, and ran with a jam-packed schedule right through to the early hours of each morning – but the ultimate



success of this festival emerged just as much from the conversations that happened on the bus rides that took us across the city to the different workshop locations; the meals shared between each day's participants; and the dancing, collaborating and debating that took place at the late-night music stage at the Rotterdam Wijktheater bar, as it did from the many exciting performances, workshops and seminars available.

One highlight of these 'moments in-between' was the festival *Murga*. In what I might be tempted to call a 'stroke of genius from the programmers', Gerardo Salinas from Antwerp in Belgium was invited to come and work with festival participants every morning to create a festival *Murga* group. What is a *Murga*, I hear some of you wondering? Well, emerging originally from Argentina, *Murga* is a carnival performance tradition that parades through public spaces. Made up of musicians and dancers, it could be likened to a very theatrical brass band, but far more anarchic. Think loud and garish costumes; rattle-tattle bang-bang trance-inducing snare, and big bass drumming; Afro-beats and Latino brass; feet stomping, hip shaking, and a lot of arm pumping, and you are getting there. Salinas' *Murga* was like ICAF's guerrilla party-bomb – appearing regularly, but unexpectedly announcing itself, as if from nowhere, through its large and loud group presence and dramatic drumming preludes. Time and time again they ambushed, and always their rallying call seemed to work. The music and the freedom of the moving bodies seemed to carry an unavoidable gravitational pull – like a sort of festival-party black-hole, sucking in everyone who was in ear or eyeshot to watch, to jump in, and to dance.

The *Murga*, however, stands for a lot more than music and dancing. I bump into Gerardo Salinas just before I am about to rush off to see another theatre show. I grab my chance to ask him what the *Murga* is all about for him. He quickly dives into his idea telling me about the power it has to quickly connect people together: '*Murgas* are the ideal melting pot for the mixing of cultures, which in turn generate more culture.' I see the *Murga* doing this during the festival – acting as a sort of oil that smoothes the edges of people and allows them to meet, dance and play together. Its unpredictability and chaos creates an even playing field among people, and its undefined borders between player and spectator means that it spreads almost invisibly around you. Before you know it, you are on the inside, moving with it, and a part of it becomes yours to play with. The *Murga* places an emphasis on creating spaces in which people with different cultures can breathe and be together, and also an emphasis on the people of a given community growing and developing through their encounters with one another.



As another *Murga* strike comes to a close I find myself seeking rest at a table of strangers. Within minutes we are all talking – conviviality among strangers is commonplace here. I am chatting to Ron Bunzl, a Dutch theatre-maker presenting work at the festival. Ron starts telling me, in a voice of gravel and silk, about his theatre project *Circ/Us*. He explains that its aim is to 'bring together professional theatre artists with people of all ages, interests, cultures, and capabilities, and translate their personal stories and dreams into circus acts.' I am lucky enough to get to see some of this work two days later when it appears in excerpts as part of a large showcasing event. The work is unusual, and takes a very particular approach to circus. One scene told the story of a blind lady who dreams of flying. The (actually blind) lady stands in a long red dress at the front of the stage singing a Dutch ballad I am not familiar with, but the people behind me obviously know it as they are singing along. She is accompanied by The All Star Refugee Band, and joining her on the stage is a female storyteller, who narrates the moment of the woman's dream coming true. As she describes the lady's flight, the storyteller dances with a floating, identical red dress attached to an aerial rope. In this circus, there are no tricks, no obvious virtuosity, but *Circ/Us* is playing with a quality that lies at the heart of circus: making the seemingly impossible possible. Where there is no trapeze to create flight there's a storyteller, a song, and a dancing dress on an aerial rope. It is not an obvious swap, but the work dives into the realms of the imagination, and emerges with a space that creates an endless amount of possibilities through playing with the impossible.

Sat with us at the table is choreographer Paloma Madrid (co-director of Botkyrka Community Theatre, based in Sweden). As Ron rushes off to run a final rehearsal, Paloma and I get chatting. She's at the ICAF as part of a residency programme that brought a total of four international community arts projects to the Netherlands over the course of three weeks leading up to the festival. Paloma's project is a collaboration between herself as choreographer and five dancers (four of which had never had any form of professional dance training). The dancers range in age from their early twenties to late seventies. The work they create together is modelled on a project that Paloma has run a few times before, entitled *Dance for Apartment*. Madrid works with a group of untrained dancers and develops a score which is essentially a set of instructions – a sort of rule set. This then becomes a choreography that can be applied in response to any space. Each new space and time brings a new interpretation of the score. People of a particular neighbourhood are then invited to loan *Dance for Apartment* from their local library (just like you would a book). The loaner books a time with the dancers and Paloma, and then together they go to the home and perform *Dance for Apartment*.

I am excited at the opportunity to see it. I arrive in a suburb of Rotterdam at the given address with the rest of the 25-strong audience, go into the apartment and await Paloma's guidance. No one sits, but no one seems quite comfortable standing either. We are all unsure. What do we do when no one, or nothing, tells us what to do? I feel lost without rules. Paloma obliges and invites us all to stand with her in a circle. We are then invited to read, one by one, a line from a document, which appears to be a sort of dramaturgy for the event we will all participate in. We read in a loop until everyone has spoken aloud one line – lines such as 'Note: What if where I am is what I need?' Following this reading, the performance gets underway as a further four dancers appear. They travel across every space in the house, from the living room to the office, the bathroom to the bedroom. There is no music. The performances from the dancers gives no sense of centre to the apartment as a space. Often there is a different dancer in every room, which leads the audience to occupy every room simultaneously, based solely on their own wish, rather than by some explicit guidance, or indication from the dancers about where we should be. Occasionally, I'm in parts of the apartment, standing on my own, with no audience, and no dancers – just the space and I, but it stills feels as though I am with someone, as the



apartment contains endless traces of the occupants – food in the cupboards, books on the shelf. What is taking place is almost anti-performance; anti-theatre. There is nothing being represented in this happening, but instead we are presented with a space in which we can explore whether these people we share it with, and the space itself, can ever be free of any given order. In moments I felt as if was moving according to what I felt I needed in that space, in that time, with those people. In many other moments I did not. I felt lost, or found myself constructing my own safety net. Finding myself doing this, however, provided me with a sense for this work's value. It asks the questions: How far can this go? How far can all of my subconscious behaviour patterns be challenged? It exposes its own impossibilities, and asks why, and if, these impossibilities are not actually possible.

ICAF is a festival that revels in the impossible. A space for artists, who make art motivated by the exploration of people being together – both as the object and subject of the work. This festival brought artists with this shared interest together from all over the world so they could commend, celebrate and challenge each other. The atmosphere was overwhelmingly convivial, yet polemical. It was this contradiction among attendees that made the whole event so worthwhile. The goal seemed rarely about seeking to breed homogenisation, but rather, focused on finding ways of holding onto, investing, and indulging in difference.

And politics are never far away. Aforementioned The All Star Refugee Band – a band cum theatre group from the Czech Republic who opened the festival – is a group of refugee performers that formed out of a theatre project that was run by Archa Theatre in the Czech Republic. The performance group combines a blur of musical influences from across the world (including brass band, ethno, ska, rap, klezmer, Dixieland, Chinese Opera, and Armenian and Kurdish rhythms) all thrown into one pot, and create theatre works that often focus on the social position and identity of immigrants in the Czech Republic.

Ultimately it is a quest for new attitudes towards the notions of

'community', to politics, to personal development, and to artistic expression that underpins all of the various manifestations of this five-day event. This is expressed very well by Ron Bunzl, who I come to discover is quite a visionary. He warns me against getting weighed down by the amount of troubles that surround us in the world, and passes on some wisdom he has taken from a book by Stephen Covey called *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*: 'Covey talks of two circles: the circle of influence and the circle of concern. The circle of concern is very big, it's all the things you are concerned about: war, poverty, etc. The circle of influence is that circle of things you can actually influence. If you spend all of your time focusing on your circle of concern, you're going to become depressed and frustrated, because you just cannot take it on. If you focus more of your energy on your circle of influence, you realise there are a lot of things you can change right now – and through that, your circle of influence gradually grows.'

For a young theatremaker, with wide eyes on a world of daily horror stories, it is invaluable advice to take onboard – a reminder to focus on the here and now, and to search for the changes that you can actually make, rather than getting lost in the enormity of all the issues that we as a global community are engulfed in.

Community is you and me, here and now...

The 5th International Community Arts Festival (ICAF) took place in Rotterdam, 30 March to 3 April 2011. ICAF is an initiative of the Rotterdam Neighbourhood Theatre, RWT.

www.icaforotterdam.com

Images pp 6–7: All images from Gerardo Salinas' *Murga*. Images courtesy of the artist and ICAF

Images p8: All images from Ron Bunzl's *Circ–Us*. Images courtesy of the artist and ICAF

Images p9: All images from Paloma Madrid's *Dance for Apartment*. Images courtesy of the artist and ICAF





I'm Going to Jackson

Well Jacksons Lane anyway, says Adrian Berry, director
of this enterprising North London venue



Jacksons Lane. Everyone has a Jacksons Lane story or association it seems, from Complicite's Simon McBurney to the Mighty Boosh, both of whom launched their performing careers at the venue. I'd known about Jacksons Lane for a while. Most people I spoke to did. 'That community centre on the Archway Road.' 'The old church where you can learn to jive.' 'The disability arts venue.' 'A centre for cutting edge experimental performance.' But which of these was true?

I'd dipped in and out of Jacksons Lane for various events over the years, enjoyed their tasty veggie cafe, seen some great work and always felt it had a real Edinburgh Fringe-style buzz about it. But I never could quite get my head around what it was, or aspired to be. At the same time, instead of having ambitions of taking over a shiny new arts venue, I'd felt drawn to this slightly shabby red brick creation (being a sucker for gothic architecture combined with a socialist ethic).

And so it was, without rhyme nor reason, I handed my notice in after four years at Trinity Theatre in Kent (the daily commute from London finally got to me and I wasn't ready for grazing in Royal Tunbridge Wells just yet), took a huge salary drop and swapped a successful programme I'd developed with the likes of Derevo, Frantic Assembly, The National Theatre and Out of Joint for... well, for what? And why?

Autumn 2006, and it was mud/wall/stick time. My first programme consisted of every favour I could cash in to resurrect Jacksons Lane. It was in debt, with a jaded team and a 'fragile' relationship with the Arts Council. No website, no online booking and a new logo which, rather than representing a progressive arts venue, hinted at a centre for tantric erotic practice. But it also had one of the best locations in the capital (just yards from Highgate tube station in North London) and possessed six spaces within its Tardis-like interior.

My first season saw an enticing programme – Jonzi D, Benji Reid, Faulty Optic, Unlimited Theatre, Ice and Fire, even Russell Brand and Alan Carr. I packed it with a diverse selection of quality work, and audiences flooded through in their thousands. My cunning plan had worked! Jacksons Lane had risen phoenix-like from the ashes!

But then... but then...

January 2007, only three months in, and I was stood behind the box office on a calm Tuesday morning. David Bowie drifting across the cafe (well, not literally); a few toddlers running amok; a quiet winter's day, post Christmas show. Suddenly above me I heard a faint pattering on the transparent Perspex roof, like the falling of gravel. It grew louder, then a strange rushing noise, followed by a mighty rumble as, no more than two yards away, a huge piece of masonry came crashing through into the foyer, smashing into pieces on to one of the (thankfully empty) pews, like a scene from *The Omen*. People ducked and dived for cover as more and more of the roof crumbled and collapsed. We evacuated the building instantly. Later that week after the damage was assessed we were told we would have to close for a few weeks.

I did not return to Jacksons Lane for almost a year.

Over the course of the next twelve months I stayed in radio contact with the board whilst freelancing for The Pigalle in Piccadilly, and Stratford Circus, and I even managed a 24-hour spell running the programme for a Christian arts festival – alas, it became a little hard to hide my tail and horns. But Jacksons Lane kept beckoning, drawing me in. I joined the fight to save the venue, lobbied ACE, whose patience had worn slightly thin, and tried to convince them that if I could just have some time to grow and develop the programme (and fix the 130-year-old roof, which Haringey Council did, thank heavens) then Jacksons Lane could be one of the best arts spaces in London. After much negotiation, ACE stayed on board, keeping a close but supportive eye on us.

Since I began working in theatre, circus played a constant role in my cultural life. When I managed the education department at the Albany in the 90s, I had the fortune to be involved with some of the most exciting 'new circus' (as it was known then) artists in the country – John Paul Zaccarini, Mamaloucos, Concussion, members of Archaos, Mischief le Bas – a really thrilling time for circus as it moved out of the big tops and into the venues. Then later at Trinity, working closely with Chenine Bhathena, I continued the work with such great artists as Legs on the Wall, Company FZ, Matilda Leyser and Lindsey



Butcher. So in my 'year off' from Jacksons Lane, always hoping I would return at some stage, I began to reflect, plan, and think about how I could continue to support this exciting and emerging area. Slowly I began to connect with the artists and companies with whom I felt a kinship: Layla Rosa at Shunt, Crying Out Loud, Circus Space, The Roundhouse. Could Jacksons Lane be that vital cog in the development and ecology of the artform? Circus was, and remains, the one area that excited me like no other. I'd always been a little in awe of acrobats and aerialists. Who wouldn't be?

Exactly twelve months on, I was invited back as artistic director and year zero (in my mind) commenced in 2008. I should say that I had already programmed and then cancelled a season which featured Ockham's Razor and Matilda Leyser, so straight away I rescheduled as much of this programme as possible, but off the radar also began to nurture and develop newer artists, met and spoke with the five existing circus RFOs in England and watched, listened, and learned. The priceless experience of such unique individuals as Upswing's Victoria Amedume and the visionary female acrobatic company, Mimbire, helped to broaden my understanding and fill in knowledge gaps, whilst my relationships with Chenine Bhatena (then Circus Officer at ACE), Daisy Drury at Circus Space, Leila Jones at the Roundhouse and Rachel Clare at Crying Out Loud were pivotal as they became advocates for the development of the programme at Jacksons Lane. We created a mutually supportive environment which remains reciprocal and invaluable to this day.

So here we are now in 2011 and, as someone remarked to me not too long ago, circus today is where contemporary dance was twenty years ago – growing, developing, finding its feet and language. Circus artists – both established and emerging – are utilising the astonishing skills they possess in order to tell stories, fusing narrative with their athleticism and artistic visions. Ockham's Razor's *The Mill* explored the interdependency of workforces and factory systems; The Sugar Beast Circus took us on a journey into an Indian travelling circus troupe; So & So's *The Hot Dots* saw the tragic breakdown of a relationship; whilst Upswing's *Fallen* told a moving tale of cultural isolation. All

transcended the desire to merely 'show' and now strived to 'tell'. In circus, sometimes the tales can be close to home (the struggle of the circus artist to tell a story is a recurring theme) – and sometimes global, political or ideological. Stories are explored through the juggler, double cloud, even the hula-hoop – Marawa's recent *Exotica* at Jacksons Lane was a thrilling exploration of black cabaret artists throughout history.

And there is a whole wealth of newer companies coming through which bodes well for the future – Collectif and then..., Long Spoon, Leo and Yam, Genius Sweatshop and Frederike Gerstner to name just a handful. We are hoping to develop new work with all of these artists in the coming years.

Jacksons Lane has established itself as the missing link between the emerging circus artists from Circus Space and Circomedia, and larger scale venues such as the Barbican, Roundhouse and Linbury Studio (ROH2), with a wealth of producing and venue partners through its many networks and the City Circ initiative (a London-wide network for theatre and contemporary circus). We give the artists the space, time and mentoring to develop their skills and ideas, often from scratch. It's an exciting time to be supporting such a fertile and ever-growing sector, but it needs more venues and producers to take risks, more investment in emerging artists and more regularly funded companies. In the recent round of Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) awards, circus fared strongly – the brilliant Ockham's Razor were brought onboard and most existing circus former RFOs ('regularly funded organisations') became NPOs – but circus still lags way behind the dance and theatre sectors. News filtering through from the Arts Council England Grants for the Arts bids is positive, and most applications we support at Jacksons Lane are being funded, enabling more work to happen and a greater number of artists to reach the public, thus helping to grow new audiences for contemporary circus. But there's a very long way to go.

It has taken almost five years to get to where we are today, but in that time Jacksons Lane has supported and co-produced work with some 40 circus companies, five of them being shortlisted for the internationally renowned showcase Jeunes Talents Cirque Europe, including Jacksons Lane associate artists So & So Circus and German Wheel artists Acrojou. We launched our inaugural Postcards Festival of circus and cabaret in 2011, have supported artists in the London International Mime Festival and ROH Firsts in recent years, and are excited to be a Mime Festival venue for the first time in 2012 with Sugar Beast Circus's *{Event(Dimension):}*. We are also joining forces with the Roundhouse for CircusFest in 2012, are partnering with the Roundhouse and Circus Space on a Jerwood Foundation residency, and will be producing a new piece of circus-theatre based on the 1908 Olympics with Lightning Ensemble. We have an exciting future ahead of us.

All this sounds like shameless PR for Jacksons Lane, but it was only four years ago during the closure when things looked very bleak indeed. Back then, a respected individual from an arts funding body correctly proclaimed (when the roof fell in) that 'no artists were shouting for you'. If we ever faced such a crisis again, their shouting would be heard from here to Camden.

Jacksons Lane programme for autumn 2011 features an array of circus and visual theatre, including: The Awake Project's high octane circus performance *Awake* from 6–8 October 2011; RedCape's *1 Beach Road*, a poignant exploration of Alzheimer's and England's disappearing coastal towns, 19–22 October 2011; and Little Bulb's fantastically bizarre music-based, anarchic comedy *Operation Greenfield*, 23–24 November 2011.

The venue is also presenting a show as part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad – Stumble danceCircus's *Box of Frogs* 4–5 November 2011.

Sugar Beast Circus's *{Event(Dimension):}* performs at Jacksons Lane as part of the London International Mime Festival 26–28 Jan 2012.

www.jacksonslane.org.uk

p10: RedCape Theatre *1 Beach Road*. Photo Nik Mackey
p11: Sugar Beast Circus *Milkwood Rodeo*
p12: Collectif and then... *Like the Rain When it Stops*



Immerse Yourself

Hannah Sullivan spends a Fortnight in Bristol with Proto-type Theater



It's late at night in Bristol city centre. I'm working with Proto-type Theater as a production assistant, and we embark on a mass hand-delivered letter drop. Armed with GPS, torches and Jelly Babies we split into three teams, and leave the car park ready for a long evening. We dodge the gaggles of girls with their high heels in one hand and cheesy chips in the other, to be confronted by gangs of foxes in cul-de-sacs that stare you down and then scurry under parked cars. It was just us and the milkman on the roads as we posted our final letters, trying to look inconspicuous, which is difficult at 3am.

The letters were the beginning of Proto-type's two-week project, *Fortnight*, which featured in Mayfest 2011 in Bristol, and was introduced

to me by Mayfest Director Kate Yedigaroff as 'quintessentially immersive'.

Ah that intriguing fashionable theatrical term – 'immersive'. Just what does 'immersive' mean in the current theatre landscape, and how does Proto-type's work relate to this contemporary landscape?

Originally a technological term referring to being surrounded by a virtual image, immersive has been taken on by installation and performance companies such as Punchdrunk who, on their website, describe themselves as 'pioneers of a game-changing form of immersive theatre', and Shunt, whose groundbreaking performance in unusual locations (often under railway arches – in Bethnal Green, London Bridge or Edinburgh) over the past decade has been pulled into critics' debates around immersive theatre.

Immersive has been evolving in definition over this time: I wondered if it was a question of proximity that defines it (the 'feeling a performer's breath on your neck' aspect), or if it was the senses (being dragged into a scenario by the ears, mouth and nose). Either way, it is definitely a question of audience relation and engagement.

To be immersed means literally to sink gently into water. This is the interpretation of the word more applicable to the work of the Stand + Stare collective, a Bristol-based sibling company who have created *SS Arcadia*, in which a building in central Bristol was turned into a cruise liner, and recently *Children of Modernity*, a smaller scale piece in a bell tent where audience members unravel a narrative by finding tapes in jars of beans. In a conversation with Stand + Stare, they explained that they feel the term immersive elicits a gentle submergence into a role or situation, rather than a dunk and run. If we extend this water metaphor further, we might ask that if we immerse ourselves, how

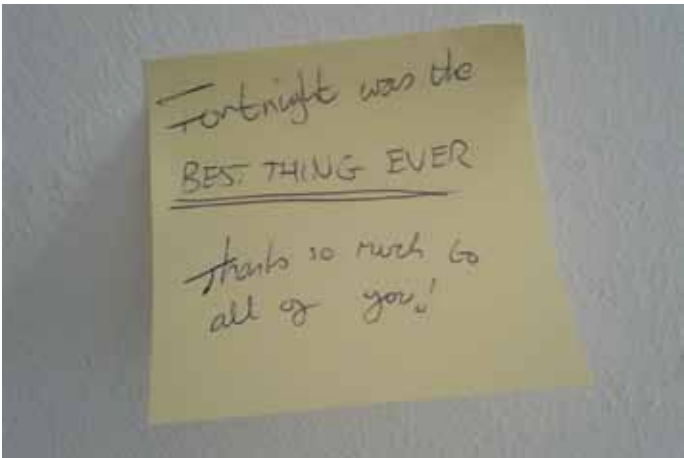


possible is it for us to drown, to be deluded, and is this what audiences and artists want? To investigate this issue I contacted Mayfest, the Bristol based annual theatre festival, who in turn put me in touch with Proto-type Theater – and hence my subsequent involvement in *Fortnight*.

Discussing *Fortnight* with me, Peter Petralia, Proto-type's artistic director, said that it is easier to say what the project isn't than what it is – it is not a play; it is not a game. For two weeks, participants hand over their contact information and receive texts, emails and letters inviting them to secret occasions throughout the city. The occasions are small activities, visited alone, that offer some time for reflection and often an alternative view of the city. The project is punctuated with larger events when everyone can meet and a sense of community is formed. The project attempts to immerse its participants in their own city and into their own everyday life through poetic nudges and engagements in new spaces, encouraging them to look at things differently. Gillian Lees, company member and co-director of the project, described the project to me as having a 'you get out as much as you put in' ethos, which is brave and difficult, as people do fall by the wayside and there is not much to be done about it.

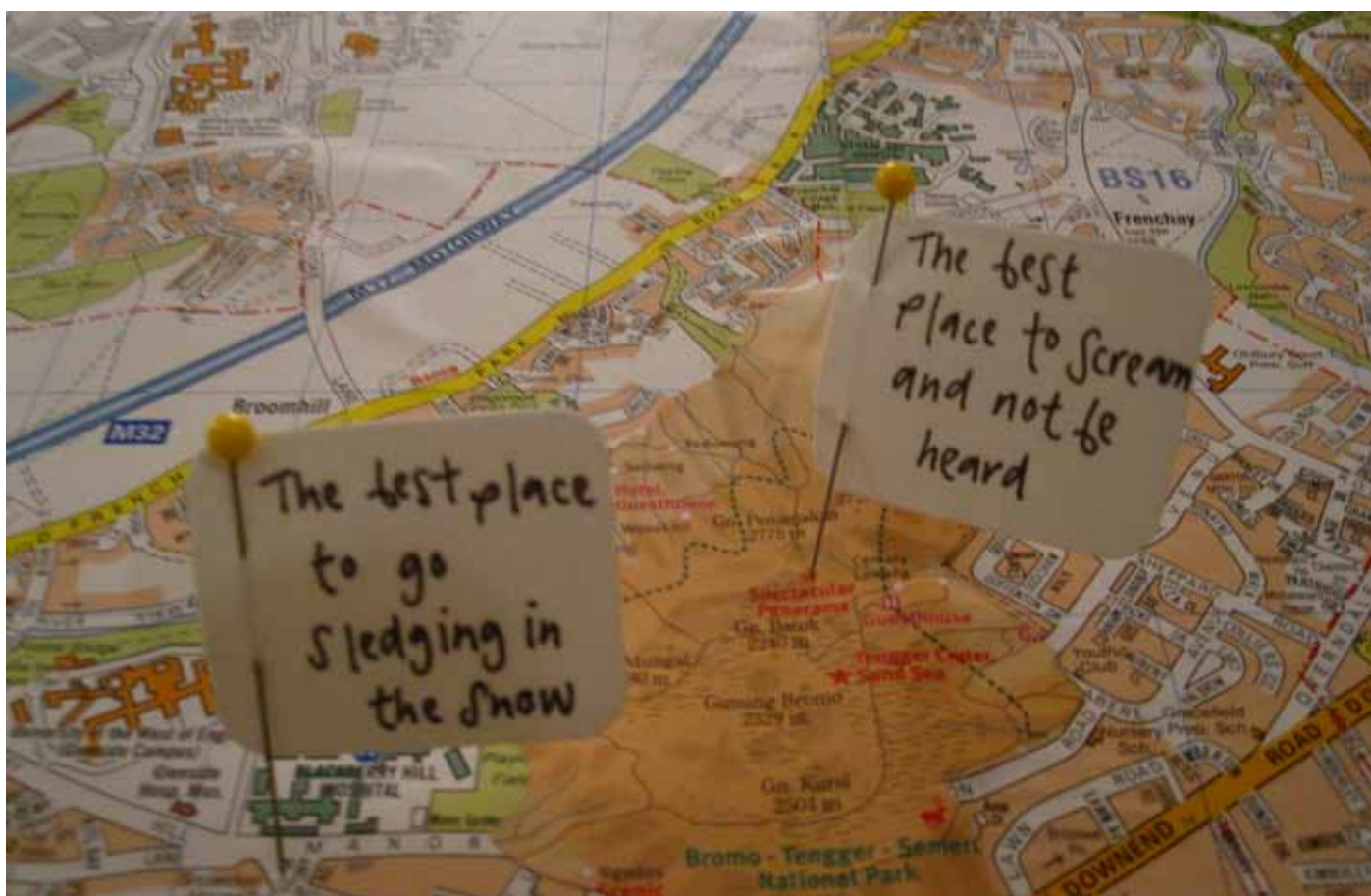
Influenced by Pico Iyer's book *The Global Soul*, the project encourages participants to be tourists in their own city. Invited to watch the sunset at one of Bristol's foremost tourist spots, the Clifton Suspension Bridge, with glasses of something sparkly and a cellist on site, the participants find themselves at an occasion suitable for a toast. But to what? They decide. The participants also become undercover detectives in their own city: by knocking on closed doors and being asked for a password, the huge wooden door of St John the Baptist church opens and they are then locked in. Proto-type set up the locations and situations in which the participants fill the main role. The project dislocates the participants from their usual routine in order for them to re-engage, to take notice of the environment and of strangers, and to bring everyday life into focus. The project works to reawaken the senses to the immediate surroundings, but it does have an agenda and a personality that is endlessly positive – so much so, in fact, that the darker truths of the city are never explored, which can be frustrating.

The relationship between *Fortnight* and its participants is unusual; the work is slipped right into the centre of people's lives via personal technologies such as SMS and email. Participants could reply to received messages, enabling bespoke conversations to develop. In all, 1,089 unique text messages were sent to participants, yielding 2,000 responses. A text would be received every morning of the two-week time period, mirroring the attentiveness and excitement of a new love affair. The *Fortnight* voice is always supportive and in your best interests. As such, it lends a sense of attachment.



Gillian Lees also expressed the thought that the participants 'built their own hysteria' around seemingly uneventful occasions. For example, one participant took photographs of everything on a dressing table because it 'might be a clue'. The activities revolved around 'portals', which were objects such as a phone or book that were situated in various places. All the participants owned a felt badge containing a chip which, when placed on the objects, activated a sound, a video, or a text to their phone. These portals worked with what the company called 'invisible technology', in the sense that we use smart phones within our daily lives without concerning ourselves with the technologies embedded within. Once activated by a tap of their felt badge, the 'portal' introduced a task, such as writing a postcard to a loved one, that provided a small meditative space within their day. Each portal was situated in a relevant place; the participants visited the Bristol University theatre collection, the Bristol record office, local artists' studios The Parlour and Mrs Brown's Teashop in Victoria Park. The spaces created a physical experience of being under the skin of the city, sunk a little, in dark corners where the under-layers of a city can be felt. Immersing yourself within the city by burrowing into it feels like an exercise in psychogeography: the idea (defined by Guy Debord and developed by writers Will Self and Iain Sinclair, and performance/art groups such as Wrights & Sites) that our geographical experience has a profound psychological effect.

The timescale of two weeks is crucial to the work. As Peter Petralia puts it: in the first couple of days the participants are trying to work out what the project is, to then solve it and get over it takes three to four days, then they need time to enjoy things and experience them, and so a week is gone. By the second week people get to a point where they realise they can make their own way through it, and then they



arrive at a point when it feels normal and people stop thinking about it happening. Peter went on to explain that then it gets dangerously close to a time when it has to continue – this would be a third week, so it ends before it can't be taken away. The two-week period is important as it allows the work to happen in real time: Proto-type were interested in what can be done in two weeks that cannot be done in a typical hour-and-a-half show. The work does not want to remove people from everyday situations and so operates in real time. During *Fortnight* a big event will happen occasionally, such as the gathering at the suspension bridge or the final event which occurred on the 17th floor of an office block providing a 360-degree view of the city; while on other days not so much will occur, perhaps just a message.

Some participants in *Fortnight* adopted a distant and critical stance, engaged with the work as a theatre project, while a larger number became completely immersed to the point of not understanding the legwork and organisation behind the project, and believing that they could carry on alone. Proto-type felt it very important to keep themselves, the technology and the organisation completely hidden, in an attempt to hand ownership to the participants.

Mathew Austin, co-director of Mayfest, told me that during the project it appeared that Proto-type had accessed a nameless 'non theatre' crowd who were given tickets as presents, or even participated for dating purposes: it seems that the ambiguity of the project created a varied audience. One task in *Fortnight* was to pick up a rubber duck from the fountains in central Bristol, which many participants kept with them (it seemed to work as a conversation starter between members). The following week at the 'Bristol 10k', *Fortnight* participants were cheering on any runners with a rubber duck.

A *Fortnight* community had developed and was now active beyond the limits of the planned events.

Within theatre there is a myriad of possibilities between intimacy and spectacle, and in *Fortnight* participants enjoyed an intimate singular journey and were also part of a spectacle; a community that inhabited the 17th floor of an office block on the final day...

I found *Fortnight* an interesting event to explore in relation to the immersive experience, as each participant's experience was unique to them, happening in their own time, and it prompted me into thoughts on the nature of 'immersive theatre' versus the theatricality of everyday life. During my time with *Fortnight* I often spent many hours sitting in one place, supervising the portals. One day, this was the hotel lobby of the Mercure hotel in St Mary Redcliffe. I watched a band in black clothes and peaked caps check out and pile into a van; I saw a mother leave her son to entertain himself while she went to the gym; I saw a young girl in last night's outfit call a taxi from the reception desk; and I witnessed the receptionists enact a western shoot-out when they got bored. By committing my time to one location and sitting fairly still and unassuming, the hotel lobby played out its drama, and all the theatricality of everyday life entertained me. I immersed myself in that hotel lobby and so it became strange, fun, and unique even in its mundanity. Perhaps that's the ultimate 'immersive theatre' experience?

All images are from Proto-type Theater's *Fortnight* presented at Mayfest Bristol, May 2011. Images courtesy of Peter Petralia and the company.

Home Truths

The Canny Granny Gets Her Kit On

Just because I'm older than you, doesn't mean I spend all day in a dressing-gown. In fact, I seem to spend a lot of time twirling in a tutu wishing I had a performance up my sleeve. I've got some fabulous unworn costumes and nowhere to show.

Costume brings a whole world with it. A hat, for example: Wendy Houstoun's quivering red feather showgirl thing in *Keep Dancing* is an actor in itself. In my attic there are 30 of the headpieces that women wear to church in Peckham. I should have left them outside during the recent riots; looters would have looked marvellous in them. There is also the sombrero I brought back from honeymoon – the biggest and gaudiest I could find – that Grandpa was shamed by on the plane. I lent it to my friend for her show, thus vindicating my hoarding. (Also, Grandpa has a neoprene sharksuit in a drawer in the bedroom, so he really has no leg to stand on.)

We keep costumes because they promise a future piece of theatre might be made to measure for them. Costume first, theatre follows. Surely Laurie Anderson started off with her touch-sensitive drum-pad suit, and then fashioned *Home of the Brave* from that? At a workshop in Leeds in 1998, Terry O'Connor from Forced Entertainment said they were looking for a use for their gorilla suit. It appeared in *A Bloody Mess* in 2004, so I imagine someone came to rehearsals in it for six years, only to be sent home to change.

Which reminds me: there's a mangy old bear suit out there that has been doing the rounds for a good few years – first seen in Shunt's *Dance Bear Dance*, then in Peepolykus' *Mindbender*, and most recently in Michael Pinchbeck's *The End*. Exeunt pursued by a bear indeed. What happens to it in-between? Does it just sit in a cupboard waiting for the next contemporary theatre company needing a bear suit to stroll by?

Talking of cupboards, I have also hoarded two identical bridesmaid dresses – the tutus I spake of. I yearn to dress the same as someone else – why is that? I love 'his and hers', the shellsuit era, and Gilbert & George. Natural Theatre Company offer walkabout performances by groups of people in uniform outfits (coneheads, flowerpotheads, royalty).



Forced Entertainment *Bloody Mess*. Photo Hugo Glendinning

And there's a Warholesque compulsion to the repetition of the identical dress present in Clod Ensemble's *Red Ladies*. The sense of theatre created by vintage devotees jiving together at this summer's Vintage festival on the South Bank was like another world entirely. Really truly out-of-this-world are the groups who gather to dress in nappies with giant nappy-pins outside Yoyogi Park in Tokyo. After Grandpa's recent accident with the real ale I'm inclined to think the latter costume choice would be really quite practical for him.

Talking of nappies, stage undress deserves a mention as it has its own style. Dancers used oft to be seen in big gym-knickers. Gotta admit that pants make compelling watching. A bloke playing electric guitar in his Y-fronts upstages all others in *Electric Hotel*, Fuel's touring mega-installation in which there are dancers in different glass-fronted rooms. Bryony Kimming's of *Sex Idiot* fame got down to her pants, the Two Wrongies have eschewed theirs (other than when they need their g-strings to twang in 'Duelling Banjos'), and New Art Club have ditched the turquoise leotards for dishcloth-grey boxers in their new show, *A Quiet Act of Destruction*. Talking of acts of (self) destruction: I tried doing a butoh performance in a gallery in a pair of giant pants I got in Peacocks once. The performance is best forgotten. The pants a duster at best.

In fact, best to do away with pants altogether. Among the many wonderful naked performance art pieces out there, Brazilian troupe Lia Rodrigues Companhia de Danças's *Incarnat* at Aurora Nova in 2007 is sticky in my mind, as it used tomato ketchup as their only costume. Ultra dark and frightening Russian company BlackSkyWhite were unfortunate enough to have the late-night slot after them, so they did their whole run with a sugary floor and the smell of vinegar in the air. Shudder to think of the revenge they plotted.

I know, I'll start a service like a personals ad. 'Costumes seeking performance.'

It will be two tutu wonderful.

Laura Eades is the Canny Granny. Her show *Holiday*, featuring aforementioned sombrero, was presented at Camden People's Theatre July–August 2011

www.fastercraftswomen.com

Wendy Houstoun
www.artsadmin.co.uk/artists/wendy-houstoun

Clod Ensemble's *Red Ladies*
www.clodensemble.com/performance/redladies.htm

Laurie Anderson
www.laurieanderson.com

Bryony Kimming's
www.bryonykimmings.com

Electric Hotel
www.fueltheatre.com

New Art Club
www.newartclub.org

The Two Wrongies
www.thetwowrongies.co.uk

Lia Rodrigues Companhia de Danças
www.liarodrigues.com/eng/

Natural Theatre Company's menu of performances, including people in naked suits
www.naturaltheatre.co.uk/walkabout.php

Forced Entertainment's *Bloody Mess*
www.forcedentertainment.com/page/144/Bloody+Mess/85

Peepolykus
www.peepolykus.co.uk/mindbender

Shunt
www.shunt.co.uk

Michael Pinchbeck
www.michaelpinchbeck.co.uk

Any other sightings of that bear suit should be reported to Bearline 0845 600 600

Total Theatre Awards 2011

Pippa Bailey, director of the Total Theatre Awards, reflects on the Edinburgh Fringe 2011

The Total Theatre Awards almost didn't happen this year and we, like many others, found ourselves in an even more precarious situation, reflecting the turbulent times we are living in. Many of our supporters are undergoing cost-cutting measures so essential work must take priority. I am delighted we were able to secure the support and proceed. I am hugely grateful to all those organisations able to support us again, with a warm welcome to the Nuffield in Southampton as a new supporter.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe felt a little different this year. The loss of Assembly on George Street meant that Assembly retained their venue on the Mound, overlooking the Princes Street Gardens but also occupied the gardens in George Square, George Square Theatre, and various other University of Edinburgh rooms. This sadly stopped last year's Total Theatre Significant Contribution Award winner David Bates from bringing his very special World Famous Spiegeltent to Edinburgh, and the George Square gardens had a distinctly more commercial vibe.

Forest Fringe was back for its fifth year but with its venue, Forest Café, under threat. Another new initiative was Summerhall, programmed by Rupert Thomson with input from Edinburgh veteran Richard Demarco. This vast building housed much of the British Council Showcase and a programme called Take Out, created by BAC, both presented in the final week of the festival. It was also home to the Total Theatre Awards shortlisted overnight show *Hotel Medea*, playing from midnight to dawn each weekend. Summerhall provided another venue, like Forest Fringe, where artists were able to play with the format and length of their work. The Fringe has become such a commodified marketplace, where every show is expected to last an hour or less, so these are welcome interventions.

During this year's process for the Total Theatre Awards, the assessors saw 402 shows, only a few less than last year's 427. The number of shows embracing visual theatre – whether that be puppetry, mask or moving image – had significantly increased. The amount of cabaret afforded a new section of the Fringe programme giving this genre a deserved boost. We had eighteen able

assessors seeing the extraordinary range of work this year, and joining the heated discussions.

The shortlisting meeting was the longest in the history of the Awards, partly due to the large number of relevant high quality shows. After six long hours the shortlisted shows were chosen. A panel of esteemed judges then saw this work over the following six days, and on 25 August after much deliberation decisions were made, with the judging meeting held on the morning of that day, and the Awards ceremony held that evening at Fringe Central, attended by a lively throng of artists, producers, venue directors, and critics.

The ceremony carried a slightly sombre tone as we reflected on the riots that had broken out in England at the beginning of the month, and judge Ben Twist reflected on the need for political engagement if theatre is to remain current. Certainly a high percentage of the shortlist and the awardees were in some way engaging with issues either directly or indirectly.

The first Award to be announced was the Significant Contribution to the field of Total Theatre, which went to Judith Knight, co-founder/director of Arts Admin.

Judith Knight founded Arts Admin with Seonaid Stewart 31 years ago and has gone on to support, administrate, produce and fund some of the most significant artists and projects of the last three decades. Several generations of artists and companies owe their early or continued success to Arts Admin, including Mike Figgis, Forced Entertainment, DV8, Moti Roti, Station House Opera, Bobby Baker, Mem Morrison, Robin Deacon, Ursula Martinez, Stacy Makishi, Chris Goode and Lemn Sissay. Arts Admin has provided the support that has allowed artists to create work, tour it both here and abroad, and develop new work in a way that suits their own creative rhythm rather than finding themselves beholden to the timetables of funding bodies. Judith Knight has not only supported artists but is a role model for many within the sector and has created a wonderfully supportive culture for creativity.



Total Theatre Awards 2011 were supported by the Barbican London, Norfolk & Norwich Festival, The Nuffield Southampton, University of Chichester, University of Winchester, and Wales Millennium Centre.

Total Theatre Awards Judges 2011

David Bauwens, Producer, Ontroerend Goed; Robert Jude Daniels, Senior Lecturer, University of Chichester; Professor Anthony Dean, Dean of Arts faculty, University of Winchester / Total Theatre Board; Donald Hutera, Critic, The Times; Dorothy Max Prior, Editor, Total Theatre Magazine; Patricia Ceschi, Creative Producer based in São Carlos, Brazil; Tina Rasmussen, Director of Performing Arts at Harbourfront Centre, Toronto; Patrick Sandford, Artistic Director, The Nuffield Southampton; Kully Thairai, Freelance Director; Ben Twist, Culture and Climate Change Consultant and former theatre director.

Chair of judges: Pippa Bailey

See over for the announcement of the Total Theatre Awards winners and shortlisted shows.

Total Theatre Award for Work by Emerging Artists/ Companies: ShadyJane, *Sailing On*

‘ShadyJane, for all their youth, live up to the challenges they’ve set themselves, showing an awareness of the power of scenography to drive a piece. There’s a lovely puppetesque quality, and strong performances from the three-woman team.’



Total Theatre Award for Physical/Visual/Devised Performance: NeTTheatre/ Grupa Coincidentia, *Turandot*

‘A wonderful postmodern deconstruction of Puccini’s last opera, mulched in with the tragic real life story of the throat cancer the composer developed. To hear, to speak, to voice, to lose voice, to be denied voice... what these mean, literally and metaphorically, is explored. Bold and brave and beautiful.’



Total Theatre Award for Physical/Visual/Devised Performance: Bunk Puppets/ Scamp Theatre, *Swamp Juice*

‘Shadow puppetry to tickle the senses of adults and children alike. It’s a jiggling, gobbling journey of rolling eyes, wagging chins, monsters with wiry hair and pincer-like attacks. Consistently, impressively, visually inventive.’

Total Theatre Award
for Innovation and
Experimentation: Adrian
Howells, *May I Have the
Pleasure?*

‘A mock-wedding reception
at which we are the guests!
In this age of interactive
and immersive theatre, it’s
good to remember that
Adrian Howells has been
there a long time, and this
experience shows. What a
pleasure it is to be in his
company!’



Shortlisted: Emerging Artist/Company

Sleepwalk Collective, *As the flames rose we danced
to the sirens the sirens*
Milk Presents, *Bluebeard: A fairytale for adults*
Wrong Crowd, *The Girl with the Iron Claws*
East End Cabaret, *East End Cabaret : The
Revolution Will Be Sexual*

Shortlisted: Physical/Visual/Devised

Muirne Bloomer and Emma O’Kane,
The Ballet Ruse
Dr Brown, *Dr Brown Becaves*
National Theatre of Wales / Told By An Idiot,
The Dark Philosophers
Cirk la Putyka, *La Putyka*
Circle of Eleven, *Leo*
Ramesh Meyyappan/Iron-Oxide,
Snails and Ketchup
Siro-a, *Technodelic Comedy Show*
Theatre Ad Infinitum, *Translunar Paradise*
All or Nothing and Strange Bird Zirkus,
Uncharted Waters

Shortlisted: Innovation and Experimentation

Ontroerend Goed, *Audience*
Zecora Ura and Persis Jade Maravala,
Hotel Medea
Orkestra del Sol, *Orkestra del Sol’s Top Trumps*
Nassim Soleimanpour/Volcano, *White Rabbit
Red Rabbit*
Tim Watts/Underbelly Productions, *The
Adventures of Alvin Sputnik: Deep Sea Explorer*

On recommendation of the Judges/Advisors
the following shows, opening late, were also
considered for an Award:

In the Physical/Visual/Devised category:
Dog Kennel Hill Project, *Working the Devil*

In the Innovation category:
1927, *The Animals and Children Took to the Streets*
Action Hero, *Watch Me Fall*
Curious, *The first moment I saw you I knew I could
love you*

Melanie Wilson and Abigail Conway (Subject
to Change), *every minute, always*
Quarantine, *Entitled*
Metis Arts, *3rd Ring Out –The Emergency*

Total Theatre Award
for Innovation and
Experimentation: Tania
el Khoury, *Maybe if you
choreograph me, you will feel better*

‘A relational piece that
happens between one female
performer and one male
audience member – an
everyman, an archetypal
patriarch, representing all
the world’s fathers, brothers,
lawmakers, religious leaders,
politicians. An ambitious,
thoughtful, and challenging
performance.’



Total Theatre Award
for Innovation and
Experimentation: Look Left
Look Right, *You Once Said Yes*

‘A one-on-one theatre show
set in the streets, cathedrals,
bingo halls, graveyards, and
bars of Edinburgh. A very
lovely piece: the sites chosen
are a varied and interesting
mix; the route planned
meticulously. Vitally, the
audience is really looked out
for throughout the journey.’



'There's a word for people like you, and that word is audience.'

Charlotte Smith, Total Theatre reviewer and Awards assessor, reflects on the Edinburgh Fringe 2011 from her vantage point in the auditorium.



Audience. That magic word. People who listen. Or in German, *die Zuschauer*, people who watch. Like *les spectateurs* in French, where they are also just *le public*. In many languages, audience is basically 'the public'. But perhaps not so naïve or unsuspecting any more...

The audience was again under the spotlight at this year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The notorious show of the same name by Ontroerend Goed provoked some strong reactions. Others like *White Rabbit*, *Red Rabbit* pushed the boundaries more gently.

The first thing to say is that audience numbers held up. Much as it hurts to waste space reproducing press-release material... It seems 1,877,119 tickets were sold in 2011, up from 1,829,931 in 2010 (neither includes free, non-ticketed events). The number of shows also edged up to 2,542. If these are harder times, move over Mr Gradgrind.

The second thing to say is that alternative interaction is now traditional. Much as I liked *Allotment* or *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*, there have been site-specific shows before. *Sailing On*, staged in the ladies' loo of the freemasons' lodge, continues the tradition of performances in a zoo, container or swimming pool. *Maybe if you choreograph me, you will feel better*, in which Tania El Khoury invites men to direct her movements, both uses and subverts the format of headphone instructions. *Dance Marathon* could be linked to *Silent Disco* or *Office Party*. If you go back far enough, we're all related...

Audience by Ontroerend Goed did seem to go one stage further. After some friendly reminders not to eat crisps, the company rifles through its audience. Total Theatre's editor Dorothy Max Prior, in her online review, wrote that a young woman was 'insulted, harangued and harassed in the most unpleasant way imaginable'. She described how: 'The camera remains on her, in close-up, throughout. Her face is enormous onscreen, her lip is trembling, her eyes blinking away the tears. The actor says that he will only stop if she agrees to "spread her legs for the camera".' If the aim was to test audience reactions, Matt Trueman describes some interesting countermeasures on his blog, *Carousel of Fantasies*. One man pre-empted and dampened the moment by leaping up to rescue the damsel, he says. As for Trueman himself: 'I had no qualms about taking £30 to start a chant: "Spread your legs. Spread your legs."'

A key question was whether the girl was a plant, for all or some of the run. This reminded me of the furore surrounding the Brendon Burns show *So I suppose this is offensive now*, which won the not-the-Perrier main comedy prize four years ago. Unlike the open discussion, gossip, rumour surrounding *Audience*, the critics maintained a blanket silence in 2007. No one spilled the beans that the Asian lady being so vehemently abused by the Australian comedian for our amusement was actually a plant.

This year, *White Rabbit*, *Red Rabbit* questioned the traditional audience dynamic more subtly. Nassim Soleimanpour's script was given a cold reading by a different actor each day. It required volunteers to become animals on stage, take notes or photos, while playing with time, distance and location. This was heightened by the writer's own position – potentially inaccessible or dangerous – in Iran.

Another contrast is with Frisky and Mannish. Their parting shot in *Pop Centre Plus* – 'we've been Frisky and Mannish and you've been superfluous' – was only partly tongue in cheek. They do work the audience: we are divided into five types or 'career paths' (Razorlight, Britney, Justin Bieber, Elvis and Echo, the first being those with wonderful hair but little else...) and later a 'man band' is manufactured with style and alacrity (told to touch each other inappropriately for the camera...). But in other ways, F&M's talent did dwarf the audience. You could enjoy watching from behind the wall.

Cards on the table: I had the advantage of not seeing *Audience*. An earlier Ontroerend Goed show, *Internal*, did catch a personal nerve. I was left feeling my fantasies were inadequate, boring, overly contained, among other things. It has been argued that the company should distinguish between a professional audience of theatre-makers and the genuine public. I'm not so sure this is the only point. Their provocation is still within the boundaries of theatre, while on stage (as to what they do offstage, well, that would be for the Belgian authorities to judge). The moral repulsion is both valid and worn.

Perhaps the debate about interactivity is linked to technology. Sites like Facebook, for which people photograph events before experiencing them, make participation inescapable. However, theatre also has a great recalcitrance with technology. To the extent that it is live, in the moment, paring down the mediation to bare the soul, it's the enemy of superficial and virtual interactivity. This can also make it self-indulgent, nostalgic or disengaged.

Generally, my encounters at Edinburgh with fellow audience members have been underwhelming. Obstacle courses, elbows, the odd friendly word, shared programme, free whisky... but no peck on the cheek, no children in or out of wedlock. And of course, while some people were safely watching the Fringe, others got a bit too interactive with stray water bottles during looting in London. Now that's what I call spur-of-the-moment participation...

See Total Theatre's Edinburgh Fringe reviews by Charlotte Smith and others at www.totaltheatrereview.com

Matt Trueman's *Carousel of Fantasies*:
<http://carouseloffantasies.blogspot.com/>

This article's title is a quote from Forced Entertainment's *Showtime*.
www.forcedentertainment.com

THE WORKS

A personal view of the works of Adrian Howells by Dorothy Max Prior



The Works | Dorothy Max Prior

Adrian Howells: performance artist, theatre-maker, creator of autobiographical-confessional works, master of the one-on-one performance mode... and twice a Total Theatre Award winner!

As an actor/performer, Adrian Howells has, over the years, worked with a great number of 'names' – from Leigh Bowery to Nigel Charnock, the Drill Hall Company to Citizens Theatre. In more recent times, he was part of the original Royal Court Theatre cast of Tim Crouch's *The Author*. Yet it is for his own solo works that he has gained most fame – imaginative, daring, interactive works that defy easy categorisation.

Adrian Howells' solo work of recent years has divided into two camps (if you'll excuse the pun): the one-on-one pieces, such as *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding, and Foot Washing for the Sole*; and what we might call the 'come into my parlour' shows, such as *An Audience with Adrienne*, in which we share an environment with Adrian that is designed as a vehicle for his autobiographical writings. What both strands of work share is an absolute understanding of the mechanics of theatre and a celebration of the performer and audience relationship. In this age of interactive/immersive theatre, it's good to remember that Adrian Howells has been there a long time, and this experience shows in the quality of the work he presents.

Adrian Howells' latest work, the 2011 Total Theatre Award-winning *May I Have the Pleasure...?* purports to be a wedding party, and is set

in a room-with-a-view at The Point hotel in Edinburgh. We, naturally, are the wedding guests. There are ribbons and streamers and purple balloons; and celebratory silver sugared almonds and teeny little gold bells set out on all the tables, which are arranged around the dancefloor. Ah, the dancefloor! Where would any wedding be without the dancing? And yes, there is dancing, and there is a glitterball...

But that comes later, first: Do's and Don'ts for the best man, mostly don'ts: Remember the ring. Don't make long speeches, and don't talk about yourself. Don't crack inappropriate jokes. Don't include sexual innuendoes, or tell embarrassing stories of the Groom's sexual peccadilloes. Don't shag the bridesmaid in the toilet.

Adrian Howells has been to scores of weddings, and quite a few civil partner ceremonies, and he has been a best man on at least eight occasions. And he is guilty of all the 'don'ts' above. Well, all except shagging the bridesmaid in the loo, although he has also been a bridesmaid himself. We don't get to hear whether he made out with the best man on that occasion, but we do get another toilet sex story, which turns out to be a very poignant little tale about being single, making personal judgements and choices, and handling expectations.

Most awfully and heartbreakingly, he's been best man to his (then) best friend, and on the night before the wedding shared a hotel room with the groom and lay awake desperate to touch the man he was in love with. At one point in the show, Yvonne Fair's fabulous lament 'It



Should Have Been Me’ resounds round the room, and Adrian stands still and upright; beating his chest fiercely and rhythmically, a kind of lament to all his lost loves.

We learn a lot about these past loves, and about his various and telling experiences as best man, through tasty little titbits of confessional-autobiographical storytelling; through stylised re-enactments of key scenes and lines from those weddings; and through watching the gorgeously fuzzy Kodachrome Super-8s and VHS video recordings of the various ‘best man’ speeches he has made (which show a series of friends and relatives – some amused, some excruciatingly embarrassed – listening to Adrian’s saucy comments). But don’t beat yourself up about things in your past you can’t change, is Adrian’s message.

But then comes the dancing! Slow waltzes, cheery swing numbers. We get taught ‘The Slosh’ and it all ends – as it must – under the glitterball, with the demented dad-dancing disco.

As with all Adrian Howells’ work, the structure and execution of the piece is beautiful – and he always takes the most tender care of his audience. What marks *May I Have the Pleasure...?* out from the earlier ‘salon’ works is that Adrian is appearing as ‘himself’ (whatever that might mean), rather than as his alter-ego Adrienne.

It was Adrienne who was hostess with the mostest in *Adrienne’s Dirty Laundry Experience*, *Adrienne’s Room Service*, and *Salon Adrienne*. *An Evening With Adrienne* (which I’ve had the pleasure of seeing twice, in Edinburgh in 2007 and in Brighton in 2010) is typical of this cluster of works: made for an audience of up to 20 people, it takes the form of a small party in someone’s front room.

The audience are greeted, sat on sofas, and offered sweets. We are invited to introduce ourselves, form teams, and create collages from old copies of Hello! Magazine. Meanwhile, Adrian’s drag alter ego Adrienne entertains us with a few songs and dances, and shows us home-movies of Adrian’s elderly parents reflecting on their son’s childhood. We also get to select stories from a menu, and after Adrian/Adrienne has shared a story of, say, a personal childhood experience in a tent on a summer-camp, or of being bullied at school,

we are invited to contribute our own stories on a related theme. Adrian’s perfectly pitched, warm and open performance creates a safe environment for shared intimacies, and people open up readily. The ending of this piece is telling: ‘Adrienne’ becoming ‘Adrian’ before our eyes as the make-up remover is rigorously applied, and a plain black T-shirt, joggers and Birkenstocks conjured up in place of the drag.

An Evening with Adrienne can thus be seen as a transitional piece, that leads us into his latest work. When I meet Adrian, during the last weekend of the Fringe, towards the end of the mayhem that is August in Edinburgh, he is keen to stress that *May I Have the Pleasure...?*, although drawing on some of the same techniques as the ‘Adrienne’ shows, is different in a number of key ways. In *May I Have the Pleasure...?* he is attempting to bring together his two strands of work by creating intimate one-on-one moments (such as the dance vignettes with audience members) within the collective experience. His previous work, *Won’t Somebody Dance With Me?* (presented at BAC, London and Arches, Glasgow in 2010/ 2011), was a one-on-one piece that informed the creation of *May I Have the Pleasure...?* and took the form of Adrian sat alone at a table waiting to be asked for a dance.

Adrian is keen to stress that although he values his one-on-one works, he wants to make work for a group experience, as he feels that our culture is currently more inclined to celebrate individualism, but politically collectivism is to be encouraged and treasured in these hard times. United we stand...

Yet the one-on-ones are perhaps the works that have had the most impact on his career over recent years. In *Foot Washing for the Sole*, which won a Total Theatre Award in 2009, you are invited to spend time with Adrian whilst having your feet lovingly attended to. The religious significance of the foot-washing is alluded to directly by Adrian, and used as a way in to a reflection on the Middle East situation and small acts of peace that can be enacted in the world.

Then came *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding*, which moves the concept on one step further: the audience member/participant invited to surrender him or herself to be ‘fully bathed, fed and held in a long embrace’. I first saw (although ‘experienced’ would be a more



appropriate word) this piece at BAC's One-on-One festival in 2010, then again at the Edinburgh Fringe 2011, where it was presented as part of the British Council Showcase.

'Pleasure', we can note, is a word that crops up frequently in Adrian's world. In *The Pleasure of Being*, you are invited in to a rather swanky hotel room, shown where to get changed, and invited to read a few lines about the show. You learn that you can wear a swimsuit or be naked, your choice; you can speak, share thoughts and memories, or not – your choice. When you have undressed and donned a crisply laundered white robe, you knock on the bathroom door and Adrian invites you in. He helps you disrobe, takes you by the hand as you step into the water. He asks that you close your eyes, and immediately your other senses – touch, and smell, and hearing – are enhanced a thousandfold. Although without a fixed narrative beyond the ritual washing sequence, *The Pleasure of Being* creates a space into which narrative can unfold. Everyone's story will be different, defined by past experiences, associations, memories.

Adrian is a skilled artist who knows his stuff: we are in safe hands, boundaries between performer and audience held in a delicate balance. Despite the intimacy of the situation, our roles are clearly defined. The theatre is in the framing of this place, this time, as a shared experience. It happens, and then it's gone. And it is – as are all of the works of Adrian Howells that I have experienced to-date – truly a pleasure.

May I Have The Pleasure...? and The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding were both presented at The Point Hotel, Edinburgh, August 2011; the first by Traverse Theatre, and the second by The Arches. Both were part of the British Council Showcase 2011.

May I Have The Pleasure...? won a Total Theatre Award 2011 in the Innovation and Experimentation category.

Between 2006-2009 Adrian Howells was the recipient of an AHRC Creative Fellowship in the School of Culture and the Creative Arts at Glasgow University, where his practice-led research was engaged with looking at issues of intimacy and risk in the one-to-one confessional performance practice. He is currently an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department.

Adrian is also currently Artist-in-Residence with the Arches, Glasgow, and TouchBase, Sense Scotland, where he runs a progressive arts programme for adults with complex learning and communication difficulties..

Image credit p21: Adrian Howells *May I Have the Pleasure... ?*
Photo Niall Walker

P22: Adrian Howells *The Pleasure of Being*. Photo Niall Walker

P23 montage, clockwise from top left: The many faces of Adrian Howells: *An Audience with Adrienne*; *Foot Washing for the Sole*; *Foot Washing for the Sole*; *Adrienne's Dirty Laundry Experience*; *Won't Somebody Dance With Me?*/*May I Have the Pleasure... ?* Photos Niall Walker / Hamish Barton

VOICES

John Fox in his own words



I have always grabbed whatever was appropriate and available to reveal the poetry and make ideas concrete. I learn the necessary techniques myself or work with experts. I have never been led by style and I am amazed to find things we stumbled on naturally now institutionalised in jargon such as 'site-specific', 'installations', 'applied', or 'cross-artform'.

A big question for me is, where does motivation come from? Our motivation has always been to make relevant art accessible. This goes from making glove puppet pantomimes as an 11-year-old (which I performed to children's parties, for half a crown!); shifting the Trident sheds in *The Golden Submarine* in Barrow-in-Furness (1990) or *Raising the Titanic* in Limehouse, London (1983) as an allegorical intervention in the Thatcher years. In Limehouse we learned, on site, how to raise and lower tons of scaffolding into a dock twice nightly. It's what we had to do.

I'm an 'ink on my fingers' artist. I enjoy working with my hands and using tools. In printmaking it's rolling ink onto a chiselled board; in the kitchen gutting fish; and outside, in all weathers, trying to knock up a log store with 6-inch nails. If I sit at a computer all day I go bonkers.

For me, the old triangle of head, hands and heart is essential. I try to get below the top of my head and work with the brains in my fingers. Apart from the physical pleasure I am always surprised at the results. The poetry seems to somehow emerge. Our culture is, I believe, dangerously locked into abstracted concepts and phoney futures neurotically out of touch with what I would call everyday common sense reality.

The division between art and craft is false. Part of the problem now is that some artists have been persuaded to despise craft, are educated not to use their hands and prefer to delegate the actual making of their work to studio technicians.

I first used the term Vernacular Arts in 1991 when I wrote a

provocative Plea for Poetry for the Arts Council's National Arts and Media Strategy (NAMS). In asking where circus, fairground, street arts, carnival and indeed 'cross-over arts', as it was then called, sat in the Arts Council England (ACE) halls of 'excellence' – at that time they were non-existent – I quoted Clarke Mackey, a Canadian filmmaker, who in turn quoted from Ivan Illich's *Shadow Work* (1981). It's a Latin term to designate any values that are homemade and homebred and of the people.

I believe that there are traditional patterns and methods of making art where the creative process is accessible to all and fully connected to the way we live our lives. Building houses, cooking, devising ceremonies, making parades, pageants, graffiti, songs, storytelling...

Contemporary art has become a professionalised, institutionalised, academicised and bureaucratised product impaled on the multiple horns of industry, investment, celebrity, careers, consumerism, pretend radicalism and media reinforcement. It's as if a huge fossilised aberration, a static volcanic plug, has been dumped on the flowing rivers of tradition, where people's history has been anaesthetised. Our job is to sail round and beyond it. It is complicated. Popular and populist forms – whether through shamen or tricksters or Big Brother or the X-Factor – have themselves meandered between manipulation, wonder, exploitation and identification.

I merely desire a creative society where everyone's potential is developed and everyone's art is recognised as a participatory mode of knowledge and a way of being. Such a way might free us from our current state of unfulfilled economic conscription. A naive vision, of course, which won't happen in my lifetime. But it's important to try to achieve it

We archived Welfare State International on April Fools Day 2006 partly because the pyramid of desks was squashing spontaneity and creativity and that was not why we joined. PAYE management, health and safety, tick box evaluations, community art as surrogate social work, output planning, and the expectation of touring repetitive product, for a start. Also because the tourist spectacle industry was whipping up more and more fireshows, and commodifying carnival into boutique spectator sport. The edge had gone.

We weren't quite sure where to go, but guessed we had to look at climate change, ecology, shifting consciousness (ours and other peoples)... How to live a creative life and invent new ceremonies for rites of passage. The latter is the one thing still missing from the ACE agenda (which I had queried in 1991) – and yet funerals, marriages, separations, baby-namings and loss (of for example jobs, health and houses) are the certain milestones in all our lives, where a connected and even spiritually based art might help. Hence *Dead Good Guides*. Smaller. More focused. More hands-on, connected and necessary. More training of celebrants. More pleasurable.

One day at ACE there will be an artform relationship manager, in a new department of Applied Anthropology, who will be responsible for re-activating the sacred in the everyday!

The Weather Station project is the next stepping-stone on our continuing journey of discovery. Five miles and five years from Lanternhouse (the £2.2m lottery funded centre for the celebratory arts we generated in Ulverston) we acquired a derelict chalet on the edge of the west shore of Morecambe Bay. Once a wartime pigeon loft, it gave us space to fly again. We have reconstructed this wreck as a wooden house on stilts with a turf roof; our personal Ark. Following the end of WSI, after a harrowing 18 months of bereavement, we were recharged.

The tides with their magnetic tonnage of sea, the ever-changing horizon, the immediacy of extraordinary bio-diversity, all helped. Our creativity has leapt into new zones. Whirligigs of submarines, snapping wolves and golden salmon placed on the garden wall, (with techniques filched from American Outsider Art) reach passing walkers.



Books of poems and illustrated fables for children mark and celebrate the changing seasons. Gatherings round bonfires on the beach draw celebrants and scientists, academics, and trainee practitioners. With scientists we dug into the Bay mud and filtered amazing critters, minute molluscs, worms and shrimps – 29,000 of them per square metre, though microscopes.

All this data has fed into mythic films, drawings, etchings and paintings, and led to research into bio-degradable funeral urns to dissolve and disperse cremated remains into the tide. And more. The liberation has been astounding. For the time being under the title *Fragments from the Weather Station* we have put a lasso round this stage of our research to cart it into an exhibition and three performances in Brantwood, the home of John Ruskin by Coniston Water (Lake District, Cumbria). We are moving in there, temporarily, 140 years after him but still quote his best known aphorism: ‘There is no wealth but life.’ Ruskin knew a vernacular thing or two.

The gift relationship offers one framework for an alternative economic structure, an alternative to capitalism constipated as it is on money and growth. Marcel Mauss set us thinking with his analysis of exchange in archaic societies, Lewis Hyde fleshed it out in *The Gift*, with his descriptions of the true value of art, and Richard Titmus in his book *The Gift Relationship* (‘from human blood transfusion to social policy’) showed altruism may prevail over selfish profiteering.

Whenever we have the opportunity we exchange our skills for goods and knowledge. I wrote a poem for topping out a warehouse in exchange for a carload of firewood. Sue [Gill, Fox’s partner in life and work] designed and officiated at a hand-fasting ceremony in return for a wildlife photoshoot of bugs and birds around the Beach House, and I swapped a drypoint etching (of a desperate man on a bike) with my dentist for a tooth extraction. Visitors work on our garden in return for seminars on art and society. We regularly make individual hand crafted artworks for friends’ special occasions. Only yesterday evening (3 September 2011) for a tenth wedding anniversary, in a magnificent decorated yurt, we performed a 15-minute shadow play, designed and directed by Hannah Fox.

We are amongst the most fortunate people on the planet. We have gained some peace of mind though connecting with a place, with what used to be called nature, with our talents and with our family and friends. All good ‘Occasional Remedies’ (the provisional



title of our next book). Nowadays underlying family structures are shifting. Networks of friendship both actual and virtual may well have more meaning and be more liberating than traditional blood bonds. For us however, with huge luck, we have maintained close family connections. In 2012 Sue Gill and I will have been married for 50 years. Dan and Hannah, our adult offspring, live close by. We have three grandchildren – one nearly eleven, one eight and one nearly three. We are all artists/musicians. We vigorously maintain our individual journeys, although we support each other, especially our wild imaginative fledgling grandchildren from whom we always learn.

In Welfare State’s first manifesto in 1968 we maintained we were seeking ‘an alternative, an entertainment and a way of life.’ We always, variously, waltzed round this tripod. But today, after four decades, when our family ceilidh band is stomping, I am in paradise. I reckon then that our art has indeed become a way of life and there is a welcome for a seventy-year-old lumpy accordion player.

I fantasise such belongings might occur on everybody’s doorstep. A welcome, wherever, for every lumpy obsessional grumpy, (if not cross)-artform granddad. Why not?

The next Dead Good Guides celebrant training will take place in Frome, Somerset 12–14 November 2011. At the time of going to press, only three places remained. For further information see the website or email: foxandgill@btinternet.com

Fragments from The Weather Station is presented at Brantwood, Coniston 10 September – 16 October 2011, with performances on 29 September, 6 & 13 October 2011. Contact: 015394 41396

John Fox and Sue Gill have recently published two books:

You Never Know (Poems for Occasions)
£7.50 plus p&p

And a children’s book written by Sue Gill and illustrated by John Fox:

Garden in the Sky
£3.00 plus p&p

Special price For Total Theatre Magazine readers:
£10 for both books including p&p

Order by email from: foxandgill@btinternet.com

Please send cheques or cash to:

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www.deadgoodguides.com
www.welfare-state.org

Image credits:
P24 Portrait of John Fox
P25 left: *Ladder* oil painting by John Fox
P25 right: An image from *Fragments from the Weather Station*
All images courtesy of John Fox / Dead Good Guides

BEING THERE

A Threeway view of *Lullaby* by Duckie as seen at the Barbican BITE London



Duckie's *Lullaby* certainly takes immersive theatre to a new level. Armed with your toothbrush, pyjamas and slippers you are welcomed gently to a giant slumber party. Twenty or so inviting beds of varying sizes are placed in a circle in the Barbican's Pit Theatre, where you are invited to spend the entire night with one of the UK's most playful theatre companies. Throughout the experience there are plenty of thoughtful touches such as glasses of water next to your pillow, an individual bar of soap anticipating your morning shower, and a pause for smokers to have their all-important before-bed nicotine fix.

As the glowing bedside lamps dim, we are taken on a kaleidoscopic journey of gentle absurdities by four long-john clad performers. Sisters H Plewis and Harriet Plewis serenade us with beautiful harmonies accompanied by melodicas, harmoniums and pianos. Tim Spooner and Matthew Robins join, and all four float in and out of the central 'stage' space as green, sequined octopi, white ducks and elephants. At one point a house with smoke puffing from its chimney floats past. At least I think that's what I saw...

And that is the magic of *Lullaby*. We're never asked to sit and concentrate on a narrative or earnestly engage with goings on. Instead, director Mark Whitelaw and his collaborators skillfully allow us to experience the entire night as we wish to do so. Sweet stories are read to us from a glowing storybook, snippets of which are lodged in my brain: tigers and trees; children dreaming of having superpowers; a man imagining a family of children, having lost his partner. Others are hovering around in my subconscious, no doubt. Meanwhile, circles of colour and seemingly hand-drawn animations are projected onto the ceiling above us. And all of this we can take or leave, let wash over us, or think about all night long.

As the evening progresses and sleep engulfs most people, it is somewhat soothing to hear the small snores of our neighbours and the rustling of the sheets in the bed next door. As children we are lulled into sleep by dim light, soothing music and story. It feels joyfully liberating to let the outside world slip away and be seduced into sleep in childlike wonderment where everything and anything seems possible and, most importantly, somebody else is taking care of you. Not to mention the boiled egg and soldiers to kick start the morning after.

Terry O'Donovan, Total Theatre Magazine reviewer and co-director of theatre company dANTE OR dIE

We talk about inhaling and exhaling and inflation and deflation in the show: nebulae expanding and contracting, and telling stories into balloons which become moons. And one of the first things we parade onto the stage is a cartoon tiger with a cartoon speechbubble which inflates as he waves. Tonight I heard Matthew, who wears the costume, sigh from inside it. These big cartoon costumes are all quite uncomfortable and hot and we can't really see out of them, so we perform with an amateurishness that I hope we will never overcome. Tonight, the Elephant and the House kept sidestepping into each others' collision paths, trying to do the opposite, and I got lost and walked into an usher.

The sound of people snoring signals the beginning of the end of the show, the final deflation of the show. It confirms that part of the audience has stopped being an audience in the usual way, which means we stop being performers in the usual way. As the show and the



snoring deepen, and I'm less and less sure that anybody's watching, I feel more like I'm carrying out a ritual observance whose symbolism I've forgotten. I inflate another speechbubble/ghostoctopus with my wheeled device, the elephant-table-hairdryer confection, and it rises to the ceiling and crashes to the ground, slowly. Once the air's gone out of it, I put on a special glove to remove it from the room, and I feel warmly lost again. The usher is still watching because it's his job to stay awake.

Tim Spooner, performer & co-deviser, Duckie

Duckie are still reeling from a show that has garnered the full set in terms of press reviews: winning 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and no stars in the papers. I awake to find today's Sunday papers are a similar mixed bag, with one hilariously bad review. Press nights and Duckie's highly interactive shows have never really been a good mix – the reviewers love theatre and see our alternative shenanigans as a lot of stuff and nonsense. Thankfully tonight's audience is a real one – bright young culture vultures who want to take part...

After checking in, our PJ-clad hosts cater for the patrons every need – hot chocolate is served and their comfy posh beds await. This is experimental theatre as a four-star B&B – a cosy, friendly live art hotel – and the mixed gay and straight crowd of bedmates are here to get seriously domestic. The choice of nightwear worn by the audience is interesting – no one is wearing PJs that put out, or show off, always a mix of mismatched comfort jim-jams that they would wear at home. The emphasis is on domesticity and our interior selves. Staying in is the new going out.

The Duckie gang of four homebirds – sisters Harriet and H Plewis and partners Tim Spooner and Matthew Robins – lay out their performance fare of delicate, homespun, and handmade songs, stories and pictures. They have devised a piece that breaks all the rules of theatre – being undramatic, soft, soporific – and the chosen aesthetic is amateurish, approximate, real, fragile. Welcome to the new bedroom theatre. The Plewis sisters have been singing together since they were toddlers, and with Matthew Robin's folky, elegant, English score deliver a cycle of lullabies that tell us sleepers that everything will be OK, we can switch off now, we can sleep, we are safe.



Duckie's audience have had enough sex and drugs and rock and roll. Tonight we want cellos and cocoa, pianos and poetry, tucking in and dreaming, comradeship, and a warm welcome in the comfort inn. Duckie's director Mark Whitelaw recently articulated the intention behind this quiet piece: 'It's like we're all puppies heading for the basket, trying to snuggle in together. That's a deep desire in us all – and when we get to that place, I think everyone will feel safer.'

The punters slowly drift off to the land of nod as the show quietly continues into the small hours. Sunday is the perfect night to experience this event – the party is over, this is the comedown, and it's not so bad.

Simon Casson, Duckie Producer

Duckie's Lullaby was seen at the Pit Theatre, Barbican, as part of the BITE season, 3 July 2011. See www.barbican.org.uk
For more about Duckie: www.duckie.co.uk
Tim Spooner: www.tspooner.co.uk
dANTE OR dIE: www.danteordie.com

All images from Duckie's *Lullaby*, presented at Barbican BITE July 2011.
Photos Hugo Glendinning



Dorothy Max Prior abandons Brighton's theatres for its streets, churches, clubs, and beaches to see what the festival has to offer off-site

Housey Housey!



Brighton Festival has a longstanding reputation for programming innovative street arts work, although the push in recent years has been more towards site-specific and installation work rather than 'street arts' per se.

The exception to the above is the work programmed under the Without Walls and ZEPA banners, national (Without Walls) and international (ZEPA) initiatives that present outdoor performance work at numerous festivals in England and/or in France.

The ZEPA programme included two pieces by Generik Vapeur, *Bivouac* (not seen by this writer due to an irritating programming decision to put it up against another of the big street arts shows, *As the World Tipped*), and *Droles d'Oiseaux*. In the latter, a convoy of white cars are driven through the city, led by a kind of carnival float truck pumping out beefy beats, and accompanied by a posse of over-excited painters wielding brushes and paint in various bright hues. When the destination is reached (The Level, a small urban park), the cars get spray-painted and then, in a moment of genuine surrealism, 'suspended' on a line to dry. The show is exactly what it says on the can: no more, no less. It's a pleasant enough way to spend an evening and I particularly enjoy a moment in the processional part of the piece where the local traffic is brought to a halt and a white car that isn't part of the convoy gets caught up in it all and threatened with a paint job; and the moment when the cars get hoisted up to the accompaniment of a masclètà-style (smoke and loud bangs rather than pretty colours) fireworks display and a shower of rainbow glitter confetti feels pretty exciting, if not exactly world-changing.

Attempting to enact change in the world is the Without Walls showpiece – the Nigel

Jamieson/Wired Aerial Theatre collaboration, the aforementioned *As the World Tipped* (which premiered at Norfolk & Norwich, moved on to Brighton Festival and has subsequently done the round of all the major UK street arts festivals in 2011). It's a large-scale outdoor spectacular, using a trademark large tipping stage-cum-screen and an ensemble of harnessed performers, taking as its subject the Copenhagen conference, and the subsequent lack of action from world leaders to initiate any meaningful directive on climate change. The show is truly spectacular, with some very wonderful live/screen interactions as the performers struggle to regain control of their environment (literally and metaphorically), but sadly for me the trite politics overruled any other considerations, and I left feeling that I'd witnessed one big long TV ad for Oxfam.

Also presented as part of Without Walls, and also an aerial theatre work, is the Scarabeus/Candoco collaboration *Heartland*, which pits the myths of the Minotaur and Icarus against each other, evoking the tug between 'earth' and 'air' that is at the heart of aerial performance, and making gentle commentary on notions of restriction and freedom, ability and disability. It's about as diametrically opposed in style to the Wired Theatre piece as you could imagine, being quiet, considered, and reflective rather than big and brash and breezy. But whereas *As the World Tipped* suffered for its simplification of complex issues and sensationalist approach, *Heartland* feels like it needs a little more oomph. That said, I saw it on a very windy day on Brighton seafront, and that no doubt caused some constrictions for the show.

Also seen on the seafront on another day was a showcase of four other Without Walls commissions. By far the best of the bunch is Red Herring's *That's The Way To Do It!*

It's a very new show, and there's a way to go – but a bona fide piece of street theatre, made by people who really understand the form. Conceived and directed by Paschale Straiton, and with a bunch of well-seasoned street theatre performers in the mix, it's a live version of *Punch and Judy* that explores and updates the story's inbuilt satirical reflections on 'law and order'. It's presented in three parts – a device that doesn't quite work for me, the long gaps in between each section making it hard to see all on the same day, but which is nevertheless a worthy attempt to experiment with form. In part one, a roustabout crowd-gathering intro from Punch and Judy (in Commedia half-mask and trad costume, but playing their characters as contemporary sink-estate parents-from-hell) leads into a live performance of the classic tale, with no holds barred. Both performers are wonderful but Judy is the star: smoking whilst the baby cries; stuffing fluffy puppet monkeys into a mincer; and ending legs-akimbo in a 'romantic embrace' that brings PC Timms ('not Dimms. That's not my name.') out from his lurking-around-the-crowd mode into full confrontation with the anarchic couple. This section ends with the show being stopped, the booth festooned with police crime-scene tape, 'witness statements' taken from audience members, and Punch and Judy issued with Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. In part two, the ASBO'd couple go walkabout: staggering down the promenade, dragging the baby's pram across the pebbled beach, and accosting passers-by with their 'slapstick'. Meanwhile, PC Timms follows, hiding behind bollards and bins, and muttering into his walkie-talkie. Part three begins with the taped-up booth guarded by our trusty copper. Punch and Judy appear and argue the case against censorship and freedom of expression, the law is defeated, and the show goes on...

Housey Housey! | Dorothy Max Prior

Elsewhere in Brighton during May is the exciting new (well, newish – in its third year) venture House, a live art/performance offshoot of the Artists Open Houses programme which is itself an odd-bod programme supported by the main festival, rather than the Fringe, yet independent of both. (Confused? Me too... In the same way that the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is becoming an enormous smorgasbord of breakaway mini festivals, Brighton also seems to be going down that road!)

Anyway, however and wherever it is placed, House offered an exciting array of work investigating 'art and domestic space'. Some of the work presented seemed to aptly fit the frame – such as the works set in the kitchen, dining room, or servants' hall of The Regency Town House venue (which is indeed a Regency Town House); and the Blast Theory piece *Single Story Building* – whereas other works seemed really not to belong thematically, good though they were – so perhaps it is time for House to rethink their name and objectives, especially as there is, confusingly, another venture called House, a consortium of producers that was also presenting work in Brighton Festival.

But back to what's on offer: I can't for the life of me work out why *Still Life: An Audience with Henrietta Moraes* – which investigates the exciting life and tempestuous times of the eponymous 'professional Bohemian' and artists' model and muse to Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon and Maggi Hambling – is part of this programme, set as it is in the Phoenix Art Gallery and being about everything under the sun other than domesticity, but I'm certainly glad someone has programmed it! A solo work, created by Sue McLaine, which combines live performance with a life-drawing experience: it's a beautifully researched piece, crafted and performed with delicious care and precision that works to magical effect on a spellbound audience (many of whom were visual artists not used to contemporary theatre; or theatre-goers not used to being asked to draw, so a very interesting mix!).

Also under the roof of House, and perhaps more logically sitting there, is the very wonderful audio-installation piece *Hangover Square*, inspired by the novel of the same name. But 'audio-installation' only gives half the story. The piece is sited in a bedroom in the flat above the Nightingale Theatre, and we are taken into the heart of this boozy and desperate tale at the crucial point at which the shy and foolish George Bone has invited the fickle Netta for a romantic weekend in Brighton, only to be cuckolded by Netta and a toy boy she has picked up en route – the horribly sordid encounter witnessed through the sounds coming through the hotel's thin walls and pipes, tormenting poor Bone all night long. The room is kitted out with perfect pre-war (1939) period detail as a room in the novel's Castle Hotel, replete with nicotine yellow walls, over-stuffed armchair, monstrous wooden wardrobe, washbasin



with wet-shave razor, creaky old bed – and the inevitable bottle of whisky and ashtray full of fag-ends by the bedside. The chapter in the book is given to us by an unseen reader (Ashley Cook), whilst we – three of us – lounge in chair or bed, like particularly decadent children listening to too-grown-up stories on a rainy Saturday afternoon. The piece is credited to Tim Brown and Cinecity, with the beautiful design by Anna Deamer. A small but perfectly formed piece, part not only of the House event, but also of The Nightingale's carefully curated Fringe programme which saw the venue and its upstairs premises converted into an 'art hotel', playing host in the 'kitchen' to *Entre Les Mots*' quirky interactive teatime show *A Spoonful of Silence*; and in the 'dining room' to *Inconvenient Spoof* with the frighteningly funny *Naïve Dance Masterclass* (featuring real and pretend dancing Barbie dolls, and a naked wildman doing a fleshy 'expressive dance'). Meanwhile in the 'bar', which is indeed the bar downstairs, 30 Bird Productions entertained the crowd with their exploration of manhood and cultural identity, the delightful *Poland 3 Iran 2*.

Other interesting Brighton Fringe venues to note include the recently-renovated The Old Market in Hove, taken over by Yes/No People (creators of *Stomp!*) and renamed TOM. The venue got off to a good start with an all-around-the-building installation piece called *The Consciousness Engine* (a Shardcore and Sam Hewitt collaboration) which was a flawed but interesting multimedia experience; and the very wonderful Il Pixel Rosso with *And The Birds Fell From the Sky*, a demented and psychotic 'car ride' in the company of a posse of hellish Faruk clowns (all done with wheelchairs, film goggles, a bottle of whiskey, a crumpled letter, and a handful of twigs). The show is a collaboration between filmmaker Simon Wilkinson, of Junk TV and *The FlopHouse* fame (*FlopHouse* being another live theatre/film crossover also featuring nasty decadent clowns), and Silvia Mercuriali, co-funder of Rotozaza, and creator, with Gemma Brockis (of Shunt) of another wild car journey in their extreme version of *Pinochio* – except on that occasion it was a real wild car journey, taking place through the streets of Edinburgh! What

I love most about this gorgeous, ferociously immersive new piece is that it is the perfect meeting point of the two makers' interests, ideas and aesthetics – it is just the show that I would imagine these two making together!

Meanwhile, back in the main Brighton Festival, other 'sited outside of theatre spaces' work included the latest piece by Me and the Machine, *I Came By Myself to a Crowded Place*, which takes the Hitchcock Rear Window idea of spying on houses and streets with a telescope, overlaid with a very lovely and poetic story that places the viewer/participant in an uneasy intimacy with the absent woman whose disembodied voice is heard. It is a piece in very early stages of development, and changed quite radically in the time between the preview and my second viewing. At this tender stage of development, it was not really ready to be reviewed (and thus odd that it was programmed into the main Brighton Festival). But it will, I am sure, grow into itself as time goes by.

A word of praise also for the very moving and enchanting sound installation by Janet Cardiff, *The Forty Part Motet*, set in the lovely old church building that is Fabrica art gallery. In this piece, the forty voices that make up the component parts of Thomas Tallis's 'Spem in Alium' are each given their own speaker, so that audience members can walk around the room experiencing the work from very many perspectives – standing in the middle to get the full range, or perhaps next to a voice you are particularly drawn to. A beautiful piece of aural sculpture. In recent years, the Brighton Festival has excelled in programming innovative sound-art work, often (like this piece) free to audience – and it is good to see that continuing in 2011.

Brighton Festival: www.brightonfestival.org
Brighton Fringe:
www.brightonfestivalfringe.co.uk
House: www.housefestival.org

p28 top: Il Pixel Rosso *And the Birds Fell from the Sky*
p28 bottom: Generik Vapeur
Les Droles d'Oiseaux
p29: Scarabeus/Candoco *Heartland*
p30: Red Herring *That's the Way To Do It*

Tim Jeeves finds that the whole is less than the sum of its parts at Manchester International Festival

The Life and Death of Marina Abramović



The Life and Death of Marina Abramović. Photo Lucie Jansch

The simple answer is, unfortunately, no. The cast works hard, Robert Wilson's design is classic Wilson, and Antony's sound design has some wonderful moments of accentuating the onstage activity, but Abramović never seems at home on stage. And as she is the central figure, this inevitably leads to the theatrical experience itself feeling slightly hollow.

Whether as the prowling incarnation of her mother, or the occasions in which she is brought forward on various elements of stage furniture, there is always an unsettling suspicion that she is uncomfortably aware that the stage is not her natural environment. Ironically, considering the vulnerability that is so key to the rest of her work, here there is a sense of something closer to awkward insecurity.

But it's not just a question of the quality of her performance; the cathartic exposure that constitutes the show's arc also feels unwieldy. The image of the 'dark' funeral which opens the show – three Abramovićs lie in black coffins whilst dogs prowl and sniff around them – is transformed into a 'light' funeral at the end where the three Abramovićs, now dressed in white, ascend angelically into the air. Such a story of redemption is, it seems, only possible because of the sharing of the miserable upbringing of Abramović, and her final declaration of 'Bye Bye Extremes. Bye Bye Tears. Bye Bye Purity. Bye Bye Unhappiness.'

As with the aforementioned and now long-forgotten *Electronic*, within the performance the parts remain substantially more than their sum. With the exception of the impeccable precision of Dafoe's freakish narrator, the supergroup never quite finds its rhythm, either collectively or individually – and Abramović comes out of the piece a diminished artist.

Ultimately, the apparent turning away from so much of her life, the implied reduction of her work to acts of compensation for an abused past, and the over-simplified morality, leaves a sense of wondering what it was all for, and contrary to the desired effect, leaves this great artist looking shadowy and more than a little insubstantial.

Though it might be an entertaining enough game when played in the pub or living room, the creation of supergroups, when a reality, too often generates underwhelmed indifference. With examples such as the easily forgotten *Electronic* (Bernard Sumner of New Order, Johnny Marr from The Smiths, The Pet Shop Boy's Neil Tennant and Kraftwerk's Karl Bartos anyone?) firmly in mind, a certain degree of trepidation accompanied the announcement that the legendary Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović, world-famous visual theatre director Robert Wilson, Willem Dafoe (known both as co-founder of The Wooster Group, and in another life as a Hollywood filmstar) and Antony Hegarty (from Mercury Music Prize winning Antony and the Johnsons) would be working together to tell the story of Abramović's life.

With the focus squarely on biographical detail rather than Abramović's performance work, the show is nevertheless an exploration of the catharsis and exposure that characterised works such as *Rhythm 0* (in which Abramović puts herself at the mercy of the audience and an array of 72 objects, including a gun, a feather and some honey, along with the instruction that the object could be used in any way that they choose).

Here though, rather than confront her fears, phobias and other intimacies through visceral self-exposure, a different, much more theatrical, tactic is employed. As the Chorus and the Narrator (performed with impeccable and grotesque precision by Willem Dafoe) create spectacular and epic imagery amongst

Wilson's towering sets, we are told stories of the childhood abuse meted out by her mother, her dissatisfaction with the shape of her nose as a young child, and the migraines that settled in her early years and would recur throughout her life.

It doesn't take long to realise that those who are interested in recreations of her performance work have come to the wrong place; her retrospective at MOMA in New York in 2010 would probably have been a more suitable event.

Which isn't to say that her work isn't present, it's just that in this quintessentially Wilsonesque design – stark shapes, silhouettes, outrageous and unnatural caricatures – there is little room for the raw humanity that characterised so many of her performances. The projection of grainy video documentation feels too removed from the onstage world to really be a part of the same piece, whilst the plastic snake and chunk of meat carried by members of the Chorus remain firmly in the realm of visual pastiche.

Quite obviously, this is a conscious decision; on the festival's website Abramović has stated that she no longer 'hates theatre' and is a fan of Wilson, so has obviously chosen to use the theatrical form as the medium for her biography in the same way that other artists choose to use the page. With this in mind, the question should perhaps not be whether the theatre is the right place for the telling of her story, but rather, does this interpretation of her life do Abramović justice and justify its presentation as an important theatrical event?

The Life and Death of Marina Abramović, Directed by Robert Wilson, was seen at The Lowry, Manchester International Festival, 11 July 2011.
The show is a Manchester International Festival and Teatro Real Madrid co-production.
www.mif.co.uk

Fred Dalmasso attends the inaugural Nottingham European Arts and Theatre Festival

NEAT, NEAT, NEAT



Nottingham European Arts and Theatre Festival, whose mission is to strengthen and support both Nottingham's theatre community and contemporary international talent, presented a wide array of theatre productions, performances, visual art installations, films, concerts, and workshops over the two weeks of this, its first year. I saw NEAT 11 as a powerful reminder of performing arts' imprint upon Europe's political landscape and of the emancipatory path they cut through history. Ulrike Meinhof, Eamon Collins, Woyzeck, Tadeusz Kantor and from afar, Andy Warhol, were as many spectres haunting the festival.

NEAT 11 hosted the UK premiere of Blast Theory's *Ulrike and Eamon Compliant*, an ambulatory performance based on the lives of Ulrike Meinhof (Red Army Faction) and Eamon Collins (Irish Republican Army) where radicalism clashes with the sedate urban atmosphere of a European city during office hours. The performance starts in

Nottingham Playhouse where you enter a plain wooden cell. To begin, you press dial on the phone: you are told to leave the theatre and asked whether you would like to be Ulrike or Eamon. I chose Ulrike. Over the next thirty minutes you receive a number of phone calls that lead you through the city, engaging you as Ulrike and prompting decisions. The instructions are given only once and with the noise of the traffic stifling the sound, the adrenalin rises. You are asked at some point to record a kind of personal manifesto and encouraged not to be shy as you enunciate loudly and clearly your own contribution to 'the concept of the urban guerrilla'. Finally, you head to 'the room where questions get asked'. An enigmatic figure appears at a street corner and leads you to the theatre back door, walking ten yards in front of you. You are shown into a wooden cell identical to the first one in the theatre lobby and invited to sit down: it suddenly becomes utterly

personal as you realise you have left your rebel persona at the door. You are not addressed as Ulrike anymore, but abruptly asked how far you would personally go for whomever or whatever cause you think you are ready to fight for. Would you be able to plan ahead or solely rely upon your instincts? What would make you think again? This is a punch in the stomach of your inflated revolutionary ego. *Ulrike and Eamon Compliant* combines the urgency of urban guerilla warfare with the melancholia of the daily grind. Blast Theory makes the most of the local surroundings in devising a perilous journey that digs deep into one's political consciousness. Here, the power of illusion fends off political mysticism and forces us to face what it takes not only to throw one word or one stone in protest, but to organise ourselves as resistance. An incredibly powerful and insightful work of art and politics. Without instructions through my mobile phone to direct me anymore, my wander through the festival was left to chance, yet Blast Theory had set the tone.

Local (and international) company Gob Squad presented *Gobsquad's Kitchen (You've Never Had It So Good)* – an attempt at a live re-enactment of Andy Warhol's filmed performance, *Kitchen*. This reconstitution of the 1960s is presented as a demystification: the film projected to the audience is shot live behind the screen which becomes more porous a barrier as the piece unfolds. Gob Squad's thought-provoking enquiry is hilarious and touching at times and when the performers ultimately resort to audience members to stand in for them 'guess-performing' the original *Kitchen*, the mystery of 'here and now' remains as acute as ever. As if by magic, the 'volunteers' exude a screen/stage presence, which transcends technology and demonstrates the mysterious power of theatre's immediacy. Gob Squad's *Kitchen* is an uplifting participatory celebration of the moment. It is cinema processed and released live by theatre.

Berlin's major building-based theatre, Deutsches Theater, presented *Woyzeck* – a spiraling run into madness. The stage is built like a pit that throws the characters at each other. The prologue sets up the whole piece within a sinister fairground atmosphere and director Jorinde Dröse succeeds in showing humankind as a freak show. Her production is a take on the 2000



adaptation of Georg Büchner's play into a musical by Robert Wilson, Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan. Waits' lyrics complement Büchner's text so well that it is difficult to know for sure who wrote what. The live music is enthralling and the songs add a gritty immediacy to the story. The acting is physically intense and the scene when the farcical drum major forces Woyzeck to drink is one of extreme violent simplicity to the point that Moritz Grove seems to be drowning under our very eyes. Wilson's imprint is kept to a minimum as Dröse's staging relies upon the visceral rather than the mechanical. Throughout, there are no suspended movements or any kind of aesthetic respite; instead there is a constant rush of emotions tempered only by the intrinsic distance of Waits' lyrics. His poetry, which culminates in a final image of the earth as an overturned piss-pot, leaves a coarse and greasy mark upon the production.

Also featured were Nottingham-based company Reckless Sleepers. As last statements go, *The Last Supper* is an eternal ending which fails to ignite. In this antechamber of death, last words are pronounced with a gripping casualness. We hear the last declarations of historical figures; famous and less famous people one after the other. All equal in facing death. At regular intervals, a chef brings the last meal ordered by a prisoner on death row to whoever drew the corresponding execution number upon entering. However interesting the real or invented anecdotes at the end of the line might be, there is more in the formula than in the actual course of the evening. What remains is the lingering image of the performers endlessly swallowing last words written on little pieces of paper: when our time is up we might have to swallow back all the insignificant statements made over a lifetime and probably choke on them to death. Theatre at its wordiest.

With Theatr Nowy's *Faust*, directed by Janusz Wisniewski, the threshold is passed and we enter into a theatre of death. The production seemed largely to draw on the ideas and aesthetics of the creator of *Wielopole, Wielopole* (Tadeusz Kantor) but remains an enigmatic tribute as the legendary Polish director's name is not mentioned in the play programme, which includes a long interview with the director and over twenty extracts of reviews from different countries. Yet the play is a succession of Kantoresque quotations using Goethe's *Faust* as a narrative. On stage, a theatre director figure signals the actors, rectifies the position of chairs exactly as Kantor used to do. Inspired by Kantor's *The Dead Class*, the costumes and make-up are particularly efficient in conjuring up a world of death. Faustian scenes are interspersed by processions of old human figures including an eternally wounded soldier, an old bride and twin brothers, as if Kantor's characters were parading all together leading to Kantor-Goya-esque animated tableaux. While the beginning is very promising, the repetitive alternating between phantasmagoric processions and realistic scenes loses its momentum after a while. This production illustrates the fact that Kantoresque theatre is hardly compatible with a linear narrative, apart perhaps in the scenes involving Miroslaw Kropielnicki as Mephistopheles and his other-worldly physicality and voice. This type of theatre is already a biographical theatre of quotations so any escalation in that direction is risky. Nevertheless, Polish theatre tradition encapsulates like no other the European history of the 20th century. Its aesthetics has retained the power to reach us and this production of *Faust* does not leave the audience unscathed.

To end on a more joyful note, *Maps* by Catalan dance and cross-artform company Nat Nus Dansa is an extended indoor version of *SLOT*, their 'street



performance for everyone' and somehow sums up what it has meant and still means to be European: the produce of incessant to-ing and fro-ing of suitcases across borders for leisure or necessity. In the context of recent mass movements in Madrid or Athens, it is highly significant that the argument that arises among performers tired of following misleading directions is punctuated by a fierce 'Ya basta!' ('Enough!') – one of the rare words uttered. The tension is defused as one of the performers hears the word 'pasta' instead, leading to a reconciliatory pretend meal with endless juggling of plates, bowls and utensils to the rhythm of hilarious munching noises. *Maps* is a clownesque tribute of palpable sweat to the unalterable resilience of human bodies in transit.

NEAT 11 is a vibrant testimony to theatre's ability to cross borders and push boundaries.

Nottingham European Arts and Theatre Festival (NEAT 11) took place 26 May –12 June 2011 at venues across the city. The festival was developed by Giles Croft, Artistic Director of Nottingham Playhouse.

NEAT will be a biennial festival, and is led by Nottingham Playhouse (and other major Nottingham venues) in partnership with Nottingham City Council and One Nottingham, and is funded by the Arts Council England, Nottingham City Council and the European Theatre Convention (ETC).

An after-note: Belarus Free Theatre were scheduled to open the festival at Lakeside Arts Centre but had their visas and passports revoked and became stateless, so the festival had to cancel the performances. The company were finally allowed to enter the UK and were included as a postponed addition to the festival, performing at the Nottingham Playhouse in July.

www.neatfestival.co.uk

p32: Deutsches Theater Woyzeck.
Photo Arno Declair
p33 left: Blast Theory *Ulrike and Eamon Compliant*
p33 right: Theatr Nowy *Faust*

Emily Ayres and Tony Appleby attend the BE Festival 2011

Birmingham's European Feast



BE Festival 2011 was an exhausting week of watching theatre, socialising, scoffing delicious food, negotiating European accents, making friends, discussing opinions, getting sweaty in workshops and stealing sleep on the festival sofas.

BE Festival is Birmingham's first European Theatre festival and it is now in its second year at AE Harris, a warehouse venue in the Jewellery Quarter. Last year's BE was a rough and ready, uber-friendly event that secured the festival a place in the yearly theatre calendar. It is run by three ambitious, warm and talented artists who bring an equally ambitious and friendly event to the city. This

year's BE was bigger than the last – packed full of performances from across Europe and events such as workshops, talks and feedback sessions scheduled throughout the day. Plus glorious food by London-based Blanch and Shock, who set up a catering van on site and had a blackboard menu translated into various languages by the visiting performers. BE is good for everybody – it's good for West Midlands audiences who would normally have to travel further (and pay more) to see new European work, it's good for the non-UK artists who would not normally get the opportunity to perform their work here, and it's good for the UK-based artists to see their work presented in a contemporary European context.

BE's format is unique for both artist and audience – the companies travel from their respective countries (with minimal set), are hosted by Birmingham families, are fed for free by the festival, perform half-hour versions of their work to audiences of about 200 per night, hear what audiences made of their work in the feedback session the next day, and then see selections of work by other practitioners the following evening. Each performing company is in the running for

the two main festival prizes – a Development Prize of £1500 (which involves a residency at mac Birmingham to finish making the piece) and a Touring Prize: a European and UK tour supported by BE Festival. But for artists, the best thing about the festival is all the connections you can make and the conversations you can have with other companies and with audiences – in fact the theme of the festival is 'crossing boundaries'. There's an intimate, generous and passionate atmosphere that enables this to happen.

There are four half-hour performances per night, broken in the middle by dinner, and a gig afterwards by a Midlands-based band. In the daytime before the performances kick off there are workshops, talks and the feedback cafe – a lively meeting place where artists and audiences can ask the companies who showed work the previous night about their performances. Good coffee too.

One night's shows are reviewed below – the programme presented on Thursday 7 July 2011 – a great selection of work in very different styles from UK, Spain and France.



Hagit Yakira (UK) *Sunday Morning*

I remember well Sunday mornings in the house where I grew up, a time of great activity, arguments and that oppressive closeness that manifests itself in eruptions of both anger and laughter. This sharply performed and well observed dance-theatre piece by Hagit Yakira company perfectly captures that bittersweet relationship between siblings and parents that seems especially poignant on Sunday mornings, that special time once reserved for religious ritual but now replaced by horse-riding and football (at least in my house). There is a strong sense of personal ritual in the piece, with the dancers very different to one another in character and look and plundering their personal memories of Sunday mornings for the repeated motifs. It is very charming, funny at times, poignant and never nostalgic which is a testament to the choreography. Free without being loose, the dancers are very much in charge, and there is a concrete-not-abstract clarity to their movement which will appeal both to dance connoisseurs and to those less familiar with contemporary practice. The variety of nationalities amongst the four dancers adds another dimension to the performance, as each body holds a memory of a country as well as a family.

EA

Autour du Mime (France) *Dis-moi la vérité (Tell me the truth)*

It is a common sight in restaurants, pubs and airport lounges – long-term couples, sitting in aggrieved silence, avoiding communication, locked in the tedious tension of some soundless argument. The cold edifice of seasoned familiarity serves to hide a battleground from view. Into the fray charge Autour du Mime, who present an artful and wonderfully adept exploration of such a scene, set around a wooden park bench beneath the sepia light of an olden street lamp. Two masters of their craft, Sara Mangano and Pierre-Yves Massip, who spent

eight years in the Marcel Marceau Company, elevate the mundane to an artful plane of romantic and often comic behaviour, as the lovers both strive to make their feelings known, without saying anything at all. With the precision and polish of their delivery, words are not necessary, and their art is a perfect form for elaborating the internal tussles and tackles of gender warfare. We see stand-offs and peace offerings. Evidence is produced, refuted and reproduced. Both characters are indignant and protestingly innocent in turn. They dance, leap, climb and ape their way through the inner wrangles of a taciturn dispute with a professional expertise that delighted the audience, and must have been an inspiration for some of the younger companies presenting at the festival. Silence never felt more full.

TA

Thomas Eccleshare (UK) *Perle*

Grief can take many forms – madness, melancholia, anger. In *Perle*, Thomas Eccleshare (of *Dancing Brick*) and illustrator Serge Seidlitz explore how loss can lock the living into an obsession with the past. A man sits surrounded by a mountain of VHS cassettes and watches them compulsively, one after another, on the television in front of him. The tapes contain the image of a lost treasure, his love, his world. But pathos is cleverly avoided. The use of VHS, now a redundant format, and the old, deep, television ‘box’ – which are both soon to be found only in a museum near you – speaks of a past that is not yet nostalgia, but nevertheless occasions a wistful affection within the audience. These charming props, and Eccleshare’s comedic and endearing interactions with the TV and the audience (he never speaks), serve to soften the subject of the piece, which concerns a young man dealing with the death of his child. Seidlitz’s self-consciously juvenile graphic style perfectly evokes not just comic books, but also faintly remembered cartoons of our childhood – *Bod*, *Mr. Benn*, *King Rollo* – which themselves utilised the services of a narrator. The piece is described as ‘an

attempt to create a live comic strip’ and in this attempt they have achieved something quite poetic, producing a show that recalls an innocence, a youth, which is sadly never to be regained.

TA

Sleepwalk Collective (Spain) *As the flames rose we danced to the sirens, the sirens*

Winner of BE Festival’s Development Prize, and Best Female Performer, *As the flames rose...* presents Lara, a red-wine-mouthed femme fatale, movie-toned and dissolute, propping up the bar stool of Sleepwalk Collective’s dark imagination. She is blonde (‘therefore I am irresistible’) and the Everyblonde, tied monochrome and screaming to the Hollywood railway tracks, or dancing wildly, spinning out of control whilst her debonair lover seizes her forcibly by the arms, over and over and over. With a nod to the surreal vignettes encountered within the films of David Lynch, and the purring seduction of a siren luring us to shipwreck on the coast of Berlin’s avant-garde cabaret scene, we are drawn bewitchingly through a series of emotional entreaties, comic turns, pleas for intimacy, and a magic trick. The implication is that we, the audience, are here to catch her and gather her up when she falls – or jumps – from the cliff, showing us her flowery knickers; that she might put her trust in us, and we put ours in her, if only for a minute. A confident and beguiling performance that indulges the romanticism of being on the edge.

EA

BE took place in Birmingham 4–10 July 2011.
www.befestival.org

p34 top: Nightly bar installations.
Photo Graeme Braedwood
p34 below: Hagit Yagira *Sunday Morning*
p35 left: Feedback café. Photo Graeme Braedwood
p35 right: Sleepwalk Collective *As the flames rose...*

Dorothy Max Prior encounters some interesting theatrical game-playing at the Norfolk & Norwich Festival 2011

A Game of You – and You and You and You



Overheard at the start of Ontroerend Goed's *A Game of You*: 'It's like waiting for the dentist'. And indeed it is: we sit in a foyer on a row of chairs, until called in one-by-one at five or ten minute intervals. Thumbs are twiddled; people look a little anxious.

Once summoned, I am led into a hallway, and this time sit alone, staring at a plain red wall. A door opens; I'm led down a corridor of black curtains, into a small waiting room. Two chairs, a mirror, a little table set with a jug of water, plastic cups and some Playmobil people. I hear the constant murmur of voices: layers and layers of voices – impossible to tell if live or recorded. Is it a two-way mirror? Am I being watched? A man comes in, sits down forcefully, sighs and rants – an actor playing an angry young man? The words and actions seem untrue, out-of-synch, as if he is deliberately over-acting, saying words that don't really belong to him. I respond to his self-pitying rants about being unlovable with a bit of cheery chatter... 'It's your turn now,' he says, and off I go into the next room, and the next room, and the next room. I find myself mirrored and I see through mirrors. I meet myself, aspects of myself, projections of myself, and interpretations of myself, in many different versions and formats. As the game becomes more complex, the reveals also

cleverly build so that by the end, a picture of the whole journey I (and my fellow travellers) have been on emerges. I'm handed a DVD and I leave, head reeling. I still haven't watched the DVD, I daren't...

Game-playing is at the essence of Ontroerend Goed's work. This show is the last part of a trilogy which started with *A Smile Off Your Face*, in which participants are blindfolded and whisked through a series of sensory encounters in a wheelchair; and which continued with *Internal*, which (controversially) invited participants into a speed-dating scenario that tested boundaries of personal space and confidentiality. I've liked both the previous parts, but in my view *A Game of You* is the best work of the trilogy, and in many ways the key work – here, the previous investigations into identity, into personal space, into boundaries, into self-image, into the carefully negotiated line between reality and theatrical pretence, come together in one very cleverly devised package. A highlight of this year's Norfolk & Norwich festival, and one of a number of shows in which theatrical game-playing featured heavily.

For although interactive and immersive theatre has been with us for a long while

(and Norfolk & Norwich festival is a keen supporter of Ontroerend Goed, and other companies that like to toy with their audiences), 2011 seems to be the year in which the tipping point has been reached – it is almost more unusual these days to sit down to see a show in which audience and actors stay firmly separated out on each side of the footlights.

Another Norfolk & Norwich show that casts us in an elaborate role-playing game (albeit in a completely different way to *A Game of You*) was the remounted Artichoke production, *Dining With Alice*, a site-responsive piece (first made in 1999 for the Salisbury Festival) set in the luscious grounds of Norfolk stately home Elsing Hall – a dinner-date cum show with a cast of thousands and a ticket price of £55–£85 per person, thus attracting a well-heeled audience that looked like they'd be more at home at Glyndebourne than at an immersive theatre event. But rather than being seated at a magnificent banquet and fed passive entertainment, the audience are treated to what the Mad Hatter and co might offer if they were hosting a supper rather than a tea party. Divided into colour-coded groups, we are led off by a team of waiters through an enormous meadow, the sea of grass occupied by a whole fleet of white-



clothed tables. We each get seated alone at a table and are left to poke around at the offerings. 'Drink Me' says a label on a little jar contain a colourful brew (quinine and bitter orange constitutional, apparently), 'But only with the soup'. What soup? Ah, the cold soup in the cup and saucer! The characters we all know and love from the two Alice books come on walkabout and we get to hear a few sorrowful tales of 'life after Alice'. We occasionally glimpse Alices of various sizes/ages running in the distance or peeping out from behind a topiary bird. There are squeals of peacocks, and even the occasional roar of a lion. Our meal is constantly disrupted and we are moved around the site, seated and reseated; in twos, in threes, and finally in larger groups. I'm amused and mildly entertained, but on this damp and chilly eve many of the Glyndebourne set find the theatrical game-playing – not to mention

the damp bread rolls and rather cold and miserable meat pie and veg – rather a disappointment, and a good few people leave dissatisfied. The operetta finale gives the gentrified audience something resembling what they came for, but witnessing it only adds to my mounting ambivalence. Despite many marvellous elements – the stunning site, the beautiful design, the gorgeous table artefacts, the lovely 'occasional writings' by David Gale, and the ingenious starting point of imagining what might happen to all those colourful characters after Alice leaves Wonderland – the show as a whole just doesn't cut the mustard.

Far more interesting, in my book anyway, is the Philippe Quesne/Vivarium Studio piece *L'Effet de Serge*. Initially planned as a solo work, the piece is a sadly funny expose of the lonely life of Serge, a man who seemingly

lives a mundane existence alone in his flat. We see him coming and going with his meagre bits of shopping, waiting for the post to arrive, fiddling with model airplanes, listlessly pouring cereal out into a bowl. Then we learn what excites Serge: he likes to set up small performances for his friends, who are invited one at a time, or in couples, to sit nervously on cushions to watch him propel a remote control helicopter across the room or set his car headlamps to flash to the sounds of Wagner. The coup de theatre is that director Quesne has chosen to use 'real people', drawn from the local community of wherever the piece is performed, to play the walk-on characters – which (as witnessed here in Norwich, anyway) they do with all the awkwardness of untrained actors who haven't had more than an afternoon's rehearsal...

It's an extraordinary decision, setting up a fantastic game of 'the real' versus 'the pretend' as the non-actors, in their efforts to 'act', make the whole thing heartbreakingly real (cue Andy Warhol and his views on using 'non-actors'). But there is also the interesting question of ethics raised. Is it fair to use people in this way? Are they aware of the irony; of the game being played? Regardless, the outcome is astonishing: Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party* meets Robert Lepage's *Far Side of the Moon* via Tim Crouch's *An Oak Tree*, perhaps? Oh and yes, there is a real car involved...

A very different sort of theatrical game-player is cabaret star Meow Meow, whose Spiegel tent show *Beyond Glamour (The Absinthe Tour)* is a wonderful take on cat-and-mouse. She's the cat (mee-ooow!) and we're the mice. Specifically, the men in the audience are poor cornered mice that she torments



to the point of torture. It starts with an interruption of the opening razzamatazz of music-and-lights with an announcement that the star of the show has been delayed and is heading hotfoot to the venue in a taxi. We hear a clatter at the door, and in she comes, a flurry of wild black hair and clomping boots, carrying an assortment of carrier bags and suitcases. 'Darling, take them to the stage,' she says to a man trying to return to his seat with a drink in hand, 'DO IT NOW'. What ensues – onstage, offstage, in the aisles, over the heads of the audience as she body surfs amongst us – is a perfectly pitched parody of the torch-singing, leg-kicking diva. Bemused but delighted men are summoned up to help her with her endless botched costume changes ('get the red bra off me, darling, it's making me look fat'). She berates the pianist ('stop please, this is the slow vibrato bit'), and the technician is made to chop and change the lighting design, ostensibly on a whim ('skinny lights please... now red, red I said – this is a political song!'). Then, to the press photographer, 'NO PHOTOS!' and five minutes later, as she takes a sex-kitten pose 'THIS is your photo opportunity'.

Of course it works beautifully because she is such a skilled player of this particular game: she parodies 'audience participation' by being a perfect manipulator of audiences. She can play the jaded showgirl, the stropky cabaret artiste, or the over-emotional torch singer because she has the skills to take it all beyond the parody – she's an extraordinary singer with a magnificent mock-Piaf trill, and the wild shoulder-climbing on innocent 'volunteers' that ends with her legs akimbo

around a man's neck, or with her dropping to the floor to end in the splits, takes a pretty sound acrobatic ability to pull off. It's clowning, kids, but not as you know it... carefully devised, meticulously executed physical theatre of the highest order. A beautiful game.

Meanwhile, on the streets of Norwich is game-playing of another sort. The Babok/Whalley Range All Stars collaboration *Imaginary Friends* involves an ensemble of ten performers (from the UK and the Netherlands) each with a life-size puppet in tow – each puppet a kind of cartoon version of the person manipulating them. The show toys very consciously and openly with its audience, and treads a careful line between improvisation and prepared material. The performers each take turns in initiating a game with other performers or with the audience – games that are often like nightmare versions of childhood party favourites like 'piggy in the middle' or 'statues'. Thus, each show is different, although there are repeatable motifs and scenes. The gorgeous Hessian-sacking puppets are taken out from their (coffin-like) wooden boxes, and the group of puppets-and-people set off, with their audience following at will. The puppets seem to lead the way, peering longingly into Starbucks, or assembling themselves into a tableau inside Top Shop, taking advantage of the shop's mannequins to enlarge their group temporarily. Then, it's the manipulators who seem to have the upper hand, forming the close-to-life-size figures into a group sat on some steps; walking away from

them so we can take in their sculptural stillness, sat as they are with Norfolk Castle as a backdrop. There's plenty of play on the 'otherness' of the puppet or doll: at one point we are invited to see them as 'real'; as representations of people, or perhaps even creatures that have a life of their own – then suddenly they become the inanimate objects that they are. In this I am reminded of how children play with their dolls and teddies: one minute smothering them with love, the next using them as bats or mops. In one of the spookiest scenes, the puppets are sat down for a picnic, then have their heads or legs or chests pulled apart to reveal hidden tablecloths, or pepper pots, or tasty treats to eat, and a hand becomes the handle of a knife secreted within. In another scene that similarly plays with our emotions and responses, the heads of puppets become balls for a game of catch. It's a tantalising game, and it is amusing to see the Saturday evening gaggles of giggling town-centre teenagers freaked out by their encounters with the puppets – and gratifying to see that many of them stay the course to see what might occur next. Fun and games indeed!

Norfolk & Norwich Festival took place 6–21 May 2011. See www.nnfestival.org.uk

p36: Babok/Whalley Range All Stars
Imaginary Friends
p37 top: Philippe Quesene/Vivarium Studio
l'Effet de Serge
below: Ontroerend Goed A Game of You.
Photo Elies van Renterghem
p38: Artichoke *Dining with Alice*.
Photo Stacia Briggs



a dance piece (but more than a dance piece) connecting Palestine to Blaenannerch in West Wales, where Eddie was brought up, a mile or so down from an MOD airstrip where unmanned vehicles were tested; André Stitt's *Amnesia*, reflecting on the artist's life through spoken word, text, sound, and projected image; and wen yau's *A P(a)lace to Remember*, which overlays the present reality of Canton the Cardiff district with the past memory of Canton the Chinese province. Finally, Total Theatre ventures the creation of an (unofficial) 'mortification' category: Elbow Room's *Intercourse*, a piece that places two people, friends or strangers, in isolation but sends a live feed to of their interactions to the nearby bar; and Mark Bell's 'visual karaoke', a 'rather fetching (and slightly disturbing) fusion of white spandex and the projected image', with possible audience participation. And there's more: more shows, but also satellite events, such as a festival live blog (fed by Random People), an Experimentica Reading Group that guides festival attendees to writing on performance, and the launch of *TRACE Displaced*, an art-book, edited by André Stitt, documenting the work of Wales' Trace Collective. The festival prices are worth a mention as well: full-cost day pass is £6, while a five-day pass is just £22.

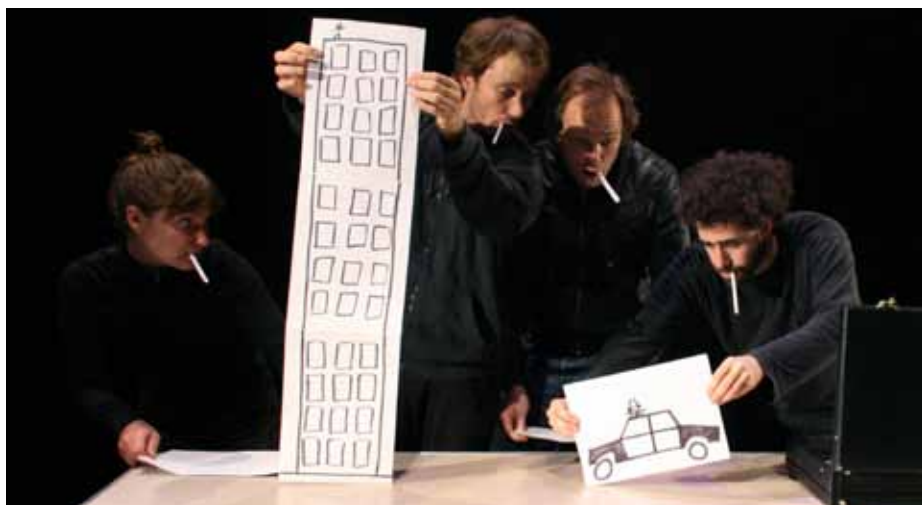
Proving again their growing interest in physical and visual and devised theatre, **Canterbury Festival** (who recently co-produced the outdoor spectacular Blink Margate) have an enticing programme this year – and perhaps all the more worth seeing given that this is the last edition of the festival before heavy National Portfolio cuts come into effect. So in among the historical plays there's RedCape Theatre's latest, *1 Beach Road*, a tale of coastal erosion and fading memory, which, in the RedCape style, was devised using true stories and material drawn from interviews; an outing for Invisible Thread's *Plucked... A True Fairy Tale*; and Night Light Theatre's interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*, which Total Theatre doesn't know a lot about except that it's got some lovely sculptural puppets (the Friar especially). Also there's the Transport New Wolsey co-production *Invisible*, a play about migration written by Croatia's Tena Štivičić and with Darren Johnston as choreographer, and, down from Edinburgh, The River People's *Little Matter*, a dark and quite beautifully miserable folktale told from out an old wooden wagon that'll be sited on the Gulbenkian Theatre's lawn (if it's raining, it may be better).

Back in London there's **Suspense**, an extensive cross-city festival of adult puppetry that had its first edition in 2009 and that returns this year with shows at eleven venues including the Little Angel Theatre, Jacksons



The festival schedule thins out moving into autumn, but there are events of note in Cardiff, Canterbury and London. Let's start in Cardiff. Fitting some two dozen performances into a richly polymorphous four-day festival of performance and live art at Chapter arts centre, **Experimentica** (which kicks off as we go to press) has pedagogy in art and performance as one of its curatorial themes, but there are many other potential throughlines connecting its performances. So in work that responds to space and site, there's Heike Roms' *How to Build an Art Centre? A Guided Audio-*

Tour, which takes participants through the backrooms of the Chapter arts centre to explore the building's transformation from a former school; Hannah Goudie's *Purveyor of Railway Communication*, which uses Cardiff Central Station to test the boundaries of communication with strangers; and running throughout the festival Matt Cook's *Automatic Walking* is an evolving installation based on the artist's walks through Cardiff, undertaken before and during Experimentica. Then there are the pieces that have emerged from autobiographical starting points: the indefatigable Eddie Ladd's *Gaza/Blaenannerch*,



Lane, the V&A, Wilton's Music Hall, the Roundhouse and the New Diorama Theatre. Some of the work has been seen before in London, or at the Edinburgh Fringe, or elsewhere: Rouge28's *Urashima Taro* is a piece that incorporates paper theatre and explores the idea of 'co-presence' (the relationship and dialogue between puppet and puppeteer) through a Japanese folktale about a poor fisherman 'seduced by a mysterious and cruel turtle-woman'; Folded Feather's *Life Still* is a painstakingly and minutely detailed evocation of a future world where discarded objects tell – or whisper – the story of a disaster; and Maison Foo's *Memoirs of a Biscuit Tin* was a great success at the 2010 Edinburgh Fringe, a piece about dementia and memory with a puppetesque eye for the quality and character and narrative of objects. Elsewhere

in the programme *Invisible Thread*, Liz Walker (formerly an artistic director of Faulty Optic)'s company, present *Plucked... A True Fairy Tale*; Eye Spy Arts' *JEW(ish)* animates objects to tell a community's stories; and a collaboration between Mischa Twitchin and George Tomlinson, *The Ecstatic Truth of Bruno S.*, follows up on Twitchin's 09 Suspense piece, the provocative *I Wonder Sometimes Who I Am*. In the cabaret vein, there's Flabbergast Theatre's *Boris and Sergey's Puppet Cabaret*, a profane Eastern European bunraku double-act; Pangolin's Teatime's *The Great Puppet Horn*, a collection of broadly satiric sketches that was shown at the first Suspense; and the ever-popular, adults-only *Puppet Grinder Cabaret*, bringing together work from diverse artists using puppets for dark/raunchy/earthy ends.

Also in London, Chelsea Theatre's festival of live art, *Sacred*, is no longer a fixed-date annual festival, but instead a seasonal event, with bursts of activity scattered throughout the year. The first installment (22–28 November) is programmed in collaboration with Gustavo Ciriaco and Projeto ENTRE_Lugares (Joelson Gusson and Daniela Amorim) from Espaco Cultural Sergio Porto, Rio de Janeiro, and correspondingly there's a heavy Brazilian slant to the programming. Ciriaco, a *Sacred* regular, will once again present work at the festival, renowned Brazilian dance artist Thelma Bonavita presents the UK premiere of *Eu Sou Uma Fruta Gogoia* (*I am a Gogoia Fruit*), and Dorothy's Shoes will pay homage to Brazil via *Flying Down To Rio*, a late-night interactive installation/performance based around a dancehall theme, an 'idiosyncratic response to a real and imagined Rio'. There's also work from UK artists Martin O'Brien, Gillie Kleiman and Joseph Mercier (collected together as *Threesome*, a night of work themed around explorations of the body), plus Francesca Millican Slater giving her take on the fascination of an old postcard in *Me, Myself and Miss Gibbs*, and David Hoyle, in collaboration with Club de Fromage, taking over the *Sacred* stage for some hilarious, dark and dangerous cabaret.

The London International Mime Festival is also coming closer (January 2012). A full preview of LIMF12 will be in the next issue, but some of the line-up is confirmed at this stage and Total Theatre is pleased to see, among others, multimedia butoh breakdancer Hiroaki Umeda (last at LIMF in 2008), Sugar Beast Circus and Gandini Juggling and NoFit State all flying the flag for UK circus, Blind Summit (who'll be performing their Edinburgh success *The Table*), and Theatre Ad Infinitum (with their equally lauded Edinburgh winner *Translunar Paradise*).

Experimentica : 12-16 October
www.chapelarts.org

Canterbury Festival: 15-29 October
www.canterburyfestival.co.uk

Suspense London Puppetry Festival:
 28 October – 6 November
www.suspensefestival.com

Sacred: 21-28 November
www.chelseatheatre.org.uk

London International Mime Festival:
 11-29 January
www.mimefest.co.uk

Images:
 P39: top Hannah Goudie at Experimentica
 bottom: ENTRE Lugares Rio co-director Joelson Gusson's *Cyborg Manifesto*, *Sacred* Festival.
 Photo: Paula Kossatz
 P40: Blind Summit

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Penny Dreadful Etherdome



New Theatre The Lyric: Bridport has a new theatre (which is actually an old theatre, reopened): The Lyric, run by Niki McCretton, Marc Parrett, Tessa Bide, Emily Faulkner and Marta Gemma as an artist-led space for theatre-makers to create and showcase work, as a home for Stuff and Nonsense Theatre Company, and as a venue for hire. The theatre had its opening at the end of June with performances from US clown trio Logic Limited, Ltd., plus a masterclass from company member Sandi Carroll. www.the-lyric.com

Performing House at York St John University is presenting a selection of exciting contemporary performance work this autumn. They host Michael Pinchbeck's *The End* on 3 November, Zoo Indigo's *Under the Covers* on 24 November; plus in collaboration with York Theatre Royal the House is launching a new International Centre for Arts and Narrative, starting with a series of studio talks (first dates 10 and 31 October) on narrative across disciplines. For further information contact m.reason@yorks.ac.uk York St John also welcome professional practitioners onto their Masters programmes on Applied Theatre and Performance: www.yorks.ac.uk/MACreativePractice

Arts Centre Washington: A great season of total theatre at Sunderland's Arts Centre Washington this autumn. There's Horse+Bamboo's puppet interpretation of *Red Riding Hood* (6 October); another company working with mask and puppets, Captain Mermaid Theatre Company, with *Captain Murderer and the Morecambe Mermaid* (13 October); a disaster-comedy directed by physical theatre veteran Mick Barnfather, *Penny Dreadful's Etherdome* (3 November); and Théâtre Sans Frontières' Spanish language work inspired by one of the country's greatest writers, *Lorca: Amor en el Jardín* (10 November). www.artscentrewashington.co.uk



Melanie Wilson Autobiographer

Triggered: Warwick Arts Centre has launched a new programme for commissioning and artist development, Triggered at Warwick Arts Centre – a scheme which sees the Centre actively commission new projects from companies, then work with them in the role of creative producer. Triggered is led by Ed Collier and Paul Warwick, of China Plate, and has already had its first commission (shown as a work-in-progress at a launch event in July): Mark Murphy's *Take a Deep Breath*, an exploration of free diving using projection and aerial. www.warwickartscentre.co.uk

The Point has put together a strong dance programme this autumn. The season kicks off with the return of The Featherstonehaughs, an all-male dance company led by acclaimed choreographer Lea Anderson, who will present a reworking of the dynamic *The Sketch Books Of Egon Schiele* (5 October). This will be the last opportunity for audiences to catch The Featherstonehaughs before the company disbands at the beginning of next year, and Anderson will hold an intimate Q&A session at the Point to talk about her work – both past and present. Also showing, Company Chameleon's *Kith/Kin* (3 November) is a double-bill of new work exploring masculinity and male identity, and *The Lessening Of Difference* (10 November) is a new piece from choreographer Ben Wright, in collaboration with author David Charles Manners, working around the concept of intimacy. www.thepointeastleigh.co.uk

mac: Some of the highlights at the revitalised mac this autumn are Melanie Wilson's *Autobiographer*, a tender and lyrical portrait of a life refracted through the lens of dementia (5-8 October); Pickled Image's *Wolf Tales*, their behind-the-scenes take on the Red Riding Hood story (30 October); MetaMorpho Theatre's *Devil in the Detail*, an old-style farce about a chaotic rent scam (1 & 2 November); and Pen-ultimate's *A Night on the Tiles*, conjuring a seedy spoken-word underworld where gangsters, high-rollers and conmen compete in high-stakes Scrabble – a game to end them all (18 November). www.macarts.co.uk

Oval House: This autumn Oval House have two major strands of work. The first, CASA Festival 2011 (17-23 October), showcases UK premieres of award-winning plays from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and Venezuela together with new work from Latin American artists who live in the UK, with César Meléndez, Jaime Lorca, Vicky Araico Casas, and others. Following on from CASA will be Lady-Led, a season of new work by some of the UK's most exciting female theatre-makers, including Stacey Gregg, Stella Duffy and Shaky Isles, Shireen Mula and Mars. tarrab. For more info see: www.ovalhouse.com

Soho Theatre: This season the Soho Theatre Upstairs brings three of the finest shows from the Edinburgh Fringe to the London venue: Wardrobe Ensemble's *Riot*, an epic tale of greed and violence in a Swedish furniture store; Hannah Ringham's *Free Show (Bring Money)*, a provocative solo about what we value; and Hannah Jane Walker and Chris Thorpe's *The Oh Fuck Moment*, examining the poetic guts of mistakes in a bundle of words and strip lighting. For the venue's (many!) other activities see: www.sohotheatre.com

Publications + Media

Save Me: For two hours each day, for eleven days during Mayfest 2011, Bristol-based performance duo Search Party spoke to each other across Bristol Harbour using semaphore. Bristol's Arnolfini is now working with Mayfest and Theatre Bristol to publish and launch a new book with Search Party and The University of Chichester about how a simple act of performance in May came to represent the struggles of distant connection. The launch of the new publication will be on 22 October, with the event also providing Search Party a chance to share a few more thoughts on the coding and decoding that occurs within daily acts of communication. www.arnolfini.org.uk

Life Lecture is an online resource, created by artist Joshua Sofaer and free to use, which structures and directs an audience to deliver a lecture to themselves about themselves. It aims to create a collective autobiography of the audience while simultaneously challenging our understanding of what autobiography is. Life Lecture has been published and distributed by the Live Art Development Agency and the dramaturg and editor in chief is Sibylle Peters in cooperation with the Interactive-Science-Program / ZMI Geissen. www.lifelecture.net

The Library of Performing Rights: The Live Art Development Agency's Study Room is now home to The Library of Performing Rights, a unique resource containing over 250 publications, videos, DVDs, CD ROMs, brochures, and digital and web-based initiatives submitted by artists, activists and academics from around the world that examine the intersection between performance and Human Rights. The Library was developed by the Agency in collaboration with Lois Weaver and Queen Mary University of London for Performance Studies International 12: Performing Rights in 2006, and has since been presented in Vienna and Glasgow as part of the Agency's Performing Rights programmes. The Library is also available to tour. www.thisisliveart.co.uk

Opportunities

Development Awards for Applause

Outdoors 212: 212 will be a programme of outdoor performances across Kent and East Sussex during summer 2012 to build on the highly successful Applause Outdoors initiative. PANeK and Applause Outdoors are now offering a first round of development awards for companies with an established interest and track record of working outdoors and interactively. They are also seeking work which is currently fully realised and available for touring in summer 2012. For more information: emailcathy@panek.org.uk | www.panek.org.uk

Greentop's Hot House is a new artist development programme that offers circus artists an opportunity to utilise Greentop's Community Circus Centre as a creation, rehearsal and devising space. The scheme also provides an opportunity for contact time with Gerry Flanagan, Greentop's first associate creative director. Applications have already closed for the first round, but a second will

be held later in the year, and the project will continue for a further two years. The scheme is open to any artist or group of artists working in circus or associated artforms, including physical theatre and street arts, who feel that the support on offer could help them contribute to the growth and development of circus arts in the North. See: www.greentop.org

Miscellaneous

The Alternative Village Fete, produced by home live art, goes national following the success of regular appearances at the National Theatre's Watch This Space. At Tattershall Castle 15 & 16 October the Fete pays homage to biker culture with music and neo-gothic delights such as corsetry making, while devotees of this National Trust treasure will meet counter-culture artists including Nu Urban Gardeners. Later in the month, at Brighton's White Night Festival on 29 October, the Fete will see Cut a Shine Collective, Tom Marshman, 815agency and Paul L Martin join forces with local artists, including Victoria Melody and Ragroof Theatre. The White Night festival runs until dawn, incorporating underground, carnivalesque themes. www.homeliveart.com

Kenneth Tynan Award for UK

Dramaturgy: The Dramaturgs' Network has announced a new award, the Kenneth Tynan Award for Dramaturgy, to recognise an outstanding individual in the field of dramaturgy or literary management. The inaugural KTAUKD will be awarded by Michael Billington at Southwark Playhouse on 16 October at 6pm as part of a day of talks, discussions and networking to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Dramaturgs' Network. In future the KTAUKD will be awarded yearly, with members of the Dramaturgs' Network nominating individuals for consideration. www.ee.dramaturgy.co.uk

Trashing Performance is an international public programme of irreverent artists and thinkers working at the edges of taste and respectability. Featuring movers and shakers from the worlds of live art, performance, cabaret, and academia the line-up includes Oreet Ashery, Neil Bartlett, Bavand Behpoor, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, Lisa Blackman, Gavin Butt, Ingo Cando, Simon Casson (Duckie), Stuart Comer, Common Culture, Augusto Corrieri, Vaginal Davis, The Disabled Avant-Garde (Katherine Araniello and Aaron Williamson), Figs in Wigs, Inti Guerrero, Adrian Howells, David Hoyle, Dominic Johnson, Lois Keidan, Keith Khan, Amy Lamé, Harold Offeh, Owen Parry, Scottee, Mara Vujic (City of Women), Ben Walters, Lois Weaver, and Jonny Woo. Trashing Performance is the second themed year of the three-year creative research project, Performance Matters. 25-30 October at Toynbee Studios, Tate Modern and Bethnal Green Working Men's Club. www.thisisperformancematters.co.uk

UPDATE TRAINING + PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Escola de Clown Barcelona

Rites of Passage Autumn School is an intensive four-day course led by Sue Gill and Gilly Adams of Dead Good Guides, with Anna Ledgard (Artsadmin Associate Producer) as guest tutor. Participants will examine the hows and whys of ceremony and celebration in a practical and experiential way, investigating how both positive and negative life events can be distilled into myth and poetry. Adams and Gill will offer insights into the cognitively rich world of the secular celebrant, sharing their experience, offering theory, information, and – they hope – inspiration. Most importantly the course will be shaped to fulfil the needs and aspirations of participants, so there will be plenty of opportunities to learn and practice the craft of creating ceremony – both public and private – in a safe environment. Only twelve places available at a range of fees: four Early Bird places @ £295 paid upfront in full; four bookings @ £325 each; remaining places @ £350. Fees include tuition, all materials, teas and coffees throughout. 12-15 November 2011 near Frome, Somerset. For more information contact: foxandgill@btinternet.com / gillyadams@tiscali.co.uk | www.deadgoodguides.com

Wet Picnic: After successful tours through Europe, China and Russia, Wet Picnic are back with two professional training weekends. In 'Character and the Actor' participants will explore animals, mime, mask, elements and neutrality, transferring this to the creation of character and the development of role. In 'Clown, Bouffon and Play' the group will look at the development of individual clown, the world of the bouffon, and how these styles are appropriate to theatre today. Cost: £180 for both weekends, student and early booking discount available. 5 & 6 November, and 12 & 13 November at a London venue. For further info contact: penny@wetpicnic.com

The Escola de Clown de Barcelona offers in-depth and wide-ranging clown training. Their next residential is a two-month Professional Clown Course, running 23 October – 18 December 2011, but they will also have one-month courses in March, June and August 2012, with dates to be confirmed. Classes are taught in English and Spanish. info@escoladec clown.eu | www.escoladec clown.eu

UPDATE PERFORMER + COMPANY

Canopy



Action Hero: *Frontman* is Action Hero's third piece in an unintentional trilogy on icons and the iconography of masculinity. Backed by an analogue synth and a tambourine, Action Hero perform a half-cut version of a faded comeback gig. Lip-syncing to the ghost of Elvis and extreme noise, they channel the ramblings of iconic frontmen and all the best gigs you never saw. *Frontman* will be touring the UK from mid October through to May 2012. For dates and details see: www.actionhero.org.uk

Bootworks Theatre will continue to tour their signature Black Box shows *Une Boite Andalouse* and *The Little Box of Horrors* as well as new show *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* after much success at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Bootworks artist Andy Roberts will also be premiering his new project – *Predator (finishing off what i started when i was five)*, a playful performance about his childhood memories and relationship with his brother – at The Basement, Brighton in the spring. A recent addition to the Bootworks repertoire, *The Red Boxes*, are currently piloting, and open for bookings next year after being well received at Pulse and Watch This Space Festival. www.bootworkstheatre.co.uk

Canopy: In Canopy's *Search Party* audiences are lead to a secluded location to discover they form the body of a search party tracking a hunted woman. Through dark woods, under bridges, across baron hillsides this itinerant audience leave no stone unturned. This unique performance is created in response to the landscape and echoes the mythology of local folklore. *Search Party* is a work-in-progress and the culmination of Canopy's internship with IOU Theatre.

Chipolatas: Following a summer of UK shows at Stockton, the National Theatre, Alnwick Garden and Mintfest, The Chipolatas take their updated show *Gentlemen of the Road* to Japan, Australia (for the Commonwealth Festival) and Thailand October–December 2011. Next year the company celebrates twenty years together and the guys are planning some exciting new projects for the next decade! www.chipolatas.com

Cirque Nova have created a new show, *Finding Epiphany*, devised by a group of their pupils and depicting love, anger, tenderness and lust through circus acts (aerial, acrobalance, juggling, clowning and acrobatics combined with role play and dance). Cirque Nova also continue to offer weekly training in Leytonstone (every Saturday) to children and young people with disabilities, free of cost. During 2012 the company will be offering a second free training programme to disadvantaged youths, creating the Tottenham Community Circus in collaboration with the Bernie Grants Arts Centre, where Cirque Nova will be the resident company. www.cirquenova.com

Clod Ensemble: Set to an original score featuring live strings, percussion and bagpipes, Clod Ensemble's *An Anatomie in Four Quarters* celebrates the physical structure of the bodies we inhabit and the ways we attempt to see, define, contain, name and value them. The magnificent anatomy of Sadler's Wells' auditorium will be dissected as an audience of just 200 move to different viewing positions throughout the piece, examining what it means to open up and to be opened. The piece is at Sadler's Wells 28-30 October, and is one of the events in the Performing Medicine Anatomy Season, a series of conversations, performances and workshops featuring artists, medics and thinkers across London venues including Sadler's Wells and The Wellcome Collection. Supported by the Wellcome Trust. www.performingmedicine.com



UPDATE
dANTE OR dIE



The Chipolatas

dANTE OR dIE: Having performed the full production of their piece *La Fille à la Mode* in the corridors, cloakrooms and staircases of the National Theatre, dANTE OR dIE will be popping up in a variety of different buildings with moments from the show. The promenade dance-theatre piece takes a playful look at the continued celebration and exploitation of It Girls, so look out for the dANTE OR dIE ladies spraying perfume and dancing on bars in department stores and art galleries near you... www.danteordie.com

Darshan Singh Bhuller: *Caravaggio: Exile and Death* is a new dance-theatre work inspired by the life and work of the 17th century master painter, Caravaggio. Darshan Singh Bhuller takes the audience on the journey of a man's search for forgiveness and redemption after a life fascinated with youth and sexuality, violence, solitude and love. Scarred by imprisonment and the Catholic Church's dismissal of his works, Caravaggio lived a painful and dramatic life. Combining highly physical choreography with stunning projections by KMA and a beautiful soundtrack, Darshan has created a show that tells the tempestuous story of Caravaggio's life and art. The show tours the UK September – November, with dates in Nottingham, Leeds, Birmingham, Newcastle, London and Buxton. See: www.darshansinghbhuller.com

Fionn Gill (The Plasticine Men / Lost Spectacles) is developing a new show about outer space in collaboration with writer Hattie Naylor, musician Chris Read (The Paper Cinema) and performer Naomi Rothwell (Lost Spectacles). An ordinary man and woman decide to get into space by themselves: they build their own rocket, embark on their own astronaut training, and report back to mission control based in their living room. A funny, poetic and highly visual show that exists between the domestic and the cosmic, *Space* will lift off spring 2012. The show is being developed and commissioned through Ferment @ Bristol Old Vic, Parabola Arts Centre and The Carriageworks. www.fionngill.com



Forced Entertainment

Forced Entertainment: In a nutshell, Forced Entertainment's *Void Story* is a blackly comic modern fable following a beleaguered pair of protagonists as things turn from bad, to worse, to diabolically dystopian... This increasingly absurd tale is told in a characteristically unconventional style – somewhere between a radio play, animated graphic novel and live performance. The audiences' attention constantly moves between the performers reading the script, adding in sound effects and turning up the voice distortion on stage, and the compelling photo-shopped images on the screen behind them. *Void Story* tours the UK throughout the autumn.

www.forcedentertainment.com

Gob Squad: In a rare chance to get to know the inner workings of a long-running collective of UK and German artists, Gob Squad will be presenting a lecture and film-screening at Bristol's Arnolfini on 20 October. The lecture will lift the lid on their participatory performances where the boundaries between audience and performers often disappear completely. This will be followed by a 'Live Long and Prosper' screening in which seven film sequences will be re-staged by seven performers across the city of Berlin. Shown on two screens, the devices of narrative film are doubled-up and reflected back on themselves in a cinematic game of spot the difference.

www.gobsquad.com

John Fox and Sue Gill: *Fragments from the Weather Station* is an exhibition of visual and theatrical poetry at Brantwood, John Ruskin's house by Coniston in the Lake District. Combining icon oil paintings, comic etchings, woodcuts, ghost wolf whirlygigs, films of micro marine critters, bio-degradable funeral urns, pickled sapphire and provocative cultural deliberations ('about happiness and all that fashionable stuff'), *Fragments* is now open at Brantwood every day 11am – 5.30pm until 16 October 2011, with a performance from John Fox of *You Never Know*, his latest collection of poems, on three nights: 29 September, 9 October and 13 October @ 7pm.

www.deadgoodguides.com



Metro Boulot Dodo



Michael Pinchbeck

Metro-Boulot-Dodo's Four Seasons, a collection of four audio installation pieces, charts Polly's journey through life, with innocence, love, loss, regret and acceptance discovered along the way. These flagship installations have appeared at Curve, Stockton International Riverside Festival and The National Theatre, and are now together for the first time in Lincoln, allowing audiences to walk from The Collection to The Drill Hall to follow Polly from 8 to 80 years old. Visit *Spring*, an interactive garden of the imagination; *Autumn*, an immersive snapshot of getting older; *Winter*, a mysterious landscape with expansive electro-classical score. New for 2011 is *Summer*, completing this intimate and moving story. For dates see: www.metro-boulot-dodo.com

Michael Pinchbeck: Award-winning writer and live artist Michael Pinchbeck is performing with his parents for the final time at Lincoln Performing Arts Centre 14 October 2011. *The Post Show Party Show* re-enacts the post-show party where his parents met after an amateur dramatic production of *The Sound of Music* in Lincoln, 40 years ago. Michael's new show, *The End*, fresh from the British Council Showcase 2011, will tour to Manchester, York and Sheffield. Inspired by the stage direction 'Exit pursued by a bear' *The End* explores endings and exits and asks why we perform and how we will know when to stop.

www.michaelpinchbeck.co.uk

Natural Theatre is currently celebrating the opening of their beautiful new Youth Street Theatre Studio and the launch of their new easy-to-use website. Also bemoaning the impending 100% Arts Council cuts and having endless meetings about how to survive, future options and whether Ralph will have to share his lovely new office with strangers. We are told that adversity is character-building, so watch this space!

www.naturaltheatre.co.uk



Rajni Shah

NIE: In co-production with The Junction and developed at BAC, NIE have created a special family show, *Hansel & Gretel*, that will be performed in Cambridge 7 December – 3 January 2012, transforming the theatre into a magical winter forest. The company are also touring *Tales from a Sea Journey* across the UK in November, and are on the look-out for an exciting space to use near the river in Southwark for a site-specific show with the Unicorn taking place in June 2012.

www.nie-theatre.com

Rajni Shah: Having premiered at the SPILL Festival, Rajni Shah Projects' *Glorious* continues to tour around the UK – next stop Newcastle for the Wunderbar Festival this autumn, where they will be collaborating with the Academy of Music and Sound in Gateshead to completely reinvent this haunting and unusual musical. Reinvented for each location with local musicians and the stories of local people, *Glorious* begins in public places and culminates in a large-scale theatre performance. The project is an exchange with an audience, a call to take notice and move towards the future.

www.rajnishah.com

RedCape Theatre: Relentlessly the sea swallows first the road, then the row of bungalows, and finally eats its way to the back door of 1 Beach Road, where the inhabitants refuse to budge. Victoria and Jane are left standing at the edge of a precipice. *1 Beach Road* is the new play from the award-winning RedCape Theatre. A tale of defiance, a shrinking island, synchronised swimming and trying to turn back the tide, the piece is drawn from true stories and explores the metaphorical connections between Alzheimer's and Coastal Erosion, asking: 'What is it like to lose everything – your home and your memories?' Touring the UK this autumn. For dates see:

www.redcapetheatre.com

Red Earth's performance cycle *Chalk*, an exploration of the South Downs in partnership with the National Trust, started in April 2011 and ends this October with a series of atmospheric performance journeys taking us into the heart of the South Downs. Be prepared for an extraordinary experience as the audience follows Japanese butoh performer Atsushi Takenouchi on a mythical journey deep into the hidden landscape, brought to life with horn, bell, bronze percussion, voice, and fire. Local choirs will bring together songs from the South Downs and the Russian Steppe, as the land resonates with the haunting sound of Mongolian Longsong from Badamkhorol Sandandamba, and the echo of ancient horns and pipes from musician Dirk Campbell. 8 & 9 October within the Bronze Age enclosure on Wolstonbury Hill.
www.redearth.co.uk

Shaun Parker & Company's *Happy as Larry* is a funny, playful and poignant new dance show investigating the elusive nature of human happiness. Created by award-winning Australian choreographer Shaun Parker, this powerful performance combines an intoxicating mix of ballet, breakdance, rollerskating and highly physical contemporary dance. Set to a vibrant electro/acoustic score, the performers bring fun and danger to the fore in this innovative and moving dance work. The piece tours the UK September and October, with dates in Nottingham, Coventry, London, Brighton and Newcastle, among others. For full dates see:
www.happyaslarrytour.co.uk

Strangeface are looking forward to a busy autumn/winter. Their new piece based on Hogarth's satirical prints, *A Rake's Progress*, will be touring in the South East and East Midlands with support from the Arts Council and Kent County Council. Also, following a run of their show *A Christmas Carol* at The Stables, Milton Keynes in 2010, Strangeface have been commissioned to create a new performance for the Stables this winter. The show, *Pinocchio*, will run 20 December – 7 January before touring to other venues as a post-Christmas pick-me-up in late January and February 2012.
www.strangeface.co.uk

Theatre Ad Infinitum: Returning from Edinburgh with a clutch of rave reviews, Theatre Ad Infinitum's *Translunar Paradise* was also the winner of the Holden Street Theatres Award, meaning the company will be flown to Australia to perform at the Holden Street Theatre as part of Adelaide Fringe Festival in February–March 2012. In the meantime *Translunar Paradise* tours to Bosnia & Herzegovina, the UK and Finland in October, while the company's previous piece, *Odyssey*, is touring internationally.
www.theatreadinfinitum.co.uk



The Paper Birds: Having opened their show *Thirsty* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, The Paper Birds will now embark on an ambitious research and development period for their new production *An Age* (working title) followed by their annual 'Feminist Futures' symposium in Leeds. The company will also be heading to Poland in November for the IETM, and hope to meet some fellow Total Theatre friends there! For further information about *An Age*, Feminist Futures, and for *Thirsty's* spring 2012 tour dates, see:
www.thepaperbirds.com

The World Famous are well into development of their new show *All Hands*, supported by a grant from Arts Council England. *All Hands* is being created in public, experimenting with ideas in front of audiences at three UK festivals over summer 2011. Two works-in-progress have already taken place, at the Fuse Medway Festival in June and SO Festival in Skegness in July; the third will be at Canterbury Festival on 15 October. The show is a celebration of collective human endeavour and the power of connection. It combines fire, fireworks, music and performance to create a spectacular and moving transformation of a site, driven by audience participation.
www.theworldfamous.co.uk

Tmesis Theatre are working on a new piece, their fifth production, from September, with a work-in-progress presentation 6 October in Liverpool and a premiere in April 2012 before a national tour. The new piece is a solo from artistic director Elinor Randle, who will work again with acclaimed North West playwright Chris Fittock, co-director Yorgos Karamalegos and practitioners Lorna Marshall and Nigel Charnock in the research process. The company will also be touring their repertoire pieces internationally and recently spent two weeks performing at the Barefeet Festival in Zambia in August.
www.tmesistheatre.com



Travelling Light will be busy this autumn running two tours and producing two more shows for Christmas. The second tour of *Bob the Man on the Moon* is now underway. Co-produced with Sixth Sense Theatre Company, this charming show, adapted from Simon Bartram's book about a diligent but unobservant moon-keeper, toured to packed houses in summer 2010. The company are also touring *White Caps*, an amazing fusion of live and filmed b-boy dance created by Champloo Dance Company, which will visit eight venues in October/November including Sadler's Wells and Babero Festival in Galway.
www.travellinglighttheatre.org.uk

You Need Me: *Death Song* is the story of a Mexican immigrant facing execution on death row in Nevada, USA in the early nineties – a tense, electric piece of theatre that brings the elegant storytelling skill and deep humanity of You Need Me's previous work to a complex and dangerous story of cultural alienation. You Need Me were nominated for Total Theatre Awards in 2008 and 2009. *Death Song* was commissioned by Newbury Corn Exchange and Arts Council England, in association with New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth. Touring from October. For dates and more information see:
www.youneedme.org.uk

Watch This Space: *Shine* is a historical journey linking five of Northamptonshire's finest churches through a celebration of their heritage, culminating in a series of illuminated exhibition events featuring lighting, sound, moving image and high-tech interaction in a unique digital playground. Visit All Saint's, Brixworth; All Saint's, Earls Barton; St Peter's, Northampton; Holy Trinity, Rothwell; and St Peter's, Oundle to hear long-gone stories as well as more recent recollections of these five beautiful buildings. *Shine* is part of the Cultural Olympiad's Igniting Ambition Festival and has been kindly supported by Northamptonshire County Council and the Heritage Lottery Trust. Dates in September and October. See:
www.shine-northamptonshire.com

Out & About



A donated item to Lone Twin's The Boat Project, which forms part of the Cultural Olympiad 2012.
Photo Gary Winters.

Pippa Bailey surveys a summer of theatre on and off the stage

The summer has been full of amazing real-life performance: riots on the streets of Egypt as people demanded change; the News International hacking scandal; and the pomp and ceremony of a Royal Wedding cum fashion show watched by millions worldwide, firmly asserting the inalienable rights of those in power, while the UK's welfare state is busily dismantled. And with one year to go, 2012 events connected with the Olympics and Paralympics are now underway in earnest. People seemed to wake up with a sudden start as the big event looms. Blimey, where did those three years go? Have you got tickets? Do you care?

I am not sure the general public have any great sense of the Cultural Olympiad, although there are a few delightful projects. Performance makers Lone Twin are building a boat made from donated wood from many sources (often pieces with a sentimental value) in the South East for the aptly named *The Boat Project*. The Pacitti Company project, *On Landguard Point* (for the East of England) is an investigation of 'home', in which a succession of live events will culminate in the making of a feature film. But to be honest, the majority of people are probably far more interested in the sporting events. That said, local authorities up and down the country are preparing their celebrations. I have been involved in 'secret' discussions for one or two outdoor events for the torch relay, amused and appalled in equal measure by so many cooks (with little or no relevant experience) wanting to stir the pot. For

many smaller places in the UK outside of the metropolis, the torch relay is perceived as an 'opportunity' to spend a lot of money and be on a world stage. Time will tell.

I have been also gathering speed with my own 2012 project, entitled BiDiNG TiME. This is an experiment to re-imagine failing systems by encouraging artists and community groups to get involved in making new music theatre. (I know, it's a tall order but hear me out!) It is based on a new story about a group of young people, focusing on a young woman. I am particularly interested in widening audiences and participation to include those who seldom or never attend the theatre. I want to reach out to a wider public with something cutting edge, topical, accessible and unfinished. This is also a global project attempting to explore a new model for international collaboration by sharing a story but enabling different interpretations that are locally relevant. Rather than tour the work, we will share most of it virtually. BiDiNG TiME came up to Edinburgh this August with an installation at Summerhall where visitors could write ideas about love, sex and romance on a bed, and fill in resolutions for the New Year Club, the setting for the second part of the show – when it is finally made. This is R&D for the project, putting a process into the public domain and exploring new models for working.

While in Edinburgh with BiDiNG TiME and the Total Theatre Awards process, I was

continually reminded of unsettled times. The riots in London and other parts of England in 'week one' of the Fringe (the second week of August) kept everyone on their phones, distracted as friends and loved ones were contacted and news shared.

Meanwhile, Edinburgh Fringe performers had distresses of their own to deal with. One assessor turned up to one of our regular Total Theatre Awards meetings convinced she had witnessed a 'nervous breakdown on stage' as a sole performer on the free fringe had deconstructed his show for his audience. No, this wasn't the show: he talked about making the show, cried and hid behind the curtain for almost 10 minutes. Apparently the performer, his partner, and their young baby were camping in a field during the very wet first week and a vitriolic one-star review was the final straw. The Fringe is an increasingly corporate environment: the new Fringe sponsorship from Virgin Media saw huge red bins up and down the Royal Mile shouting about numbers of shows, artists and audiences. This seems to be far more important to the festival than any of the work, and there is work to be done to ensure the onstage dramas are as gripping and relevant as those going on around us.

Pippa Bailey is director of Total Theatre, who produce the Total Theatre Awards. See report elsewhere in this magazine on the Awards 2011. www.totaltheatre.org.uk
For more on BiDiNG TiME, which is currently seeking partners in the project, see www.bidingtime.org

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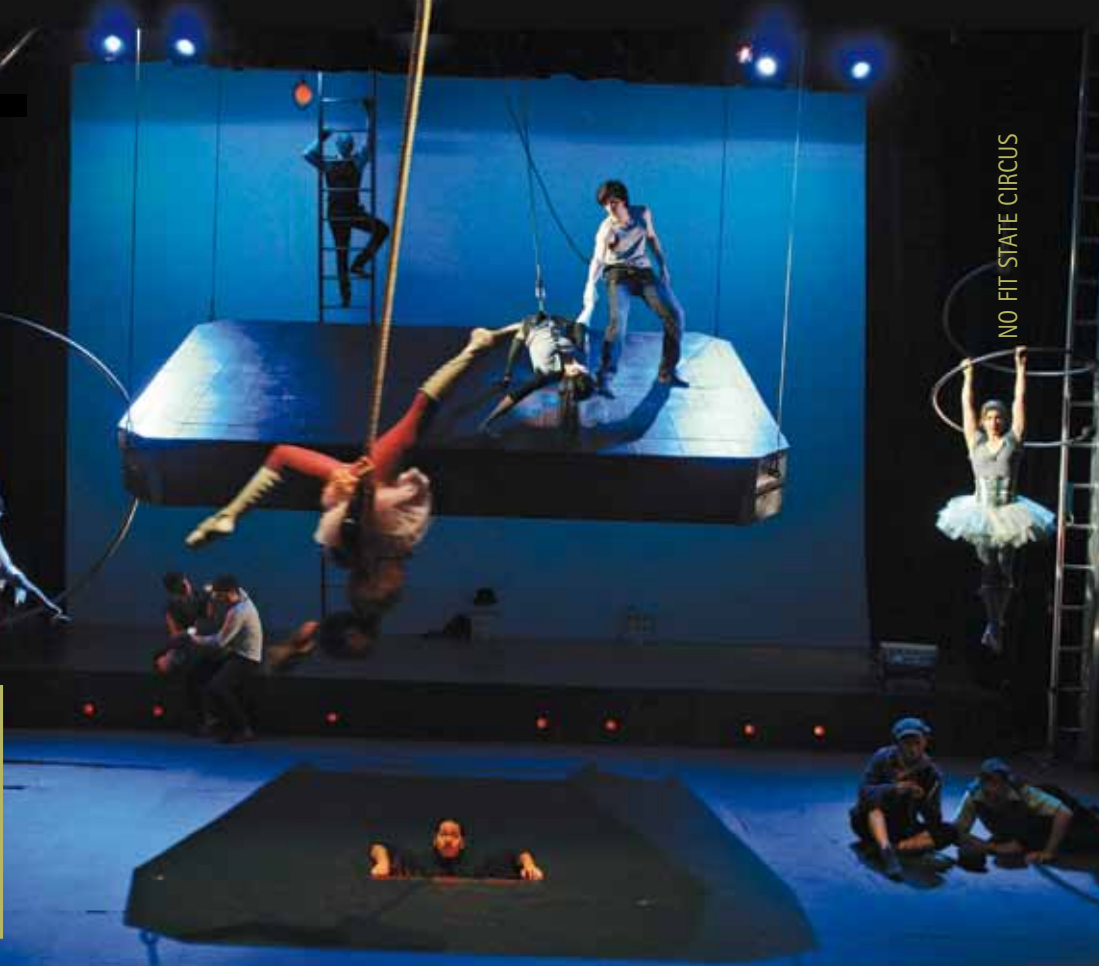
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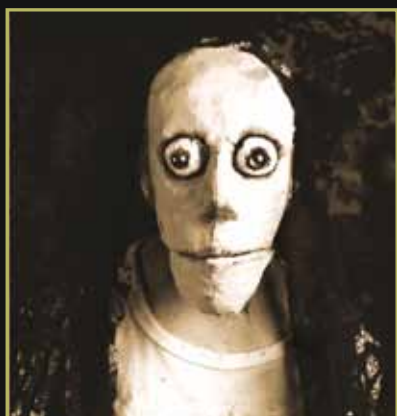
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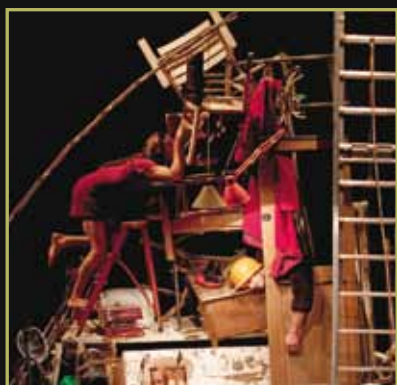
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