

TOTALTHEATRE

MAGAZINE



WILD THINGS: GEOFF SOBELLE IN THE FLESH... AND BLOOD & FISH AND FOWL
MORE BEASTLY GOINGS ON: GAVIN GLOVER IS FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE
IT'S A DOG'S LIFE - COMPLICITE PAST AND PRESENT APPRAISED AND REVIEWED
EVEN MORE PUPPET DOGS! THE NT, HANDSPRING AND NEIL BARTLETT COLLABORATION OR YOU COULD KISS ME
LOST IN MUSIC: FROM ENO TO ENO - A NEW TAKE ON MUSIC THEATRE
PLUS: TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE'S NEW WRITING PERFORMANCE PROJECT IN KENT, INSIDE OUT IN DORSET, ROADKILL
IN GLASGOW, STAN'S CAFE IN BRISTOL, FORCED ENTERTAINMENT IN WARWICK AND MANCHESTER, SACRED IN CHELSEA,
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TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

Volume 22 Issue 04 Winter 2010

We started this year with a reflection (in the editorial of Volume 22 Issue 01) on the nature of reviewing and the role of the theatre critic. I make no apologies for coming back to this subject, particularly in the light of a recent project developed by Total Theatre Magazine in collaboration with PANeK (Performing Arts Network Kent). Writing Performance was a pilot project for those wishing to write about theatre, led by members of our editorial team, and documented in this issue. We are hoping very much to repeat this programme in association with other arts organisations, higher education institutions, and venues around the country – so watch this space.

At the core of our work here at Total Theatre Magazine over the past three decades has been the notion that the distinctions between artist, curator, critic, and cultural commentator are a lot more fluid than some would have us believe; and that theatre-makers could and should be encouraged to write about their own and other's work – it being a job 'too important to be left to professional theatre critics' as Beccy Smith says in the Writing Performance 'reviews special' in this magazine. It is interesting that it is considered the norm for a fiction writer to review another writer's novel, yet is somehow seen as 'too close to home' if a theatre-maker reviews theatre. Hence, the almost across-the-board supremacy of the 'professional critic' (i.e. a critic who is not also a theatre-maker) in the national press – honourable exceptions like Brian Logan excluded.

Of course there are issues around how one writes, especially if writing about people you may well end up working with in some capacity at some future date, but perhaps that might make for more compassion and a general desire to offer constructive criticism?

As regular readers will know, we now carry most of our reviews on the Total Theatre website (www.totaltheatre.org.uk/reviews) freeing up the magazine pages for a rather different take on 'reviewing'. For example, in this issue we have Forced Entertainment's *The Thrill of It All* reviewed twice, by different writers at different venues. I was interested in seeing what the two reviewers – both theatre-makers themselves, but thirty years apart in age and experience – would have to say. Their responses are, of course, different – all reviews are a subjective response – but there is some shared territory, particularly in the concerns about how 'radical' the work seen was. This raises an interesting discussion point: how much 'repeat' of ideas/themes/structures is acceptable in new work? Are we harder on theatre-makers than we are on artists working in other forms? (Murakami's novels almost always feature girl runaways, boy suicides and cats, for example!)

Regardless of subjective views, I'd have thought that a key 'rule' to reviewing would be that you have to review what was witnessed, rather than what you thought ought to have been presented to you. I was rather confused by Michael Billington's review of the Handspring/Neil Bartlett collaboration *Or You Could Kiss Me* (in the Guardian) in which he wonders, why puppets rather than actors? Surely the answer is: because it's puppet-theatre – that's the form, and the chosen art and craft of the people making the work. It would be a bit like seeing a dance piece and asking 'why does it have dancers in it?' No such problems with the puppets in our review of that show, which you'll find in this issue.

Being There – in which we invite artists/company members to 'review' their own show in tandem with an outsider's view – is now an established feature of this magazine, and in this issue it's the turn of Stan's Cafe, with *Tuning Out with Radio Z* at Bristol's Tobacco Factory Theatre.

The Works is a new regular feature and another take on the question of how to write about theatre. It's a personal view of a body of work by one artist or company, in this case *Complicite* as seen by Richard Cuming, who is viewing their work from the perspective of someone also working with 'contemporary clown'.

Also on *Complicite*: we've placed side-by-side reviews of two of the three different shows directed by Simon McBurney that have been playing in London this season (November – December 2010): *Shun Kin* at the Barbican and ENO's contemporary opera, *A Dog's Heart*.

Elsewhere in this magazine, you'll find a reflection on Total Theatre Award winning show *Roadkill*; an artist's diary by Gavin Glover of *FaultyOptic*, who brings *Flogging a Dead Horse* to the London International Mime Festival 2011; and in another Mime Festival related feature, Geoff Sobelle (co-star, with Charlotte Ford, of *Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl*) is our candidate for Voices.

Plenty to get you through the long winter's nights, so enjoy!

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Front cover image: Geoff Sobelle and Charlotte Ford in *Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl*, appearing at the London International Mime Festival January 2011. Photo by Jason Frank Rothenberg. www.mimelondon.com

Flogging a Dead Horse

Gavin Glover from FaultyOptic shares some thoughts on the making of his new adult puppetry show, which premieres at the London International Mime Festival 2011

Amongst the inkblots, intercoms, coffee rings and pizza, there's a little doorway down to the deepest, darkest ocean, where the seabed sludge has a similar chemistry to that of the human brain. The brain hosts trillions of neurons and each is playing an endless game of mental ping-pong. Of course, no one really knows any of this as fact, although someone bravely went in search and sent back reports, whilst others scrutinised and postulated and made lists...

FaultyOptic are renowned for creating puppet theatre for an adult audience, and their work features haunting tales, strange animated figures and dark, dark humour. In much of FaultyOptic's work, the puppeteers are almost lost in the darkness behind the figures, allowing the puppets to be the apparent sole acting bodies on stage. In the company's latest work, *Flogging a Dead Horse*, the decision has been made that the actor/puppeteers reclaim the stage – or at least share it with the puppets and at times perform without them altogether!

This highly visual show includes a cast of rather disturbing and disturbed puppets, some unbelievable microscopic films, a deranged kangaroo dentist, a live roving camera, distant messages from other members of the team, and two researchers trying to figure out what it is they are researching – and indeed if they are who they think they are.

Suitable for an adult audience and older children.
Contains no nudity.
No real animals will be harmed in this production.
You have been warned...



For a little while I have been pondering my work within the puppet world and after almost giving it all up and getting a proper job, I realised I still have a couple of ideas left that I wanted to explore. As well as slowly formulating these ideas, I have been working in mainland Europe and in Scotland, making puppets for various companies and directing actors in the use of puppets on stage.

Whilst working with these actors and trying to get them to concentrate on the art of manipulation, I was struck by how many of them can so easily adapt to using a puppet and add it to their repertoire of skills. Interestingly both puppet and actor can share the space if the work is such that it allows both to develop side-by-side. So if the logic says that it is OK for them to both be there, then so be it. But they have to be closely knitted together from day one otherwise there is a feeling of it all just being haphazardly pasted together.

In this new production I have tried to create a show which is not typically FaultyOptic, and I started to explore how the puppet is on stage and why it is there in the first place. Previous FO shows have seen the puppet as the main actor – always alive, always active, always the central focus. I started to see what happened when the actor shared the space with a puppet: sometimes the puppet just being an object, a thing, a pile in the corner; at other times the puppet very much alive, a living breathing character.



No more miraculous cinematic effects that we all take for granted when we see a show! If a DVD is to be seen, let's see it go into the DVD player

In *Flogging a Dead Horse* I started, as I often did when creating a FO show, with a rough notion of the theme of the show, made some rough drawings and then started making some things, puppets, machines, situations – partly for my own amusement, partly knowing that what I was making might not actually get used at all, but if it was made, it stood a chance of joining in the madness later on in the process.

The themes were basically a collection of wild cards:

- Sperm whales and their incredible evolution to survive in the most extreme of conditions
- Oscar Wilde's *Salome* with the victim/master/manipulator relationship between each of the three main characters: John the Baptist, Herod and Salome
- Brains, neurons, the depths of our subconscious and our thinking processes
- Stand-up comedians
- A few other even wilder cards which I can't even remember now but were quickly discarded

And technically, a desire that everything is visible to the audience, and an awareness that the sound manipulation is just as important as the puppet manipulation. No more miraculous cinematic effects that we all take for granted when we see a show! If a DVD is to be seen, let's see it go into the DVD player.

So I made a leather whale which could talk back; an innocent faced yellow puppet in a long coat; and a life-sized pig-faced man who could be dismantled, and who sat tied up in a chair with a gag in his mouth. Maybe my love/hate relationship with puppets was surfacing as I really wanted to start to be destructive and destroy their misty-eyed integrity. My barbershop John the Baptist victim was going to lose his head after some relentless hairdresser interrogations.

So the jigsaw puzzle pieces had been made and the game of devising the show had started. Perhaps overconfidently believing the show would simply create itself, which of course it didn't, I was left realising I was facing something uncomfortably familiar, a rather large overwhelming feeling of *deja vu*. The show was also to be a solo. I have found, however frustrating, however much time one wastes, this is the only way I know to create a devised show. It's like flogging a dead horse and I always swear never to make another one again!

Back in June 2010, I did do a two-week residency in a music venue in Brussels called Atelier Claus – they generously support artist performers and open their space for creations with the promise of a public showing at the end of it. So it was that the creativity started amid technical problems and the closure of the venue after day five due to health and safety concerns (the venue had no fire exits). So the show was hurriedly rescheduled to another arts centre.



The text is written as and when in the same way as the visuals. I write the scene titles on postcards and constantly rearrange them on the floor after each improv session

I was to play with Mark Webber and Eve Libertine (from CRASS) whose experimental electronic/vocal performance was more in keeping with the venues remit and their audience more attuned to their fantastic earbleeding soundwaves than my bemusing puppet decapitations and whale whisperings.

A week later, I decided that doing it all alone as a solo was too boring for me and, more importantly, probably more boring for the audience. I invited actor Philip Bosworth, who I had met doing a Spymonkey clown course at Salford Uni this year, to explore ideas of the show so far. I was surprised that he was not completely confounded by it and he seemed excited by trying to fathom it out with me. It's amazing how quickly things start to move when the right decisions have been made.

This is not to say that it wasn't hard mental work. If you throw all the ideas up in the air and expect them to come down in a nicely ordered scenario, it just won't happen. You have to persevere, be free with ideas, oil ideas and allow them to move about. Expect the whole thing to shift; it's never going to be what you originally thought it was going to be. The text is written as and when in the same way as the visuals. I write the scene titles on postcard-sized pieces of paper and constantly rearrange them on the floor after each improv session. That's the only way I can see it.

In the black-and-white neuron film in the show, the neurons slowly bob around in a porridge of sludge, semi submerged, partly hidden. It reminded me of this slowly forming show, the ideas batting around in

The show suddenly started to create itself. The puppets had a reason to be on the stage and the actors had space to flit and wander between scenes, videos and camera work, with and even without the puppets

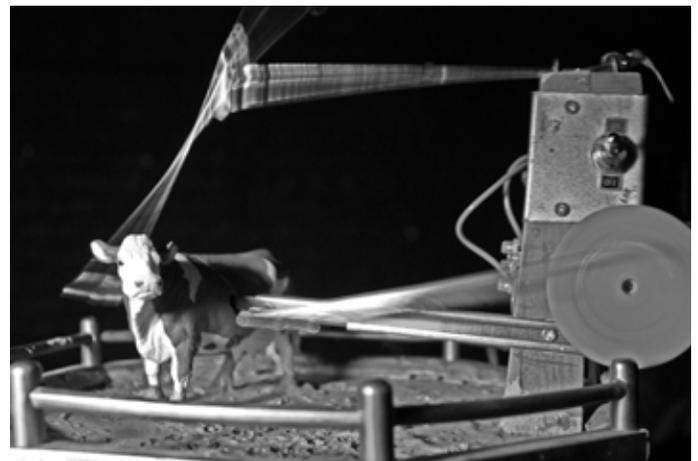
the sludge of my own brain as it pondered the infinite possibilities of a 1 hour 15 minute timeline.

Working with Philip Bosworth, and with Isabelle Wery as an outside eye, the show suddenly started to create itself and the wild cards began to sit together quite happily. The puppets had a reason to be on the stage and the actors had space to flit and wander between scenes, videos and camera work, with and even without, the puppets. The madness and nonsense all started to make sense. For example, the mini live camera sequence had had no real reason to be there until it began to play a more crucial role in the dramaturgy – a sort of premonition, a nightmare with a sadistic kangaroo dentist and a host of lost animals in his surreal surgery including some underwater horse sex and a seedy cinema showing an old copy of a dancing Salome.

The decapitation scene was cut and the pig-faced man was replaced in favour of some more tender moments with a more loveable, albeit more ugly, old git with a moveable jaw and lips. Maybe the worst we would do to him now was to brush his teeth. This guy was beginning to take on more and more importance in the story. Tied up and sitting there patiently in the corner eventually paid off: he kept his head and now was centrestage. He had become the metaphoric hermit, the old man, the person lost in their own thoughts and fears, in deep thought, in limbo, incommunicado.

When a person is there in the room with us, but not there with us, their mind is somewhere else – that's what interests me. And if our minds are so far away, what happens if we want to return to reality but our minds simply won't let us? It's like flogging a dead horse deep, deep down in our very being, in our very soul.

That is what this show is about.



FaultyOptic's *Flogging A Dead Horse* premieres at the London International Mime Festival 2011, presented at Roundhouse Studio Theatre 27–29 January, 8pm. Meet the Artists: Friday 28 January. See www.mimefest.co.uk Bookings: 0844 482 8008

Flogging a Dead Horse is available for touring in the spring and autumn of 2011 and beyond. Contact the company for further information.

www.faultyoptic.co.uk
www.myspace.com/mrgavinglover

All images are of FaultyOptic's *Flogging a Dead Horse*, courtesy of the company. Photos by Gavin Glover

Roadkill

Behind the closed shutters on a suburban street, there are goings-on that the neighbours know nothing about. Charlotte Smith witnesses a harrowing theatrical exposé of the sex trafficking industry



Roadkill | Charlotte Smith

Pollokshields, Glasgow. A small boy cycles down Keir Street. A road sign warns of a primary school; hijabs and ‘artifacts’ are advertised opposite. At one end, there’s an airy square, a playground in winter sunlight. A small pile of litter sits on the pavement, but overseen by golden plane leaves with a hallucinatory beauty, ready to tessellate. It’s a clear Sunday morning in November, and most people are unaware that behind the quiet façade of a sandstone tenement, the theatrical sensation *Roadkill*, a hard-hitting, award-winning, site-specific production about people trafficking and prostitution, finished a second run the night before.

The nearest neighbours received a polite letter about a ‘small, contained performance piece’, shortly before the first five-day run this June. It gave precise details, but said the location would not be disclosed in publicity material or to the audience. The show would involve three actors and an audience of twelve, transported from and to the Tron theatre by minibus. Ankur Productions had secured the necessary licences and would ensure noise was kept to a minimum, said company manager Suzi Simpson. ‘At approximately 7.30pm, one of the actors will climb through the window of the performance flat. Please don’t be alarmed if you see this. Then at 8.15pm one of the actors will be seen outside in a police uniform.’

The odd person had noticed the bus, but little else. Shaz Iqbal, a newsagent round the corner in Albert Drive, first heard about *Roadkill*

after the last night there. ‘It shouldn’t be a problem,’ he said. ‘For me personally, but not for everyone. The older Indian generation might find it difficult and everyone who’s more religious. But no one mentioned it to me, so I can’t say anything.’ A nearby halal butcher, also unaware of the production, said: ‘We don’t have that much people trafficking and prostitution in this area. I’ve lived in Keir Street for 34 years. I think it gives a bad image; I’m against it really. It devalues your livelihood. The whole area loses its image, its dignity. Why don’t they pick another place, you know?’

Billy Munn, who lives with his partner and 15-month-old daughter, first heard the sounds of domestic violence. ‘I was out in the back garden and they pretty much came at it hammer and tongs. So there was a discussion in this household as to whether or not it was real. A bit of you didn’t want to believe that the nice actors next door were battering each other. Another time I saw a policeman and thought it was quite unusual that there was only one policeman for a domestic. Later, buses and camera crews turned up. It was good to have it confirmed that we weren’t neighbours who didn’t care about what was happening.’

Roadkill is the brainchild of director, actor and folk singer Cora Bissett. It is being presented as part of the IETM (International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts) meeting, which saw over 500 delegates from 35 countries converge on Glasgow for a four-day conference and artistic programme. Performances (which were open to the general



public, as well as delegates) included David Leddy's *Susurrus, Trilogy* by Nic Green and *The Monster in the Hall* by David Greig. *Alma Mater* by Fish & Game was at Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Scotland Street school, while an installation *Bridging* spanned the River Clyde. At the Arches, Adrian Howells' female alter ego Adrienne dished up prawn cocktail, quiche lorraine and blancmange.

Feisty, dedicated and animated, Cora Bissett is framed by rows of spirit bottles when I meet up with her in the bar of Glasgow venue the Tron, where she has just finished playing Helena in *Midsummer* (shortlisted for a Total Theatre Award in the music theatre category in 2009). *Roadkill*, presented by the Traverse at Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2010, as part of the Made in Scotland programme, won her a Total Theatre Award in the Innovation category.

'It's real, it's here, it's now... there's a repeated blueprint of exploitation.' Cora Bissett, writer and director of *Roadkill*

Roadkill has been three years in the making. Cora had a trafficked girl to stay at her flat when she had 'coincidentally' been thinking about working with the subject. 'Rather than pouncing on her life story, it was just like a mental tweak, to make this happen. I thought this makes it very urgent, it's real, it's here, it's now.' She was careful to protect the girl's identity, using case studies and a small grant to travel to Italy and develop a 'generic, slightly fictionalised' story. Her research revealed a 'repeated blueprint' of exploitation, be it by older women in Africa or men posing as a boyfriend in Eastern Europe. 'The title was a metaphor for these great trade routes. The sale of people is the second biggest black trade in the world after arms. If you think of the highways and byways of the world, the women are the roadkill.'

So why make it a site-specific production at a flat in Pollokshields? How can a piece of theatre be organic to a site yet detached from the community around it? East Pollokshields has the largest Muslim population in Scotland, and has been touted as a model of integration, yet most people were oblivious to the theatre on their doorstep. Cora



said: 'It's not been a deliberate choice to set it there because of the community it is. We set it there because it's the only goddam flat we could get. It comes down to sheer logistics, availability and who's willing to give us a flat, and it was other theatre-makers that live there.' The same flat in Pollokshields also recently hosted *A la Carte* by Molly Taylor as part of the Arches' off-site programme. And *Roadkill* met all the legal requirements for a performance licence (which include needing to be a space with ground-floor main entry).

So the point is that this could happen anywhere, and the neighbours' ignorance is built into the play. In Edinburgh, *Roadkill* was staged in a salubrious street near Leith Walk. Cora points out that people living near the Tron in a sectarian city like Glasgow might not agree with a play about the IRA, but the theatre has a right to stage it. 'No one has ever asked me that question before – what reflection does it have on the community. A lot of people that come there don't know where they are in the city.' So is there an issue with bussing in a middle-class audience, is it sensationalism? And how does the site specificity work? 'The specific site is the flat – this is happening not in brothels, red-light districts but in a domestic location and it could be the other side of your wall or down the street. Beyond that, the city is my site – Glasgow, Scotland. For me, the bus journey [that is an integral part of the performance] shows how the whole city is colluding.'

For about five years, Cora has been involved with Ankur Productions, which co-produced *Roadkill* with her own new company, Pachamama. Ankur focuses on black and minority ethnic arts, with a strong record of community workshops, under the artistic direction of Lalitha Rajan. Cora took up a post as outreach director as a break from acting and taught their adult group. She says this gave a safe place to build confidence and explore professional acting for people whose family or cultural background might not support this, providing a useful conduit to mainstream arts. The group's work ranged from *Detainee A*, about terrorism, to *Love's Times Beggar*, to an adaptation of Isabel Allende's *Clarisa*, and tapas-style piece *Feast*, set in a restaurant.

Roadkill has been supported by the Scottish Refugee Council as a way of raising public awareness. Belinda McElhinney, Arts and Cultural Development Officer, said: 'Because it is site specific – the audience are 'trapped' in the flat as witnesses to this systematic abuse – it forces people to confront the reality of trafficking. Since it premiered during Refugee Week 2010 we have had a significant number of calls, both from agencies who work in this field and members of the public. People are looking for information and to find something they can do to help. For us this has been invaluable.'

But is the novelty partly in the form not the subject? Other recent productions on similar themes include *Emma Thompson presents: Fair Trade, In a Thousand Pieces* by The Paper Birds, *The Container, Unprotected* or Alecky Blythe's *The Girlfriend Experience*. And a few years earlier, Chopped Logic's *Double Negative* also had sex trafficking as its subject. 'It's strange because it's not like you're jumping on a bandwagon,' says Cora. 'It's a zeitgeisty thing. As theatre-makers your eyes are open to the world.' But she adds: 'I think what we did that was different was the impact of doing it in a flat. The power of being in that space, enclosed and disorientated gave a whole different experience. Its site specificity wasn't a gimmick, it was about creating a very particular dramatic experience.'



‘We don’t have that much people trafficking and prostitution in this area. Why don’t they pick another place, you know?’ Keir Street resident

Roadkill has now grown from a tiny idea, a kernel, to an international tour. It wasn’t always a smooth journey: one script was shelved as too naturalistic a route. Parts were devised or shaped by visuals and sound, and a new young writer, Stef Smith, was brought in for key linking scenes. So the violence is both graphic and indirect. For example, video is used to show the clients’ write-ups of the prostitute ‘Mary’ in Internet chatrooms and close-ups of a man’s face in the throes of passion become stylised portraits of horror. But the onstage action looks at the aftermath through the women’s conversations or attempts to clean up afterwards, for example in a harrowing scene in which the blood is washed off the young girl’s body by Martha (the girl’s ‘aunty’ and the ‘madam’ of the brothel – herself a trafficked and abused woman) after the first rape. Cora is aware of the demands made of her actors: Mercy Ojelade as Mary; Adura Onashile as Martha, and John Kazek as various male roles. In the close confines, they can feel the waves of hate, love, aggression and compassion from the audience, but she says they are robust professionals. *Roadkill* is now set for Belfast and Australia; talks are underway with venues in Dublin, Los Angeles and London. Cora has resisted requests to use conventional theatres, even though the current production runs at a loss. ‘If it had just been a passable piece of political theatre on a stage, I don’t think it would have had those ripple effects. But I am still sad that more people can’t see it.’

So this is the conundrum. A ‘site specific’ show that pushes this concept to the limits, relying on a succession of generic sites (‘a flat, on the street where you live’) so has no link to a particular place or community, but instead has its own internal logic of alienation. A company and director who are exemplary in their community work, yet have knowingly placed their latest work in communities who are unaware of it. A piece that is international but intimate, so it can only be seen by a small group at a time, often those who are theatrically in the know. And perhaps a fragile cultural jigsaw: a production that has so far been well received, but has the potential to create controversy – it’s not everyone’s cup of tea, and as the Keir Street butcher said, ‘the media make everything worse’. A theatrical success, with an unusual curtain call, as the shutters stay closed to the street outside.

More on the IETM in Glasgow

Roadkill was performed in Glasgow as part of the IETM (International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts) meeting in November 2010. The four-day event comprised a plenary meeting and an artistic showcase that was open to the public.

The theme of IETM was voices, an umbrella term for ‘communication, argument, noise, identity and many other ways to express ourselves as individuals, groups and nations’. More than 500 delegates from 35 countries took part.

There were talks, debates, discussions and symposia for arts practitioners, industry representatives and academics. Themes ranged from the economic impact of impending cuts to greener touring; other sessions had a geographical focus on Europe, Asia or Africa. Mike Daisey, whose monologues combine autobiography, gonzo journalism and unscripted performance, and Todd Lester from New York, an academic and human rights advocate, gave the keynote address. The living legacy of European Cities of Culture was discussed by Robert Palmer from the Council of Europe, Andrew Dixon, chief executive of Creative Scotland, and Nicola Schlitzer from Ruhr 2010. (Glasgow was the UK’s first city of culture, twenty years ago.) Gareth Vile, performance editor of *The Skinny* magazine, devised *Mr Criticulous Shows Us His...* a mop-up session hosted by his alter ego at Renfrew Ferry on the final Sunday morning.

The live element gave a backdrop and context for delegates, as well as a mini-festival for Glasgow. *Bridging* by Laika (Minty Donald and Nick Miller), a site-responsive piece on the banks and waterway of the River Clyde, and *Alma Mater* by Fish and Game, which looked at childhood, education and coercion through a performative tour of Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s Scotland Street school, were new commissions. Artists taking part included Nic Green, David Leddy, David Greig, Scottish Dance Theatre, Janis Claxton Dance, Janice Parker and Adrian Howells. Venues ranged from the Botanic Gardens, Tall Ship, Doge’s Palace and Òran Mór to the Tron, Tramway, Arches, Citizens’ Theatre and Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD).

IETM is an international membership organisation, based in Brussels, which celebrates its thirtieth birthday next year. It supports the creation, production, diffusion and documentation of contemporary theatre, dance, music, visual arts, installation, performance, writing, architecture, film and video, new technology and emerging art and media forms, as well as looking at public policy and training. IETM is a global network, spanning 50 countries. Most members are based in Europe but its priority regions are the Balkans, Mediterranean and Middle East, Caucasus and Asia.

Steve Slater, producer of IETM Glasgow, said: ‘The meeting confirmed what a vibrant and creative performing arts sector we have in Scotland. There has been a lasting and ongoing legacy of Glasgow’s City of Culture and this continues to bring young, creative people to the city.’ He hopes that the success of the event might lead to a new Scottish live art festival.

www.ietm.org
www.ietm-glasgow.eu

Cora Bisset was interviewed by Charlotte Smith at the Tron Glasgow, 7 November 2010.

Roadkill by Cora Bissett (Ankur Productions/ Pachamama Productions) was presented in Glasgow as part of IETM, seen by Charlotte Smith on 6 November 2010. The show won a Total Theatre Award 2010 in the Innovation category.

www.ankurproductions.org.uk

**Images pp9–10: Ankur Productions *Roadkill*.
 Photos Tim Morozzo
 Images p11: Glasgow Pollokshields’ Keir Street.
 Photos courtesy of Charlotte Smith**



Remixing Theatre

Never go back? Tom Wilson reflects on revivals that go beyond mere restaging

The ‘spirit of the new’ is an idea that drives contemporary theatre and performance, either in the search for a new form, or the expression of a new idea. The classical, literary theatre has a slightly different view, and although there has been a continual support for new writers from certain producing houses (the National Theatre, The Royal Court and the Traverse to name some obvious examples), a large proportion of classical theatre’s output is an engagement with the restaging of canonical texts, reshaped in new versions, albeit with little adjustment to the skeleton of the piece, the text.

Contemporary performance, perhaps because of its tendency to define itself in comparison/opposition to the scripted classical theatre, sees fewer examples of companies revisiting old work with the intention of remaking it. There have been some instances of companies reviving work in its totality, for example Frantic Assembly’s return to their 1999/2000 production *Hymns* in 2005 (celebrating 10 years of the company) and Complicite’s *A Minute Too Late* (revived for the company’s 21st birthday in 2005 at the National Theatre, with original cast members Simon McBurney, Jos Houben, and Marcello Magni now two decades older – adding an extra layer of poignancy to this piece about death), but these examples are limited to a handful of events in a year. The impulse to restage work is often in the context of a celebration of an anniversary or a retrospective of the particular company, but what of companies who revisit earlier work for other reasons?

In May this year Manchester-based company *Quarantine*, with co-producers Company Fierce, restaged their 2006 production *Susan and Darren*. The decision to restage was taken partly because of the continuing interest of producers, including Queer Up North (who interestingly brought it in to celebrate *their* 18th birthday), but also for other reasons. For Richard Gregory (co-director of *Quarantine*) the restaging principally provided the company with the opportunity to undertake ‘a fuller rehearsal period’ in order to ‘revisit a mature piece of

work’ which itself led to a process of reworking it. This reworking was also driven by the nature of the show.

Susan and Darren is an interesting fusion of autobiography, conversation, dance and theatrical vignettes – staged in-the-round and close to an audience with significant audience interaction in places and a gentle shift between theatrical formality and informality.

For performer and choreographer Darren Pritchard the new rehearsal process was less a reworking than a remixing – it was more about capturing a state of something, refreshing it

Originating in the long-standing association between Darren Pritchard and *Quarantine*, the performance explicitly uses dancer Pritchard and his mother Susan Pritchard’s personal lives as the material of the piece. This is achieved through introducing the audience to specific events from their lives, whilst also constructing the physical geography of the flat they share and the area in which they live within the space; in this instance, a function room of Sachas Hotel in Manchester’s Northern Quarter. Because of this focus on the ‘actual’, Gregory identifies that after three years, ‘some of the material started to feel tired and not really true anymore’, and that the show had ‘slightly lost touch with the original principles, that it was about Susan and Darren’s lives, and it wasn’t anymore’. This importance of the biographical thrust of the piece suggests that maintaining the authenticity of the text-based elements, which carried this strand of the piece explicitly, was a key decider in the decision to rework the piece. For Darren Pritchard,



though, the new rehearsal process was seen not as a reworking, but rather a ‘remixing’, asking: ‘How do you undo work? We didn’t want to undo work... it was more about capturing a state of something, refreshing it.’ This choice of word suggests pop music’s relationship to its own canon of works, taking the original and reshaping the piece whilst maintaining the essence of what makes it recognisably the work in question – establishing a relationship between the source version and the remixed version.

Pina Bausch’s reworked versions of *Kontakthof* raise ideas of the veracity of performance in relation to the original material – it’s like arranging a piece of music composed in one idiom into another idiom

This idea of maintaining a relationship between the source and remixed versions is of central concern in Pina Bausch’s restaging of her 1978 work *Kontakthof*, for ‘Ladies and Gentlemen over 65’ (2000) and the subsequent restaging with ‘Teenagers over the age of 14’ (2008). The first restaging was intended as a ‘one-time happening’ in which Bausch could see ‘this piece, this theme shown by ladies and gentlemen with more life experience’. (Although it proved not to be a one-off as it was subsequently recreated again!) The performers (in the 2000 version) were drawn from non-professionals in Wuppertal, taking over a year to rehearse the piece. In both versions, that for elders (original cast and recreation) and that for teens, the material remains the same, but by reconfiguring the casting Bausch brings a new perspective on the work and invites the audience to see the works in relation to each other. This brings new nuances and layers to the piece, as noted in various reviews of the work (see for example the review of the two versions in *Total Theatre Magazine* Volume 22 Issue 02).

For the remixed versions of *Kontakthof* these nuances work on the level of recontextualising the piece’s exploration of human relations, relocating the relationship between men and women, inviting the audience to view them through the eyes of older and younger folk. In addition, for *Kontakthof for Ladies and Gentlemen over the age of 65*, the nuances of the aged body engaging with the challenges of choreography developed on younger bodies opens up the nature of physical performance, reframing the idea of a ‘virtuoso’ performance to one that is seen in the light of overcoming the ravages of age. For those of us who have not seen the original, it also raises ideas of the

veracity of performance in relation to the original – like arranging a piece of music composed in one idiom into another idiom. Equally for those who have seen both the original and the ‘new’ versions, the expectations of the repertoire from memory are met and confounded – adding a new layer of interest, whilst perhaps not disappointing the audience’s memory of the first experience, because it strives to maintain the essential qualities of the original work. (It is pertinent to re-iterate here that no changes were made to the original choreography for the new incarnations.)

For Quarantine this relationship between the past and present versions of a work and the past and present experiences of Darren and Susan’s lives raised interesting points. Because of the piece’s autobiographical basis director Richard Gregory came to view the reworking as a way of updating, but not destroying, the original material, initially having the intention ‘to throw away huge chunks... we’d keep the overall structure and shape, which we have, but we’d start again from scratch, but as we worked, we felt that wasn’t the most appropriate thing to do.’ He came to realise that ‘you don’t discard history; you add layers on top of it. In remaking the piece we were doing what *they* had been doing in the last five years... if you want to change your living room you don’t knock your house down, you put a new layer of paint on, or some fresh wallpaper or some new ornaments.’

This discussion of remixing the piece suggests a way of working that is not just guided by dissatisfaction with the piece, but looks to reflect the change in the artists themselves, how shifts in their lives and personal circumstances have affected the material and their reception of the material, providing a different slant on their younger selves and addressing an audience from a renewed position.

For Darren Pritchard, this manifested itself in interesting discoveries surrounding the choreography of the show, and the different responses of his, now older, body to the dance vocabulary, approaching the choreography a lot differently now ‘...because I can handle the piece as a whole better now,’ and that, ‘as my body has slowed down the pieces have got technically harder’. For choreographer Jane Mason, there is a different sense of the demands of reworking the dance material in *Susan and Darren*, and indeed she says: ‘Choreography is a very different animal, it operates very differently in the work; there are a number of dances that are made in isolation and then they’re placed very carefully in the context of the overall work.’ Her focus is not upon the construction of meaning, but on the establishment of ‘atmospheres’ through the dancing, and in spite of changes to the piece, the dances ‘don’t become redundant if the structure is still functioning in the same way’. Instead, her remixing focuses upon questions of whether ‘I still like it... Is it working?’



'You don't discard history; you add layers on top of it... if you want to change your living room you don't knock your house down, you put a new layer of paint on, or some fresh wallpaper or some new ornaments.' Richard Gregory of Quarantine on the reworking of Susan and Darren

An interesting counterpoint to this idea of 'is it still working?' is raised when examining work that is restaged by another artist (rather than reworked by the person who made the work), for example choreographer Anne Collard's 2009 're-enactment' or 'replay' of American choreographer Anna Halprin's seminal 1965 piece *Parades and Changes*. Halprin's original, along with other experimental dance works of the period, radically challenged notions of dance including the use of audience interaction, pedestrian movement and nudity.

Receiving generally positive reception in the US, this 'new' version (which was developed in consultation with Halprin) investigates Collard's concern with how dance creates meaning in our lives. What makes this restaging interesting is two-fold. First, that seen in the context of Halprin's methodology of working with scoring tasks rather than steps allows the performers to restage the work in a different way to the work of Bausch or Quarantine – the performers' completion of instructions, rather than specific set steps brings a certain flexibility of interpretation within the individual bodies, making the work both of 'the sixties' and of 'the now'. Secondly, that the distance in time (44 years) focuses the audience's attention on the work's specific relationship to our time, as well as its nature as an historical curiosity. Collard's use of the word 'replay' is particularly interesting in signalling both its newness and its oldness at the same time. The audience watches this piece both in expectation of a taste of 'the sixties' and with a sense of testing our response to a performance that drew such strong reactions during its original staging, testing to see if the essential quality of the work still speaks to an audience after the momentous cultural changes of the last four decades.

This suggestion of an essential quality of the piece remaining also chimes with Quarantine's question to themselves as they embarked on their reworking, which Gregory articulates as: 'How do we refer back to what used to be there, but we no longer want to be present, but how do we not lose it?', and that Darren Pritchard refers to as 'a respect for the past'. This was especially pertinent in Quarantine's use



of video testimonies of family and friends of Darren and Susan, which in the main the company retained 'as was'; finding ways to indicate the age of these within the dialogue of the performance. These images and voices of the past, and direct referencing of the past incarnation of the piece, create an engaging other layer to the show. It allows us to see the progress of time in double, both within the piece itself, as Darren and Susan talk about the past, but also in the lifetime of the performance. In doing so, it contributes to the delicate sense of loss and companionship that permeates the piece; and the paradoxical nature of events within our lives that are both fleeting in the occurrence and ever-present in the memory. In this way the piece achieves a richness, because of its remixing, that goes far beyond simple updating. In this way Gregory suggests, 'it's more like lacquering wood. The more layers you put on it the richer the texture.'

This idea of a richer texture brings us full circle to the start of this article: to physical/devised work's relationship to the notion of a fixed 'performance score' replayed versus the 'remixing' of that score. When watching the latest incarnation of a specific performance text, the audience does so with an awareness of these layers – something that devised performance potentially struggles to allow because of its over-riding concern with newness. Those who have the courage to play with revising and remaking their past works root the audience's experience in something broader and deeper than the here and now.

Tom Wilson saw Quarantine's *Susan and Darren* at Sachas Hotel, Manchester, 1 May 2010, where it was presented as part of Part of Queer Up North. www.queerupnorth.com

Quarantine quotes taken from an interview with Tom Wilson at Sachas Hotel, Manchester, 1 May 2010.

For more on the company see www.qtine.com

Kontakthof was seen at Barbican BITE, 4 April 2010 and on DVD (see below).

Pina Bausch quotes are taken from *Pina Bausch Kontakthof with Ladies and Gentlemen over 65*, L'Arche Editeur, Paris 2007 (DVD).

For more on Tanztheater Wuppertal see www.pina-bausch.de

P12 Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch *Kontakthof with Ladies and Gentlemen over 65*. Photo by Laszlo Szito
P13 Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch *Kontakthof with Teenagers Aged 14–19*. Photo by Laszlo Szito
P14 (both images): Quarantine *Susan and Darren*. Photos by Gavin Parry

Home Truths

Melanie Wilson *Simple Girl*

The Canny Granny is hearing things

To accompany this column with sound effects you will need: a piece of toast, a helium balloon, a Hoover, a landline, a Nora Jones CD (I know you have one), some loose change, a hanky, your iPhone, either a dilapidated hold-all or some walnuts and a nut cracker. All right then, here we go. I'll just pop the hearing aid in, and we're off.

Sound effects allow you to rest your eyelids if you've had too many gins before the show. If you closed your eyes at Forced Entertainment's *The Thrill of It All* you'd be lulled by Japanese lounge music, but then you'd miss all the very entertaining and very funny dancing. And talking in a squeaky voice. (Now inhale from the helium balloon and say: I love contemporary theatre!)

Soundscapes are layers of sound effects. Soundtracks are more filmic. Please note soundcards are some kind of memory chip, not a musical birthday card. (Create a filmic soundtrack by sticking some Nora Jones on the CD player and swishing your hair about youthfully.) Lovely.

Some things are *not* meant to be seen but not heard. Early pioneers of 'corporeal mime' such as Etienne Decroux were purist about mime being without music. Now, however, watching mime without sound effects is oddly prim, like watching football without cheering: suddenly it just looks like a bunch of men with bare legs prancing up and down in front of a crowd. Except that in the world of mime, they are probably not millionaires who pay grannies for sex. (Just for the record, I have personally never accepted money to sleep with any of the Manchester United players.) Make a sound effect for this by throwing coins at an old bag. Or if you feel feminist, crack the nuts.

Devised theatre once liked to visually *expose* how sound effects are made. Complicite's *A Minute Too Late* included their interpretation of 'Brechtian alienation techniques' such as treading on gravel to indicate walking in a cemetery. (Recreate this now by crushing the toast underfoot. Don't worry, we'll Hoover it up in a minute). Lepage is equally fond of this technique, having someone on stage in *Lipsynch*

to bang cupboard doors. Don't do this, it'll annoy the neighbours.

Melanie Wilson also does a fine line in dissonance: *Simple Girl* has sudden arrivals of music, including an addictive little riff on the words 'my wife' – you can see a clip of this on her website. (At my age, you don't need a sound effect to recreate this because you repeat yourself naturally anyway.)

Some theatre pieces are almost audio installations. Rotozaza's *GuruGuru* doesn't have any actors – only a digital face on a TV and headsets. (Recreate this by texting your own landline and then laughing at the electronic woman speaking your message.) Forest Fringe's travelling sounds library is purely audio – except if you close your eyes. Don't do that now, or you won't be able to see the page.

En Route, by Australian company One Step at a Time Like This, took its audience on a whole theatrical treasure hunt by audio around Edinburgh this summer. Alice Jones of the Independent remarked 'I'm not sure how it counts as theatre'. This dilemma – an 'interrogation of the boundaries between participant and spectator', is also at the heart of Non Zero One's work. Interrogate your own boundaries now by using the voicememo function on your iPhone to record yourself saying 'Are you paying attention?'

Total theatre rarely finds its way onto radio. The onset of Radio 4 drama generally signals time to do the Hoovering. (Recreate this now by vacuuming up the crumbs whilst muttering snatches of sentences like 'Jennifer, I – I –' and 'NO! The cliffs!') The exceptions are of course the odd specially commissioned Bobby Baker performance or a radio play by Chris Thorpe. The project *In The Dark* pioneers adventurous radio such as documentaries about the catchy pop songs played in an abattoir.

Some shows use the context of radio: for the two scientists in *Longwave*, the radio was their only company. Stan's Cafe's *Tuning Out With Radio Z* is currently on tour and gives you three hours of interactive improvisation (you text and email in), complete with superfast adverts

and spurious news bulletins. You can listen in on their website. I said, you can listen in on their website.

What did you say? Sorry, I think I hoovered up my hearing aid by accident.

Laura Eades is The Canny Granny

Melanie Wilson is developing a piece called *Autobiographer for The Roundhouse*, and is currently touring earlier show *Simple Girl*. See video clips/hear her audio clips on the website: www.melaniewilson.org.uk

One Step at a Time Like This have intriguingly divided their web site into 'audience works' and 'theatre works' www.onestepatimelikehis.com

Rotozaza's Ant Hampton's website has links to several international audio-based projects: www.anthampton.com

Forest Fringe has a new website and you can watch a video trailer for the sounds library there: www.forestfringe.co.uk/forest-fringe-travelling-sounds-library

Stan's Cafe's *Tuning Out With Radio Z* is on tour (and reviewed in this issue of Total Theatre Magazine): www.radioz.co.uk

Chris Thorpe is currently performing in *Third Angel's What I Heard About the World*, touring in Portugal: www.thirdangel.co.uk

In the Dark have a great selection on their Editor's Picks page: www.inthedarkradio.org

Bobby Baker has just published a collection of drawings charting her recovery from mental and physical illness. An exhibition of the drawings is on tour in 2011: www.bobbybakersdailylife.com

Non Zero One have some nice photos in their archive section: www.nonzeroone.com

Signal to Noise's *Longwave* was created by Chris Goode with Tom Lyall and Jamie Wood: <http://beescope.blogspot.com>

Forced Entertainment's *The Thrill Of It All* is touring: www.forcedentertainment.com

Laura Eades' company The Society of Faster Craftswomen have been developing the audio theatre installation *Yeah! I'm a Dog* at Shunt and Brick Box in Brixton market: www.fastercraftswomen.com

Lost in Music

From Eno to ENO. Dorothy Max Prior reflects on music theatre, and music as theatre, as seen and heard in 2010

If I say 'music theatre' what do you think of? Glossy West End musicals perhaps; well produced and entertaining, but candyfloss – a sweet treat with no real substance. Cringe-worthy stage-school revivals of *Cabaret*? Perhaps, if you think a little harder, you might concede that there is innovative work of quality in the genre, such as the Theatre Royal Stratford East production of *The Harder They Come*, a vibrant and feisty reworking of the Jimmy Cliff cult movie which was taken up by Barbican BITE and has subsequently toured extensively across the UK, garnering positive critical appraisal, and bringing in those much sought after 'new' and 'culturally diverse' audiences.

But there's more, so much more! On the evidence of performance work seen in 2010, I'd argue that 'music theatre' is a much broader genre than is usually discussed; that this genre is thriving; and that it is, and always has been, an important strand of the 'total theatre' family of performance practice.

My quest started with the news that renowned experimental composer, musician and erstwhile pop star Brian Eno had been appointed guest artistic director of the Brighton Festival 2010. Festival-goers were treated to a programme of multi-discipline performance events that threw up interesting ideas on the potential for 'music' not only to *work* with theatre, but to *be* a form of theatre. For example, the PR blurb for *This is Pure Scenius!*, a nine-hour durational/improvisational music work in three acts, announced that 'the theatre of the music-making process is as enthralling as the music itself', and that it was 'like a laboratory conducting an unknown experiment' – which indeed it was. The stage features a regular enough set-up for an art-rock gig (guitars, drum kit, amps, synths, laptops, big screens for projections), but there's a sofa and a table with a kettle on it set up in front of the stage. The musicians, who include Eno himself, Underworld co-founder/singer Karl Hyde, and keyboard wiz Jon Hopkins, come and go as they wish, and their upfront tea breaks become as much a part of the performance as anything else happening. It's a really beautiful piece, aurally and visually. As is *77 Million Paintings*, sited in Fabrica, an art gallery in a church that retains its original features (font and all). A batch of red sofas are scattered through the space, on which to lounge for as long as you wish to watch the ever-morphing abstract painting in light that unfolds, listening to Eno's 'wallpaper' music, the piece originally conceived, as Eno puts it, as 'a the next evolutionary stage in the fascination with the aesthetic possibilities of generative software'. Another lovely piece of sound-and-vision 'theatre'.

Interestingly enough, the least successful of the Eno works I saw at Brighton Festival was the one that was ostensibly the most 'theatrical'. *This Is Tales of the Afterlives* was based on *Sum*, a lovely little book of short fiction by David Eagleman, which offers a series of fantastical musings on potential afterlives. The stories are read by 'local people' of various ages, some of whom would call themselves performers, some who wouldn't, these readings accompanied by a live score by Eno and

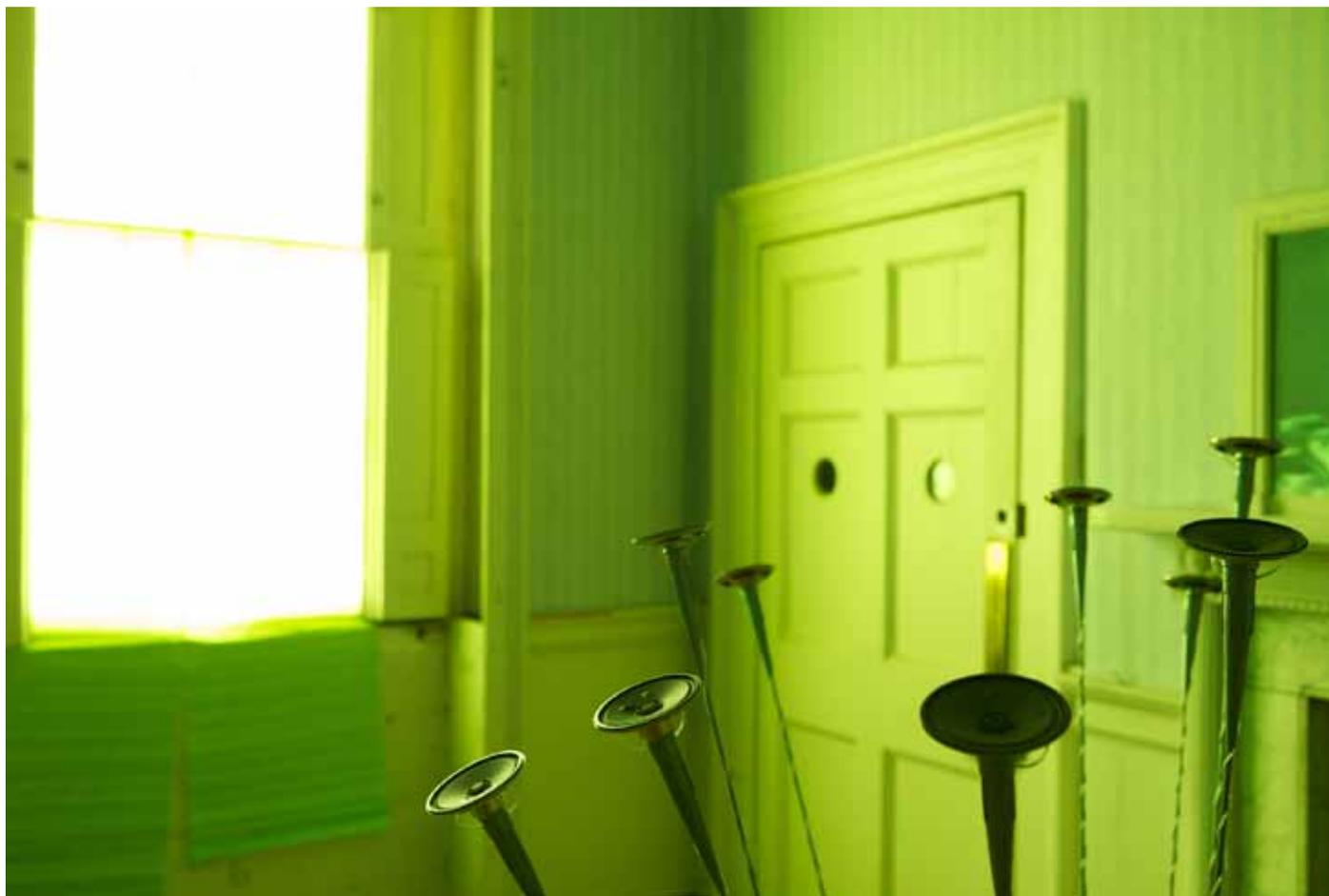


a video piece featuring a series of slow-dissolve close-ups of individual faces. But the deliveries vary wildly in quality, and the piece lacks direction.

Far more successful, and my favourite Eno piece in the festival, was a late addition to the programme. The *Speaker Flower Sound Installation*, created in collaboration with poet Rick Holland, was a beautiful response to an empty, slightly distressed, Regency building, Marlborough House – a truly site-responsive work, featuring Eno-designed 'speaker flowers', which ranged from things that were literally flower-like emitting barely-audible sighs and whispers, to an Astroturf sound-lounge, and wooden 'logs' set up to respond to movements in the room. There was an elemental theme, with some rooms 'watery', some 'earthy'. Holland's text was represented written on walls, or in some of the sound transmissions: 'my god is in the breath of crows' says one; 'words in there and the fountain can flow,' says another.

Other popular music megastars whose work edges into performance territory include the extraordinary Jónsi, lead singer with Sigur Rós. His solo show (also seen in Brighton, autumn 2010) merges music made with a gorgeous variety of instruments, – including a deconstructed drum kit, a glass Celeste, an ancient armonium and an over-sized metal xylophone which is bowed rather than struck – with beautiful animation, and a loose storyline of the encroaching of the wild on civilisation (there's a lovely scene of ants carrying off a can of Coca Cola). This may sound like the Gorillaz' *Plastic Beach* (which also blends music with animation; also reflects on environmental issues; also seen in 2010, at Glastonbury Festival), but the aesthetic is a million miles away: Jónsi's is firmly rooted in the Icelandic world of the mystical imagery of fairytales, and legends of the Hidden People.

And if we are talking of people sitting on the fence between pop stardom and performance art, how could we not mention Laurie Anderson, who stepped out of the performance art ghetto to have



a number one hit single with 'Oh Superman'. It is telling that Laurie Anderson is regularly presented as part of the Barbican International Theatre Event (BITE) programme, rather than within that venue's music programme, for it is indeed theatre – music theatre – of the highest calibre. *Delusion*, seen at the Barbican in April 2010, is one of her best shows for years; a gentle, dreamlike reflection on mortality, with the artist's customary mix of treated violin (and other instruments); projection; light-and-shadow play; and poetic prose, spoken in a mix of voices, including that of her alter-ego Fenway Bergamot – who has a 'treated' voice, deep and moody, as he recites the story-song about the nature of time around which the piece revolves, 'Another Day in America'. 'Ah these days, all these days. What are days for? To put between the endless nights,' he growls...

Other shows programmed for the BITE 2010 programme have demonstrated the Barbican's continuing commitment to experimental music theatre, with a return to the venue of Heiner Goebbels with *I Went To The House But Did Not Enter* and a first time Barbican appearance for Catalyst Theatre with *Nevermore*, an exploration of the interplay between Edgar Allan Poe's life and art. Catalyst's unique form of highly visual and ultra-stylised music-theatre suits the subject matter perfectly. *Nevermore* could perhaps be described as a burlesque opera. The facts of Poe's life are presented to us with an ultra-grotesque Gothic sensibility – terrible tales of tuberculosis, alcoholism, literary rejection, and romantic abandonment presented as larger-than-life cartoons. The show is a visual feast: the costumes a kind of carnivalesque re-interpretation of Victoriana; the set comprising a number of sliding screens, creating a (literally) multi-layered vision; the many marvellous props and artefacts including a pop-up book and a whole menagerie of 'big head' animal masks. Those who want to amuse themselves picking out the visual references to Poe's stories might spot a grotesquely pounding Tell-Tale Heart; a Black Cat with Scissor-hand claws; and, across the back wall, alternating washes of colour that evoke the journey through the castle's many-coloured rooms in 'Masque of the Red Death'.

The ensemble of seven are superb performers: beautiful singers, and gifted physical actors. *Nevermore* was composed, written and directed by Catalyst Theatre's artistic director, Jonathan Christenson, who has similarly created and/or performed in fifteen original productions for

Catalyst over the years. His longterm collaborator is designer Bretta Gerecke, and together the pair have created a very special style all their own. Having followed the company from their first UK appearance with *The House of Pootsie Plunkett*, it was great to see them programmed at the Barbican. If I had to name one company that represented the best of contemporary music theatre, I'd pick Catalyst.

From gothic opera to opera 'proper'. ENO have, in recent years, welcomed the physical/visual theatre community into their arms. *Madama Butterfly*, directed by the late great Anthony Minghella introduced contemporary puppetry to the mix in the form of Blind Summit. This collaboration paved the way for further unusual pairings with UK theatre-makers. Improbable designed and directed the Phillip Glass opera *Satyagraha* for ENO (and Improbable have a good track record for working with musicians, albeit of a very different sort – in works such as *Shockheaded Peter*, a collaboration with the Tiger Lillies). Blind Summit are currently (November-December 2010) working in collaboration with Simon McBurney of Complicite on another ENO production *A Dog's Heart*, which also draws connecting threads back to that seminal Minghella production through designer Michael Levine, whose work for *A Dog's Heart* is breathtaking (snow drifts, water floods, and blood flows across the stage; an every-which-way set that tilts and over-sized furniture that skews perspective; and the customary Complicite clever integration of moving image into the live action). The opera's composer Alexander Raskatov worked closely with McBurney, breaking the rules with the inclusion of mediated voices (usually a no-no in opera, in my admittedly limited experience) through megaphone and 'telephone'; the scuddering sounds of footsteps and the scuttling of the puppet dog across the stage; and interesting instrumentation that includes such things as vibes and a clanger-like swanee whistle. McBurney says that his work is always 'intimately bound up with music'. Often in Complicite's work music isn't decorative or mood setting, it's integral to the dramaturgy of the piece. As, for example in their production *Shun Kin*, a story of a master samisen player which features a real live master samisen player onstage!

There have been other extraordinary 'cross-over' opera productions this year. At Sadler's Wells, Tanztheater Wuppertal brought an early Pina Bausch work to London – *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, her version of the Gluck opera. The orchestra is where you'd expect to find it (in the pit) but



the singers (scores of them!) are placed in the boxes to both sides of the stage, so that their voices come to us from above and around like choirs of heavenly angels. Each main character has two people playing them: the offstage singer and the onstage dancer. The choreography has all the hallmarks of Bausch's work – a mix of childish playfulness and intense adult sexuality. There's the women's characteristic tossing of long, loose hair; a boyishly sexy male duet in underpants; odd pairings of men in evening wear with women in loose silk nightgowns; a dance with a mirror; and a dance with chairs. All in the service of the tale of temple maiden Iphigenie's disturbed relationship with her family: father Agamemnon tries to sacrifice her; she's spirited away and years later dreams her mother has killed her father (true); then dreams she kills her beloved long-lost brother; inadvertently tortures and kills her beloved long-lost brother. In every scene – scenes which play with the notion of 'dream logic' to great effect – the music and the ever-more-beautiful visual pictures complement each other perfectly: you couldn't describe one as illustrating the other; they feed off each other harmoniously, forming a whole experience of sight and sound.

Back at ENO, a major event for 2010 was their pairing with Punchdrunk for *The Duchess of Malfi*, a new opera (composed by Torsten Rasch with libretto by Ian Burton after John Webster), staged in a disused office block in East London. As is often the case with Punchdrunk's large-scale productions, the narrative is deconstructed and rearranged into a series of looped performances set in a wonderful fantasy land of installations (which in this case include a forest of metal trees; secret fur-strewn dens in abandoned offices; and a cathedral replete with wooden pews and signs exhorting the value of purification). The audience, free to wander the building, encounter – in no particular order – scenes depicting or referencing Webster's terrible tale of incestuous desire, insanity, torture, and child-murder. The story culminates in the execution of the eponymous Duchess. The audience are silently directed to all gather in one large space for the denouement: a familiar Punchdrunk tactic that in this case leads to a visually stunning, physically gruelling, and musically enchanting piece of 'total theatre' that is long enough and engaging enough to be classed as a show-within-the-show. Playing Count Ferdinand (one of the duchess's terrible brothers) was counter-tenor Andrew Watts, who is currently performing in *A Dog's Heart*.

'Our previous productions have been operatic in intention, so we were crying out to do the real thing,' says Punchdrunk director Felix Barrett (speaking on the More4 TV programme *The Making of... The Duchess of Malfi*). The challenges in *Duchess of Malfi* were obviously there in moving a whole orchestra (as opposed to a few nimble actor-dancers) around the space. Although it was a marvellous achievement, the production wasn't perfect: the musicians sometimes struggled with the task of relocating discretely, and with staying in a neutral performance mode between set-pieces.

What you 'do' with the musicians is a challenge that many theatre-makers face when creating music theatre. Of course traditionally they'd be in the pit, or to the side of the stage, but if you want a more integrated approach, there can (as demonstrated in the ENO/



Punchdrunk collaboration) be issues with keeping alive the world of the play if it is peopled by musicians who are not used to the notion of staying in character and maintaining a performance presence that is in tone with the aesthetic of the piece.

But if the theatre-makers are themselves musicians, then the odds on maintaining that onstage world successfully are increased. A theatre ensemble who have music at their heart is the ever-enterprising Little Bulb. All three of their productions to date (*Crocospia*, *Sporadical* and *Operation Greenfield*) have circled around an interest in music. With *Crocospia*, a trio of orphaned children remember their parents through their vinyl record collection. In *Sporadical* we get an abrupt switch in aesthetic for a cardboard-and-sea-shanty junk opera set at a family reunion. *Operation Greenfield* (presented at The Zoo Roxy for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2010) is another shift in tone, being the story of the emergence of a Christian rock band and their first gig at a local community centre. It works brilliantly because the actors playing the band are a band who can play; and because all the little details (learning to play bass by copying 'Walk on the Wild Side'; niggling arguments between band members on whose songs get worked on; constant agonising on the band's name) will feel absolutely right to anyone who has ever been in a band. The climax to the show, in which the band finally emerge in their angel-winged glam glory as 'Operation Greenfield', playing the most extraordinary prog rock number, is divine – and, you know, I have always had a soft spot for bands with girl drummers...

Also playing with the 'let's be a band' idea, and also seen at Edinburgh, was *Patchwork* by The Honourable Society of Faster Craftswomen, in which Laura Eades weaves autobiographical stories of her relationship with female family members into the band-on-the-road motif (the band rather fetchingly dressed in odd-bod multicoloured knits). It's an odd combo (in both senses of that word), but Laura's onstage enthusiasm and energy as she half-sings half-recites her poetic text, and the accompaniment of some very lovely animated drawings, make it an interesting evening.

Another interesting onstage musical world can be seen in *Dancing on Your Grave* by The Cholmondeleys and Featherstonehaughs, choreographed by Lea Anderson and featuring the banjo-and-uke music of Nigel Burch (of Flea Pit Orchestra). The show, seen in the Brighton Fringe at Nightingale Theatre, is the story of a vaudeville troupe who are dead, but continue to tour regardless. Others breaching the gap between music and theatre in vaudevillian mode would include musical clowns and visual artists Foster & Gilvan, who under the banner Badstock Productions created *Penny Arcade* (a live interactive version of a Victorian penny arcade). Foster also appears with Unpacked Theatre



in their version of the troop-of-vaudeville-musicians-on-the-road story, *The Show Must Go On*, which circles around the moving of an old piano, and the stories that piano has to tell.

Another Foster & Gilvan collaborator is Joe Bone (of *Bane* fame). These three are part of a loose collective of musician-performers working under various banners creating live scores for silent film (for example, a jazz-and-toy-instrument soundscape for *The Patsy* at BFI by Gwyneth Herbert); and bringing live musical performance into art galleries in response to pre-existing artworks (for example, in the Foolish Romantics show presented at the Quay Arts Centre, Isle of Wight, April 2010).

Someone who is an occasional member of this loose grouping, performing, for example, with Badstock at the Basement Bordello at Brighton's Basement arts centre, is 1927's Lillian Henley. 1927 have made a name for themselves with their groundbreaking mix of animated film, mime, storytelling, and live music, garnering numerous awards for *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*. Their new show *The Animals and Children Took to the Streets* is at BAC for the Christmas slot. 'Lilly's piano is at the heart of the work,' said writer-performer Suzanne Andrade when interviewed on the making of the work. And rumour has it that 1927 will be tackling opera soon too... Lillian's own solo work shows an ongoing interest in the integration of film, music and performance: earlier this year (April 2010), she was to be found hosting her own venture, *The Palace of Varieties* at Hoxton Hall, and playing her newly composed piano scores for Laurel & Hardy films.

And when Joe Bone isn't being a Foolish Romantic and isn't performing/creating *Bane*, *Bane 2*, or *Bane 3* (which in itself is an interesting collaboration between a sole performer and a musician in the creation of 'live film noir'), he's a member of the Total Theatre Award winning company The River People, who this summer have been taking their particular blend of music and puppet theatre out of the theatres onto the streets (and into the woods) including at the Winchester Hat Fair in July, where they performed *The Terrible Tales of the Midnight Chorus*, a series of macabre Hoffman-esque vignettes, on a lovely wooden 'gypsy wagon'.

Also on the streets of Britain in 2010 (and in the music venues and pubs too) has been Periplum Theatre's *1000 revolutions per moment* which is about pop, politics and posing; the search for the perfect gig; music and social change; remembering the soundtrack to growing up - and a whole lot more... It's a genuinely site responsive piece, reworked for each town it visits - and music is not only an integral part of this show (with local musicians integrated into the fabric of the piece at each place), but is the very subject matter of the piece.

Other enterprising outdoor music theatre projects this year have included Kimmo's collaboration with Paper Cinema, *The Rock Charmer* (see review in this issue of the magazine), brought to Inside Out festival in Dorset by producer Simon Chatterton, whose previous productions have included *Siren*, an indoor sound installation work featuring a score of whirring machines, and *Power Plant*, a multi-artist endeavour

(collaborators including Jony Easterby and Anne Bean) which was an enormous success at the Edinburgh Fringe 2009 when it was sited at the Botanic Gardens, transforming the glasshouses and surrounding areas into a night-time magical kingdom populated by standard lamps, wind-up gramophones, flamelights, singing flowers, sculpted dresses, and mechanical insects.

The notion of 'the theatre of sound' came to the forefront in late 2010 with the announcement of the Turner Prize win for Susan Philipsz, who uses her own voice to create 'uniquely evocative sound installations that play upon and extend the poetics of specific, often out-of-the-way spaces'. Her work *Lowlands* (presented at the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art) features her melancholy voice recordings of a folk song sited under a lonely bridge under the River Clyde.

We are a long way from the West End musical here, but Philipsz' Turner Prize win has come at an interesting time. There is currently an increased awareness of, and interest in, the theatre of sound: in sound art and sound installation; in performance work that uses sound and music in extraordinary ways; in collaborations between physical, visual and aural artforms and traditions of all sorts; in new operas and reinventions of the notion of 'the musical'. Different artists will see themselves placed in different ways within all this, some defining themselves principally as musicians, some as performance artists, some as theatre makers, and some as fine artists - but ultimately it's all about new sounds in new settings.

I'm all ears, and can't wait to hear what 2011 might offer up!

Music works, many and various, as referenced above seen at:

Brighton Festival: www.brightonfestival.org
 Brighton Fringe: www.brightonfestivalfringe.org.uk
 Edinburgh Festival Fringe: www.edfringe.com
 Barbican BITE www.barbican.org.uk/theatre
 Sadler's Wells: www.sadlerswells.co.uk
 ENO: www.eno.org
 Hat Fair, Winchester: www.hatfair.co.uk

For more on the Turner Prize 2010 winner and nominees:
www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize

Unpacked Theatre continue to tour *The Show Must Go On*, and premiere new children's show *Robin & The Big Freeze* December 2010: www.unpacked.org

Theatre Royal Stratford East production *The Harder They Come* was seen at Wimbledon Theatre, June 2010.
www.stratfordeast.com

Periplum's *1000 revolutions per moment* was seen at Reveal festival.
www.periplum.co.uk

Badstock Productions for Foster & Gilvan, Foolish Romantics, and *Penny Arcade*:
<http://badstockproductions.blogspot.com>

Bane and other Joe Bone projects:
www.whiteboneproductions.com

Complicite: www.complicite.org

Catalyst Theatre: www.catalysttheatre.ca

Punchdrunk: www.punchdrunk.co.uk

The Making Of...The Duchess of Malfi is screened 9pm on 4 December 2010 on More4. *The Making of...* is a series of three films on seminal recent productions co-produced with Arts Council England.

1927's *The Animals and Children Took to the Streets* is at BAC main house, 8 December 2010-8 January 2011.
www.19-27.co.uk | www.bac.org.uk

P16: Theatre Royal Stratford East production *The Harder They Come*. Photo Robert Day
P17: Brian Eno & Rick Holland *Speaker Flower Sound Installation* at Brighton Festival 2010. Photo Matthew Andrews
P18 left: 1927 *The Animals and Children Took to the Streets*. Photo Nick Flintoff
P18 right: Laurie Anderson *Homeland*
P19 Catalyst Theatre *Nevermore*

THE WORKS



A personal view of the works of Complicite by Richard Cuming

In the 1980s Complicite were taking clown far beyond what we dreamed of, and were employing the clownesque in hilarious and incredibly inventive ways

This autumn Complicite have no less than three productions running in major venues in London: in September a revival of the wonderful *A Disappearing Number* at the West End's Novello Theatre, first seen at the Barbican Theatre in 2007; in October at the Barbican a revival of the haunting *Shun-Kin*, first produced there in 2008, in a collaboration with Tokyo's Setagaya Public Theatre; and in November and December, in collaboration with the ENO at the Coliseum, there is *A Dog's Heart*, first performed earlier this year at De Nederlandse Opera. Wow!

They've come a long way since I first saw Complicite, or as they were then called, Théâtre de Complicité, in 1983 in *Put It On Your Head*, presented at the Almeida Theatre in London. The show was a comic look at the seaside and was a devised piece of physical performance using gesture, movement, object manipulation, speech and sound. The piece was sketch-based and consisted of a series of mostly comic vignettes around standard incidents which occur at the beach. These were reminiscent of Jacques Tati's *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* but focused on what can be described as the embarrassment of being English, such as attempting to undress under a small towel.





What began as a small company has become a loose collection of performers, writers, dramaturgs and associates

Throughout, the company displayed the great virtuosity of the clown. For example, when they played volleyball in slow motion, the sponge ball was caught on a stick which was then manipulated in slow motion in rhythm with the actors' movements. In this show the company consisted of Simon McBurney, Annabel Arden, Fiona Gordon, and Marcello Magni, who had all met whilst at Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris, although significantly both McBurney and Arden had previously studied at Cambridge University and had been involved in student drama productions there and with the Cambridge Footlights. They bridged the worlds of Cambridge comedy in the Footlights tradition, text-based theatre, and physical theatre in the Lecoq/Gaulier tradition. In this show the emphasis was on physical comedy: clowning, le jeu, complicity; but the seeds of much of their later work were to be seen here – namely, an international cast, physical performance, devising, puppetry, a mix of speech, grammalet (the nonsense language of commedia dell'arte) and inventive sound design. I was extremely impressed, not to say envious, as I myself was working with Zippo and Company at that time, and we were considered to be a successful clown company who were pushing the boundaries, so to speak. Complicite were taking clown far beyond what we dreamed of and were employing the clownesque in innovative, hilarious and incredibly inventive ways.

This inventiveness was further developed in their next show *A Minute*

Too Late in 1984, which again toured small arts centres. This show about death with its three actors, McBurney and Magni, plus Belgian Jos Houben, was painful, funny, tragic, and exhilarating, sometimes all of these at once, as in the scene where Simon attempts to fit the oblong photo of his deceased wife into an oval frame, trimming it with scissors until eventually it is too small to fit. Hilarious, tragic and touching, the characters mixed the practices and the appearance of the bouffon and the clown. The show was revived several times and I saw it when it was last performed – at the National Theatre in 2005 for a six-week run. Twenty-one years later, twenty-one years older... the clowns had finally been permitted onto the stage at the Nash! I admit that the company had mounted productions at the National before, but these were Brecht and Shakespeare and Durrenmatt, serious stuff, and what's more, proper plays. Well, not quite, because the devised pieces *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Out of a House Walked a Man* were also performed at the National Theatre. But these were 'serious theatre' with proper actors, and based on and adapted from the writings of Bruno Schulz and Daniil Kharmis respectively.

In 1985 the company won the Perrier Award for Best Comedy act at the Edinburgh Festival with *More Bigger Snacks Now* cementing the link with the Cambridge Footlights. This was sketch-based comedy with a loose structure, about four unemployed blokes passing the time in a flat, and again displayed the performers' visual and comic inventiveness. It was before the time that the Perrier went mainly, although not always, to stand-up comedians, including Lee Evans and Frank Skinner. Despite the award, Complicite was still touring small-scale venues, but gathering a growing reputation until 1989, when they were invited by Pierre Audi, then artistic director of the Almeida Theatre in London, to perform a season there. This featured previous shows as well as performances by core company members such as Linda Kerr Scott's solo show *Ave*



Maria and, significantly a production of Friedrich Durrenmatt's *The Visit*. It was a radical reworking and production of a neglected text, with direction by Annabel Arden, and featuring a classically trained actress, Kathryn Hunter, which moved them from small-scale, albeit international tours, into mainstream theatre, with subsequent glowing critical reviews, and a later transfer to the National Theatre.

Despite the scale of their current productions, it still feels as though the company is ceaselessly exploring, researching and playing with the forms and meaning of live theatre

And yet this pattern of diverse work – including devised work, adaptation, site-based, text-based – continues. What has been of particular interest for me is their association with the writer and influential art critic John Berger from 1993-2009. Their adaptation of his novel *Pig Earth*, which deals with rural peasant life in France, *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* (1994-1996), displayed many of their hallmarks I referred to earlier, as well as a precise depiction of the realities of peasant life and manual labour, which included building a barn on stage. The production also displayed a keen awareness of the political, which is appropriate, since John Berger, now in his eighties, is an avowed Marxist.

The company has expanded in its scope, although Simon McBurney has become the overall artistic director, and, as the three productions this autumn attest, the subject matter and form of their work has become very diverse. In addition, more recent productions have included an increasing use of sophisticated technology – this is particularly evident in *A Disappearing Number*. Simon himself not only directs and performs but also is invited to direct other productions, including Al Pacino in

Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* on Broadway in 2004. He has also appeared in films such as *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), where he played the seedy British diplomat. He has directed Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders in their live shows, and played the cameo role of the choirmaster, Cecil, in *The Vicar of Dibley*, and in 2010 the archest of Archdeacons in *Rev* on BBC2. What began as a small, tight company in 1983 has now become a loose collection of performers, writers, dramaturgs and associates, working under Simon McBurney's direction.

Whilst many aspects of Complicite have changed, many of the elements of their work in 2010 can be traced back to their early work and are still present: an emphasis on physical characterisation, on virtuosity, comedy intertwined with tragedy, the mix of styles and genres, addressing the audience directly, complex technology with movement and gesture, silence, and of course 'the political' in the widest sense.

Their working methods, like their productions, remain fluid, playful and exploratory. Despite the scale of their current productions, it still feels as though the company is ceaselessly exploring, researching and playing with the forms and meaning of live theatre. For me, it is this which links their work back to that first performance I saw at LIFT twenty-seven years ago.

For details of current and past productions referenced, and for more on the company see www.complicite.org

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Image credits p20-21: clockwise from top left:
ENO *A Dog's Heart* directed by Simon McBurney; puppetry *Blind Summit*. Photo Monika Rittershaus
Complicite *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol*. Photo Robbie Jack
Complicite *The Chairs*
Complicite *A Disappearing Number*. Photo Joris-Jan Bos
Complicite *Mnemonic*

Image p22: Complicite *A Minute Too Late*. Photo Robbie Jack
Image p23: Complicite *Shun Kin*. Photo Sarah Ainslie

Voices

Existential clown Geoff Sobelle, in his own words



I studied magic as a kid and got my first performance experience as a magician around Los Angeles where I grew up. While this guaranteed that no girl spoke to me until I was 18, it did shape the way that I see the theatre. I studied physical theatre with Jacques Lecoq when I was 19 and met some amazing artists at that school – friends that became collaborators and inspirations – like the whole Pig Iron Theatre company.

***Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl*, coming to the London International Mime Festival in January 2011, is a venture between myself and Charlotte Ford.** We met many years ago through Pig Iron, and we had previously collaborated on a few projects. We co-created the piece on every level, much the way that I have worked with Trey Lyford [Geoff's partner in *Rainpan 43*, an ongoing project] in the past. Originally, the show was a site-specific work, set in an abandoned Rite Aid pharmacy – a giant, 7,000-square foot space. We used the existent lighting, the ceiling, the floor, the furniture, everything. And then, suddenly, the animals start to come out... creepy!

Charlotte is similarly dedicated to making original work; finding new ways of making us laugh; finding new ways of pushing the clown and the absurd. The dynamic is good. We complement each other very well – we have different qualities that sometimes drive each other crazy, but this I think makes for a good tension in the work. Charlotte loves structure, I like things to be chaotic. Charlotte likes to explore the emotional truths of moments and characters, I like to play with gadgets. Charlotte loves twisted stories about animals mutilating humans, and I like... well, I guess I've learned to like those too. So – you know, typical boy/girl stuff. We crack each other up, which is sort of the only reason we're doing this in the end anyway!

To some degree, all clowning is existential. That is to say – clowning, deep down, has everything to do with the performer's true self, their ugly self, and their relationship to the audience. What more do we have? Our relationship to ourselves, and to others... It's our way of navigating in the world.

Because the clown is laid so bare, they're always best when pushed to the breaking point – a point of extreme vulnerability. The clown is an idiot – like all humans: we may be bringing down societies or bringing up families or building an economy or en route

to finding the cure for cancer, but also – we're morons. We walk into poles, we put salt in our coffee, we lock ourselves out of our cars, we fill our world with waste and raise our kids on garbage – we may have good intentions, but that doesn't cure stupidity. That's just being human. Which is beautiful. And horrible. And ridiculous.

I'm still not sure that I consider myself strictly a 'clown'. I have a really high regard for that word and it makes me think of extremely great artists like Grock: performers who could do anything – play any instrument, acrobatics, speak any language, do any trick – and make it funny and heartbreaking. That said, I have my aspirations! And my inspirations: Chaplin's precision and politics; Keaton's daring and grand gesture; and Harpo Marx's complete mayhem... Those are my heroes.

I think that *Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl* is unwittingly stealing from Buster Keaton's *Steamboat Bill Jr.* – this is a film that starts as kind of a melodrama, a father/son reconciliation, and then the whole film gets hijacked by the natural world. We really wanted to make a play that got jacked by the natural world, like Hitchcock's *The Birds*...

We imagined the last days of human existence as a kind of clown show; like the flip side of Adam and Eve – the Adam and Eve that no one will ever read about or paint portraits of because no one will know, and no one will care. The tenders of the garden have become secretaries and middle managers, more concerned with their petty power games than preserving even their own skin, let alone helping one another. The piece is ultimately about myopia. That while you were hiding from your boss and doing 'fake work' around the office, it turned out that the earth was hurtling through space, spinning into oblivion as your species was making itself obsolete... I was really interested in how short-sighted humans are, how absurd ambition is, really. That you fight so hard, work so hard to *become* – and then you see a mountain, that took thousands, millions of years to become, without any effort at all...

Charlotte, meanwhile, was really getting obsessed with stories where people would get attacked by wild animals in urban settings. Somehow, she would find these stories, and read them to me. And kind of at inopportune times, to be honest. Like you'd just be waking up, and she would say, 'turns out these boys snuck into a polar bear cage in the Bronx zoo and the last thing one kid heard his friend

say was “get help quick – he’s biting me – hard.” A guy gets killed by a tiger in the San Francisco zoo after he repeatedly taunts it; a woman is one day turned on by her chimpanzee and it eats her face off (a lot of those stories); crocodiles in New York apartments, the list goes on and on...

If it comes to fisticuffs, I’m sorry, but my money’s always on the bear... We’d like to think that we’ve really secured our place in the food chain, and that nothing can touch us in our cities and homes. In a typical urban environment, we are so distanced from wildlife of any sort that the thought of even encountering another species other than birds or rats seems impossible.

We thought that maybe the play would begin with a really mundane scene – like two kind of boring people having an annoying conversation about something really cliché – like an abortion – something that you’d expect in a kitchen-sink drama... and just when you’re thinking, ‘good grief, did I really pay my money for a ticket to this?’ a puma would leap through the window and thrash the people to pieces. But we really didn’t have a good way to stage that. Eventually, our designers – Erik Sanko and Jessica Grindstaff of Phantom Limb – said, ‘why don’t you just set it *here?*’ (We were working at the time in a crummy old abandoned school in North Philly – it looked like a bombed out office.) And we began to play with a desolate office environment. Jessica found photos of Chernobyl – destroyed buildings that wildlife and the natural world now reclaimed – we got hugely inspired and decided that was where the piece wanted to go.

The show really tests you. Time is a huge theme in the piece – as is torture. The loooooong pacing in the beginning is an expression of this feeling that your life has amounted to nothing more than just biding your time – that interminable feeling of having long lost the sight of any kind of meaningfulness to your job or your life – it’s just hell. And everything is torture. But it’s a clown show! It’s funny to see people in agony for some twisted reason. The other thing is that the two characters are losing sense of how to behave, how to *be*... they are becoming more and more feral. They are actually returning to the wild, without knowing it.

As for the stuffed beasts in the show – well, I guess we just thought that there was something funny about taxidermy. In keeping with the themes of the show – the hubris and absurdity of the story that we tell ourselves, that we are the ‘tenders of the garden’. And what a terrible job we’ve done with that if it was ever ours to have in the first place. Taxidermy is kind of like that. You go out into the wild, find an animal, kill it, skin it, stuff it, and then shape it to look like it did in the wild. Why not just keep it in the wild?

As objects, the animals present this great theatrical dilemma – they’re alive, but they’re dead. They’re real, but they’re fake. They seem to move, but they really don’t. They are beautiful and they are grotesque. They’re amazing and well-made, but they don’t move – so they’re actually really inefficient theatrically... They present this great tension onstage that we really fell in love with.

My favourite moment in the show is a section we call Rabbit Rescue. Charlotte’s character, Rhoda, has caught a wild rabbit in the office and put a bow around its neck and is insisting to my character, Jerry, that she has brought in her new pet to work; that she does this thing called ‘rabbit rescue’ when not at work, where she rescues sick rabbits, I guess, and then nurses them back to health. Charlotte is so crazy in this scene – it’s like this insane barren mother instinct to mother anything furry that she can, but it’s so bizarre, and all Jerry can say is ‘cuuuute’ in this really disgusted way. Charlotte is so funny there, I’m always about to crack up...



Voices | Geoff Sobelle

Geoff Sobelle studied at Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris and subsequently with Philippe Gaullier in New York. He furthered his understanding of theatre in his work with Pig Iron Theatre in Philadelphia. Geoff has performed in many of the company’s productions, including *Gentlemen Volunteers* and *Shut Eye*. His partner (in work and life) Charlotte Ford is also a longtime associate artist with Pig Iron Theatre. Pig Iron are starting an international physical theatre school in Philadelphia – Geoff and Charlotte will both be teaching at this new enterprise. www.pigiron.org

Geoff Sobelle formed Rainpan 43 with Trey Lyford and the pair collaborated with director David Shiner on the creation of their acclaimed show, *All Wear Bowlers* (2003). More recently, they have worked with Giovanni Fusetti of the Helikos school in Florence, and are currently working on *Next Stop: Amazingland*, with magician Steve Cuiffo. The show will debut September 2011. www.rainpan43.org

Geoff Sobelle & Charlotte Ford’s *Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl* is produced by Barrow Street Theatre in New York. The production played The Traverse at St Stephens for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2010, where it won a Fringe First and was shortlisted for a Total Theatre Award. <http://fleshbloodfishfowl.com>

The London premiere of *Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl* is presented at the London International Mime Festival and BITE 2011 at the Barbican Pit, 19–29 January (not 23 Jan). Meet the Artists: Thursday 20 January. BSL interpreted performance: Friday 28 January. Book online at www.barbican.org.uk

Geoff Sobelle and Charlotte Ford will be leading a workshop on comedy duos entitled ‘Stuck With You’ as part of LIMF: Saturday 22 January, 10am–1pm at Central School of Speech & Drama, London. Cost: £40. This is one of a number of LIMF workshops; see the website for more. Bookings: +44 20 7637 5661 or workshops2011@mimelondon.com

For more on London International Mime Festival 2011 performances, events, and workshops see www.mimelondon.com

All images Geoff Sobelle and Charlotte Ford *Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl*. Photos by Jason Frank Rothenberg

Forced Entertainment's latest show reviewed – twice. Edward Taylor and Alexander Roberts offer their opinions from different viewing points

The Thrill of It All



Forced Entertainment *The Thrill of It All*. Photo Hugo Glendinning

The Thrill of It All, following *Spectacular* and *Void Story*, is a return to Forced Entertainment's bigger, messier stage affairs; akin to *Bloody Mess* and *A World in Pictures*.

The nine performers take to the stage in grubby white tuxedos and mini-dresses, vinyl boots, and squiffy cheap wigs. Their voices are digitally manipulated through their mics – the men's ultra-deep, slow and pedantic, the women high, squeaky and almost impossible to listen to. They are positioned as a vaudeville dance ensemble desperate to keep the show alive through a series of chorus dance acts to Japanese lounge music tracks. Unable to leave the stage and framed by a bright white dancefloor, the cast are seemingly trapped in some sort of entertainment torture chamber.

The show has many of the trademarks of a Forced Entertainment work as the 'dancers' bashfully negotiate their incapacity for sincerity and a desperate desire to make glossy and consumable entertainment. *Thrill of it All*, as with much of the work that has preceded it, creates a world that enjoys the beauty of failure and the accomplishments and creativity that come from that. Bad dancing, bad stage-fighting, bad acting, and bad 'heightened emotional moments' lead to brilliant dancing, sadistically comic stage-fighting, and incredibly moving heightened moments of emotion. It would also be a crime not to mention the 'small things...' game, in which the men competed to generate poetic observations of banal and forgotten small things in life – like 'a single pea sat on the plate of a giant'.

The environment that they created with *Thrill of it All* was dark and somewhat

contemptuous towards both the cast that performed it and the audience that played along. In many ways it was bold and shrewd, but there was something a little too familiar with it all. I feel I have been there before with this company – a different world, but a similar feeling. In many ways that familiarity does not bother me, but perhaps the company's reputation requires them to now take it a few steps further. I wanted to see them be more ruinous, more destructive. I guess I was left seeking a greater thrill – and so the perpetuating paradox continues.

Alexander Roberts

Forced Entertainment demand respect. They've kept a core team together for 25 years, they tour all over the world, and they consistently produce new work in a variety of forms. No mean feat.

The Thrill of It All is familiar FE territory. It looks like the sort of thing you might find yourself watching in a hotel at four in the morning: the effects of the beer are wearing off, and you've turned on the TV to discover a naff variety show on an obscure cable channel. *Thrill* features intentionally crap choreography, lashings of insincere sincerity, swift changes of mood, and lighting which suggests a world seen in neon.

Although there are some funny moments, it's pretty much the same show they've been doing for years. The performers are excellent, the text is strong, but there was nothing in it that surprised me. They are still going after that desire to portray modern life by both celebrating its ghastliness and exposing the fragile foundations beneath. Their sets

use am-dram aesthetics, the stage flats seen the wrong way round with the costumes on a rail. The monologues are a kind of doomed romanticism mixed with cliché. And everything is fake. For me, there was no electricity in the performance.

When I see an agit-prop theatre show I usually wish it acknowledged the complexity of a situation as Forced Entertainment do; but when I see a FE show I sometimes wish they'd drop the ambivalence, get off the fence and name names.

What depressed me was looking around the audience and seeing a lot of other theatre companies and performers – by playing to an audience consisting, in the main, of fellow artists they are boxing themselves in. To earn their mantle of Britain's best experimental company I'd like to see them throw the kind of approach they ably demonstrated here up in the air and look at new ways an audience can engage with what they are doing. The relationship between art and audience has changed over the last 20 years, and although there is merit in ploughing the same furrow I would like Forced Entertainment to get experimental in a way that doesn't just press the buttons for academics in a comfy theatre.

Edward Taylor

The reviewers saw the show on separate dates of the tour and wrote about Forced Entertainment's *The Thrill of It All* independently, without seeing the other writer's response. Alexander Roberts saw the show at Warwick Arts Centre, 20 October 2010. Edward Taylor saw the show at Contact Theatre, Manchester, 20 November 2010.
www.forcedentertainment.com

Moving waxworks, speaking holograms, and a born-again Velvet Underground playing the tunes. Dorothy Max Prior finds things aren't always what they seem to be...

Sacred: US Radical



David Hoyle's *Factory*. Photo by Dr J



Sara Juli *The Money Conversation*



Marisa Carnesky

Sacred 2010 was the sort of satisfyingly eclectic mix of tantalising forms and fascinating artists – established and emerging alike – that we have come to expect of Chelsea Theatre's annual jamboree.

This year saw an influx of shows that first saw light of day at New York's legendary PS122 venue. These included Young Jean Lee's Theater Company's *Pullman, WA* and the New York City Player's *ADS* by Richard Maxwell, both of which I saw; and Cupola Bobber's *Way Out West*, *The Sea Whispered Me* and Sara Juli's *The Money Conversation*, both of which I missed. Missing things becomes a kind of festival experience in itself with these full-packed seasons full of fleeting one- or two-night appearances: other artists that I sadly missed including Stacy Makishi, Robin Deacon, Leibniz, Natasha Davis and Sacred's artists in residence, Julia Bardsley and Andrew Poppy.

That said, I was happy with what I managed to see! Young Jean Lee's offering is a stripped-back, house-lights-up, relentless confessional/interrogational play on the language of interpersonal relationships: well scripted and well executed, but perhaps not quite as radical as a UK audience schooled on Forced Entertainment and Station House Opera might have wished for. But an artist I'd be interested in seeing/hearing more from.

Maxwell's *ADS* was a first encounter for me with this seminal US artist, and again I saw shades of Forced Entertainment's confessional style, although I know that Tim Etchells is a fan of Maxwell's work, so this could well be a chicken-and-egg debate! Regardless, it was a show brimming with restrained beauty, challenging our notion (pertinent in this age of video calls and Skype) of 'live' and 'mediated' presence. There are

no 'present' actors sharing the space with us; the first-person text is delivered by life-size, realistic 'holograms' of a selection of NYC citizens of various ages and life experiences. Each 'hologram' (actually, a reworking of the Pepper's Ghost projection trick), seemingly as solid and sturdy as you or me, stands and delivers his/her heartfelt thoughts, most often starting with the phrase 'I believe'. It is only as they step from the soapbox and fade away do we really take in that they are but ghosts in the machine. Ironically, the first person up believes that the 'faceless and bodiless' non-contact of Facebook and YouTube are a downhill path for mankind. Subsequent confessors believe in love, success, yoga, spirituality, baseball, saving the world – or in nothing. It's like an expose of Shakespeare's humours or Steiner's temperaments: we are all individuals, yet 'types' manifest the world over, and ultimately humans have more commonality than difference. Everyone is beautiful!

Meanwhile, the bar downstairs is being transformed into 'a sweatshop for the soul' as David Hoyle's *Factory* sets up (work) shop. Creating interesting thematic pairings has become a feature of David's recent installation/performance work, and in this piece (directed by Nathan Evans, with a host of talented collaborators) the *Factory* refers both to Andy Warhol's decadent 60s space and scene (a nice tie-in to Sacred's US Radical theme!), and to David Hoyle's working-class Northern English heritage. Once 'clocked in' we have the opportunity to take part in Chelsea Girls-style screen tests; to make our own screenprints; and to listen to the Velvets reincarnated (featuring David as a kind of Andy-Lou hybrid; Thom Shaw spaced-out but gorgeous as tambourine tickling Nico look-alike Simone Simone; and Sonic Sideshow's Nathaniel Slade doing a pretty mean Sterling

Morrison impersonation). David Hoyle's work is always political (the personal is the political, right?) but on this occasion there is no pussyfooting: channelling the spirit of a Socialist Worker electioneer circa 1969, he's straight in for the kill on the Clegg betrayal and the current government's failings. But as always, humour is paramount; and the band do a pretty mean version of 'Pale Blue Eyes' to boot. Radical! Oh what fun politics can be! Power to the purple and pink people!

On another evening, the theatre space was transformed into a hall of ghastly delights as Marisa Carnesky (in collaboration with American musician/artist Rasp Thorne) took her obsession with waxworks – as previously manifested in *Dystopian Wonders* at the Roundhouse CircusFest (April 2010) – onto the next stage in *The Quickening of the Wax*. The audience is divided into two groups. The first group get to encounter a series of grotesque living waxwork displays (including one of a woman exposing the bloodied foetus in her womb), then the 'tour' is interrupted by blackout and a bloodcurdling scream, and we are invited to sit and watch group two going through the same experience. The nature of voyeurism, you will have gathered, is a key theme. What distinguishes this show from Carnesky's earlier explorations of the same themes is the playfulness: none more so than in the wonderfully absurd 'tea break' freezes in gruesome action – mid-sizzling on the electric chair, or whilst chainsawing a woman in half – in which everyone downs tools of torture and Marisa fetches cups of char for the weary waxwork museum workers. Sterling stuff!

Sacred: US Radical – a season of contemporary performance took place at Chelsea Theatre, London, 22 October – 20 November 2010.
www.chelseatheatre.org.uk

A three-way reflection on 'Tuning Out with Radio Z by Stan's Cafe

Being There



There's a buzz in the air (among the arts community at least) as Stan's Cafe come to town with their new improvised and interactive show. The local arts bulletin intriguingly asks for volunteers to sleep onstage for the duration of the performance. The audience is invited to bring their laptop and their phone, to text, email and contribute show content directly via the show's online, 'virtual newsroom' forum.

It's disappointing to see such a thin audience tonight, as a show which is improvised and based on audience contributions would presumably benefit from a full house. The radio station is already broadcasting to a wider, but invisible, audience when we enter the theatre, and the two DJs Amanda and Craig sit facing us behind laptops, purring into their microphones. Pictures, videos and occasional glimpses of the online 'newsroom' are projected onto a screen behind them.

The theme of tonight's show is luck. Craig and Amanda discuss lucky escapes, setting a lighthearted tone, with moments of poignancy. They ignore the audience throughout the show, whilst inviting listeners to text and email in. This creates an odd barrier between them and us, and I think this is why it is a while before contributions start coming in. Also, it isn't really clear what sort of contributions we should, or might, make. Are we pretending to be radio station 'listeners' or are we narrators of a show about a radio station? Should we offer up anecdotes or directions?



I couldn't log on to the clunky newsroom forum until two hours in, so decided to text instead. The process of texting forces a lapse in concentration on the dialogue, and a space to rethink your own position in relation to *Radio Z*. Dipping in and out of the narrative flow evokes thoughts of sleep and dreaming, which is reinforced by the curiously effective onstage sleepers. There are vague thematic strands winding through this work, including complex ideas of communications and relationships, many of which will be the same in tomorrow's show, but some of which are unique tonight. There is plenty to think about, but I can't help feeling that tonight's audience haven't played their part well enough; we haven't sent enough interesting messages in, and that seems rather unfair when the mechanisms of the show weren't clearly explained at the beginning.

Maybe this conventional theatre space isn't the best venue for *Radio Z*; we are not at ease enough, seated in rows in the dark, to confidently take control of the interactive opportunity offered to us.

I hope Stan's Cafe continue to play around with the basic model of this fascinating show as there is clearly still work to be done.

Geraldine Harris



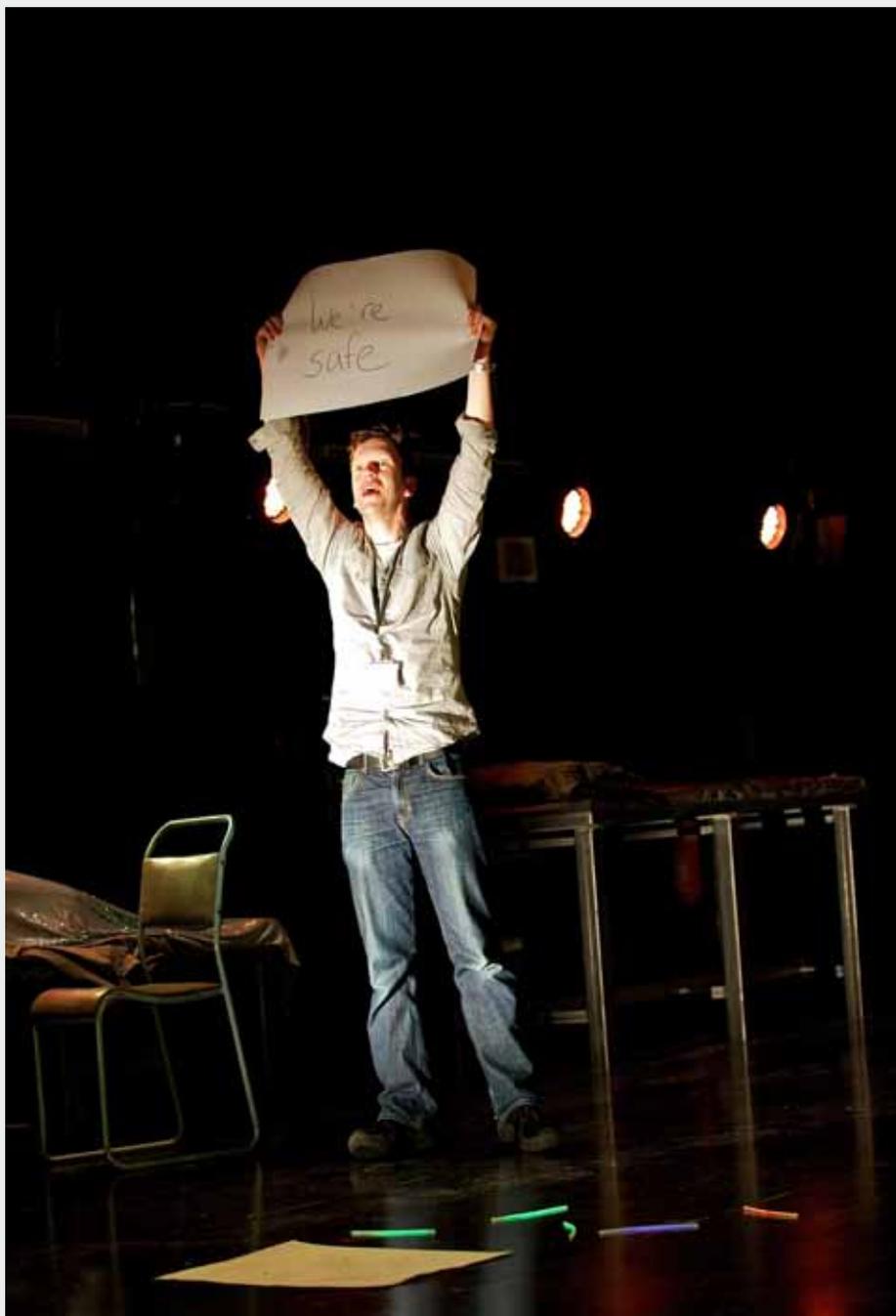
This show's a monster, impossible to tame and if tamed, pointless. Tonight's theme is 'luck' – and it's against us. Front-of-house foul up: programmes – key instructions for audience collaboration – haven't been distributed. SMS to Web translation *apparatchik* hits glitch, backstage phone support required. Now audience messages start to flow cue laughs of recognition. Amanda and Craig – Radio Presenters – are on good banter form. The show even turns French for a period, they can keep this fun up forever but it needs to escape and transcend and tonight we're struggling with that.

I'm placing still images and video behind the improvisation, likely material ripped from YouTube. 'Lucky people' footage causes gasps but is perhaps too obvious, the 'lighthouse beam' feels better but nothing's really meshing. I want to catalyse a transformation and so, via web and stage screen, solicit audience help. With honourable exceptions, what's incoming is standard radio shtick – maybe tonight's theme is badly chosen. In the rehearsal room you would stop, adjust, reset and re-launch, but here the train can't stop until the end of the line. I'm growing desperate, pulling and pushing leavers – all feels futile. It's Stan's Cafe's job to experiment, but right now it feels like it's blowing up in our face.

Stage sleepers fail to find a place in the broader fiction, two didn't show and now, maybe two hours in, an audience message arrives requesting to join their number. Why not? I get them backstage and brief them. Shocked but game, their arrival provides strong raw material and we get into some good stuff. The closing passages are moving – a quality familiar with epic long shows. It's over.

Maybe this observation changed the observed; tomorrow night is bound to be a triumph. It is. A validation of the enterprise shared only with those who are present, such is the joy of the improvised.

James Yarker, Artistic Director, Stan's Cafe



We went into this Bristol run feeling more confident about the show, having honed how we ask for audience material and having become more adept at incorporating it. As it is improvised there remains, of course, an element of terror. The audience seem quite lively tonight, which we of course encourage by asking for their input. But as a paranoid performer you do ask yourself whether this is 'we're enjoying this!' liveliness or 'what on earth is this?' discontent. Largely I think it was the former and the audience offered up some fun and interesting contributions.

A highlight of this performance was the entrance on stage of two audience members. It's always worrying for a performer when you see the audience in your bit of the theatre and initially we thought they had stormed the stage to take over. Before they could say anything we cast them into a story and ushered them into beds. To our relief they did this without protest and on returning to the desk I spotted a message revealing that they had been sent on by director James [Yarker]. Their intervention did give the show a new lease of life at a time when it was flagging a little.

I came off stage after this one feeling a little disappointed. Perhaps because of our theme choice we found it difficult to generate material for the off-mic, on-stage world and in trying to get this going, we committed the sin of letting the radio station slip, leaving our online listeners with some dead air. We are always trying to pin down what makes the show work and when it does, it feels great. I think we will continue to learn each time and we hope the audience enjoys it along the way.

Craig Stephens, Performer

The showing of *Tuning Out with Radio Z* by Stan's Cafe reflected on here took place at Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol, 4 November 2010. www.tobaccofactory.com
For more on Stan's Café, and future plans for this show, see: www.stanscafe.co.uk

All images: Stan's Cafe *Tuning Out with Radio Z*. Photos courtesy of James Yarker & Stan's Cafe

Two very different works directed by Simon McBurney: the ENO opera *A Dog's Heart* reviewed by Charlotte Smith, and Complicite's *Shun Kin* reviewed by Dorothy Max Prior

A Dog's Heart, a Lover's Eyes



ENO *A Dog's Heart*. Photo Monika Rittershaus



Complicite *Shun Kin*. Photo Tsukaka Aoki

Strands of light centre on the operating table as a surgeon transforms a dog into a human using a testicle transplant. The design is as stunning and coherent as the story bizarre: sparse, black-and-white modernism intercut with socialist realist film footage. A giant door and carpet dwarf the characters like a drug-induced fairytale; farce, puppetry and shadow theatre combine in this expert production, directed for the English National Opera by Complicite's Simon McBurney.

A Dog's Heart has a simple core: the story of a stray dog who longs for sausages and cats to chase. Sharik ('little ball') is portrayed through his pleasant and unpleasant voices, sung by Andrew Watts and Elena Vassilieva; and by a large and bony puppet, inspired by a Giacometti sculpture and manipulated by Blind Summit. After his operation, Sharikov (Peter Hoare) is unleashed, an animalistic human who is hired by the Moscow sanitation department to deal with stray cats, but whose demanding and unreasonable behaviour eventually drives his creator, Professor Filipp Filippovich Preobrazhensky (Steven Page), to dispose of him in an epic bloodbath.

But this tale of human nature is also a sophisticated political satire, written by Mikhail Bulgakov in 1925, banned in 1926, and not published in Russia until 1987. *A Dog's Heart* has bureaucracy and communism among its targets, although the politics may seem more languid today. As in the recent production of *The White Guard* at the National, there may be a degree of complacency in looking at post-revolution Russia with the benefit of hindsight. Bulgakov (best known in the UK for *The Master and Margarita*) remains a fascinating, absurd, razor-sharp writer, and this production is often mesmerising.

The music by Alexander Raskatov can be dissonant and onomatopoeic. Singers play their voices, sometimes using a megaphone, with repeated notes like a dripping tap or hiccups. The libretto is both coarse and cultured – whether it's the newly created *enfant terrible* screaming 'suck my cock' or a story that seems primeval (a creation myth) and literary (a disorientated intellectual who plays with fire like Faust).

A Dog's Heart both works as an opera and goes beyond the normal parameters of that form. Its theatricality runs deep and this is visual theatre – shadowy, beautiful and a little unhinged.

Charlotte Smith

Only in Japan... The perfect porcelain beauty and oh so sadistic cruelty of blind samisen musician Shun-kin; the masochistic devotion of her pupil and lover Sasuke; the importance of honour and 'not losing face' (even when you lose your face). Can you imagine a story from anywhere else in which a man blinds himself so that his blind-from-childhood lover can rest assured that he will never cast eyes on her recently-disfigured face? And this, somehow, seems perfectly logical. *Of course* he'd gouge out his own eyes to save her shame, what else would he do?

The narrative for Complicite's *Shun Kin* is taken from Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's short story 'A Portrait of Shun-kin'; but the tone, scenography and dramaturgical drive from his essay 'In Praise of Shadows', which expounds the view that oriental art and literature favour shadow and subtlety over light and clarity. The play between light and shadow is key: for much of the time the stage is dimly lit, with light suddenly arriving in beams or shafts, and

then leaving as quickly as it arrived, as a door slams, or a candle is blown out.

Stories nesting inside other stories are a feature of Tanizaki's short story, this expanded by director Simon McBurney, who creates the frame of a radio broadcast of the story, read by a woman with a younger lover – the couple forming a reversed-out or negative image of the lovers in the story. This radio story frame is also a clever way of denoting the world of blindness that Shun-kin (and later Sasuke, too) lives in: a world in which the sound of the samisen and the song of the lark is everything.

Representations of Shun-kin in the production evolve from child puppet to adolescent puppet to masked actor-puppet to unmasked actor. The puppetry (by Blind Summit) evokes that company's work with Anthony Minghella and Carolyn Choa in *Madama Butterfly*, but this production takes the notion of 'manipulation' further. For example, Eri Fukatsu continues to control the action when her puppet becomes masked actor, then later throws this human puppet she has been manipulating aside to take on the role of Shun-kin herself. There are also many lovely references to traditional Japanese artforms: the young woman bunraku puppet with no body, merely kimono, head and hands; a beautiful tableau of disembodied floating kimonos wafting up to the heights of the stage; a flock of origami birds; and constantly shifting projections that unfold like a series of Dogugaeshi sliding screens.

A beautiful work, one of Complicite's best of recent years, and true to their own traditions: literary, yet visually inventive; and a fantastic use not only of puppetry, but of the whole notion of the 'puppetsque'.

Dorothy Max Prior

Charlotte Smith saw the English National Opera production of *A Dog's Heart*, directed by Simon McBurney, at the Coliseum, London, 24 November 2010. Dorothy Max Prior saw Complicite's *Shun Kin* at Barbican Theatre, London, presented as part of BITE, on 5 November 2010.

Life, love, and growing old together. Dorothy Max Prior reflects on the collaboration between two legendary theatre presences, Handspring Puppet Company and Neil Bartlett

Or You Could Kiss Me



Or You Could Kiss Me explores the play of memory and imagination: Where, in our reflections on past times and in our projections into the future, does the present moment belong? Separating fact from fiction, understanding the lure of false memory and exaggeration, seeking the truth, facing the past, dealing with the present, fearing the future – it's the stuff of all of our lives.

In an interesting take on autobiographical theatre, two men who are partners in life and work (Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones of Handspring) explore their relationship through, obviously enough, puppetry, in a story that sees them playing themselves in present-time reality (or one version of themselves anyway: the characters are named 'Mr A' and 'Mr B'), with puppets – gorgeously crafted five-sixth human sized wooden puppets – playing their remembered younger selves and their imagined older selves. There are constant references to the tripwires of memory ('Is that really where they would have gone?') and to the uncertainties of the imagined future ('Will you remember?' 'Yes, I will remember.')

It all circles around the urgent need to sort out their legal status as 'partners' and the making of wills. This mundane plot anchor is a kick-off point for a whole raft of glorious scenes: young gay male adulthood in South Africa is captured in a moment of first love centering on a seaside swim, the two 'young men' puppets soaring round the space, energetically animated by an ensemble of black-suited, barefoot men; bedtime for the elders forecasted in painfully funny scenes of grumbling about night-time peeing and hospital smoking bans, which give Kohler and Jones the opportunity to show off their renowned puppetry skills.

Always we come back to the key motif – the

breath: the heightened breathing as the lovers kiss; the sound of the swimmer's breath; the emphysema-induced wheezing of old age; and the sighs of a restless night spent in bed with a longterm lover, wondering if the last kiss between you has already happened.

This 'breath' motif is taken up enthusiastically in a soundscape that combines live and recorded/treated breath with the almost-human sighs of the bellows of an accordion. Disembodied voices are another feature of the soundscape: an invisible barking dog; voices in the dark; a radio tuned in; replayed answerphone messages...

The power of human memory, our 'involuntary attic', manifests itself in the beautiful details dredged up from the past: nostalgia for the yellow packets of Craven A cigarettes as the characters 'partake of the old Spanish custom' with a post-coital cigarette; the remembrance of a conversation about ties that now seems amusing, but which captures the fears of being young and gay in South Africa in the 70s: 'Not the blue. We can't both wear the same colour, people will know.' There again, the powerlessness of our human imagination is manifested in such musings as this: 'You can stare at a photograph all night but you can't make it speak.'

The scenes are played out by our two main actors and their puppet alter-egos together with the aforementioned all-male ensemble, which includes Mervyn Millar, who brought Handspring to the National Theatre's attention and consequently played a key role in the development of *War Horse* (good to see Mervyn back on the other side of the footlights); and the ever-charming Finn Caldwell, who not only barks nicely but also operates a very lovable puppet dog that delights the audience by peeing on the floor.

There's one other performer, Adjoa Andoh, the only woman, who plays housekeeper, nurse, and – in more esoteric moments – a kind of *Deus Ex Machina*, declaiming poetic truths and reciting excerpts from the myth of Philomen and Baucis (who, at the moment of death, are transformed into trees – the analogy to the wooden puppet characters being obvious). This can sometimes feel a little too much like wearing one's research on one's sleeve – never more so than in a horribly postmodern 'performative lecture' on the nature and physiological processes of cognition and memory, a scene so irritating that I'd wiped it from my memory until reminded of it... It really needs to go as it drags the piece into a whole other performance mode that feels horribly passé.

Or You Could Kiss Me is a touching and thoughtful show that goes straight to the heart – even if one or two of the dramaturgical decisions are to be despaired at. It is a pleasure to see Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones onstage manipulating their own extraordinary puppet creations. How wonderful to see puppets employed to tell true life stories; to explore not the fantastical realms of fairytales, but the everyday realities of life, love, 'marriage' and growing old together. But of course there is no more fantastic a story than that of human life and love, with all its foibles, frailties, and fairytale beginnings and endings.

The Handspring Puppet Company/NT production *Or You Could Kiss Me*, directed by Neil Bartlett, was seen at the National Theatre, Cottesloe, 14 October 2010.
www.nationaltheatre.org.uk
www.handspringpuppet.co.za

All images: NT/Handspring/Neil Bartlett *Or You Could Kiss Me*

Alexander Roberts goes to Dorset for the Inside Out festival 2010

Rock Charmers and Dreamers



Kimmo and Paper Cinema *The Rock Charmer*

Inside Out festival (which launched in 2007) brings to Dorset – the county I grew up in, and thus know well – a unique opportunity for people to encounter local outdoor sites in extraordinary ways. This third Inside Out must be commended for both the spread of work across the county and the diversity of outdoor works on the programme.

This programme's broad spectrum included NoFit State's circus show *Parklife*, which invited local community members not only to watch but also (if they wished) partake in the outdoor rehearsals and the final performance; *Congregation*, an interactive light and video installation for Bournemouth's main square that 'turned pedestrians into performers' (created by KMA and curated by Bournemouth-based media arts organisation SCAN); *Trajets de Ville, Trajets de Vie*, a site-generic dance piece taking place on public benches in Bournemouth town centre by French company Ex Nihilo; plus *Tracking*, a dance work by StopGAP, a dance company consisting of dancers both with and without disabilities.

The two shows I attended at the festival were site-specific piece *The Rock Charmer*, and promenade spectacle *Rene D'Herbert* – two vastly different outdoor works.

The Rock Charmer took place in the rural,

coastal setting of Winspit, Worth Matravers – created by local company Paper Cinema and Finnish performance artist and musician Kimmo Pohjonen and made specifically for this site. This was more than evident throughout the event: the site that was once home to quarry workers, smugglers – and, much earlier, dinosaurs – providing a rich source of inspiration for the creators.

Audience members first convened at the Square and Compass pub – known locally for its unique history (and also for hosting a popular fossil museum), but popular in this case for providing audiences with a chance to grab a Dorset brewed ale and a pasty before embarking on the half-hour long countryside amble down to the old quarry and cliff face where *The Rock Charmer* was to be performed.

This simple act, clearly born out of necessity (walking being the only way to arrive at the site, other than by boat) created a potent sense that we were embarking on a short pilgrimage – setting the tone that we were here to witness something special; a treasure that required a bit of leg-work.

Upon arrival the audience became cradled within the walls of this Jurassic coastal site, which had been animated by Paper Cinema

with what felt like a living scrapbook of the site's histories: human-sized scrap-metal dinosaur sculptures; an industrial soundtrack of clunks, drips and drones; and a selection of choicely positioned lights that seemed to reveal the presence of real, embedded fossils in the quarry's walls.

The main event was to follow: a solo-musician performance by Kimmo. Armed only with his electric accordion-synthesiser, Kimmo moulded this accordion into some kind of vessel for possession – bursting with the spirit of the quarry's past. The accordion crashed and ripped, veering from organ notes to sounds of bangs, clangs and pneumatic drills; creating a thunderous, almost hypnotic underscore of music as Kimmo appeared to call out to the quarry for the histories of the rocks to reveal themselves. All this served up against the backdrop of a towering cliff face, upon which Paper Cinema's exuberant cascade of lucid, dreamlike, animated illustrations were projected – a layered cluster of bright and colourful painted sketches alluding to the life of dinosaurs, sea-monsters, shipwrecks and industrial machinery. As if the rocks were now speaking to us, Paper Cinema puppeteered their paper images (manipulated in front of an overhead projector), creating a kaleidoscope of emerging narratives upon the face of the cliff. The piece finished with a peaceful



Quidams Reve d'Herbert

procession of the audience back to the Square and Compass – this time under the blanket of a starry night, each carrying an oil lamp.

The combination of Kimmo's shamanic performance and Paper Cinema's live projection work was severe and violent – an aggressive conjuring of the quarry's volatile past, demonstrating a great curiosity for what the site had to offer. The processions to and from the site created a sense of communion and encounter; the whole experience a meeting point of extremes in a site where intensive human industry collides with the power and weight of the mighty sea.

Reve D'Herbert by internationally-renowned French company Quidams was a wholly different sort of offering. Where *The Rock Charmer* was a fierce theatrical excavation of Winspit's past, Quidams' family-friendly processional piece offered a much more gentle and unchallenging proposition.

Performed on Poole Quay, *Reve D'Herbert* was a promenade piece in which audience members followed a troupe of performers on stilts as they travelled from one end of the quay to the other. This ethereal troupe, dressed from head-to-toe in hooded white gowns, approached people along the way, offering soft smiles and bows to those they encountered. As they travelled the quayside they attracted very large crowds, which in turn invited an endless flurry of camera-flashes; a lot of applause; a relentless hubbub of talking; and a constant furor of pushing and shoving from the audience. A great spectacle had arrived!

The climax arrived when, at a certain point, this travelling troupe huddled together causing their white suits to inflate and glow very brightly. The figures were now double



StopGAP Tracking

Rock Charmers and Dreamers | Alexander Roberts

in size and their heads were replaced by much larger, inflated, glowing orbs. The procession continued until they arrived at a very large, brightly glowing balloon which they consequently released into the sky like a floating moon.

The piece, though popular, left me feeling that something was lacking. It was let down by the choice of a nondescript 'world music' soundtrack, and I found the finale a little low-key. In the interests of honesty, it should probably be said that truly site-specific, intensive and engaging work such *The Rock Charmer* is of far more interest to me.

Reve D'Herbert succeeded in attracting a large portion of the local community to come together and share in something beyond the everyday. *The Rock Charmer* was an exemplary example of how theatre can unpack and unleash a site into the boundless realm of the imagination. And *Inside Out*, it seems, is a festival wisely listening to its audience and providing something for everyone.

Inside Out ran 10-19 September 2010. It was produced/curated by Simon Chatterton and Bill Gee; presented by Dorset Theatre Promoters' Consortium (DTPC), Bournemouth and Poole arts teams, Wave Arts Education Agency (wave) and DepARTure; and managed by Activate Performing Arts. www.insideoutdorset.co.uk

Alexander Roberts saw *The Rock Charmer* by Paper Cinema and Kimmo Pohjonen at Winspit, Worth Matravers, Dorset on 16 September 2010, and Quidams' *Reve D'Herbert* at Poole Quay, Dorset on 18 September 2010

Beccy Smith reflects on the PANeK/Total Theatre Magazine Writing Performance project for Kent-based writers and artists

How to review?

As a theatre practitioner, I believe developing a handle on how to describe your own work and the work of others is important. It's an empowering way to self-define, allowing you to frame the agenda in those discussions that necessarily surround what you have made. It hones your analytical skills by encouraging specificity and thoughtfulness in your responses. It develops relationships and connections between others' work and your own, an ongoing mapping process in an ever-shifting landscape. In short, I think it's too important to be left to professional critics. In the field (or perhaps multi-verse) of 'total theatre', practitioners' interest in subverting, expanding or reclaiming formal territories makes the role of those written framings that mediate work's reception through reviews, blogs and marketing material more powerful. Sharing these views, the Performing Arts Network Kent (PANeK) teamed up with Total Theatre Magazine for the Writing Performance project that sought to empower participant theatre practitioners, teachers and arts managers better to describe their own and others' work.

The project ran alongside the theatre/multi-arts programme of Canterbury Festival. Participants all saw and wrote about three performances from a programme of five selected by the facilitators (members of Total Theatre Magazine's editorial team), receiving individual feedback on each written piece which was produced in response to one of a menu of potential journalistic briefs. This process was bookended by two extended seminars that investigated the practice and theory of critical writing.

The initial seminar set out to frame the exploration by investigating what makes a good review an effective record and comment on the experience of a show. Notions of evocative communication, accessible commentary and the translation into words of work operating through a variety of other forms were discussed. One of the key ideas underpinning the project was the sense that established critical models are biased toward the literary: privileging content and style over form and thereby problematic when applied to models that challenge this hierarchy. In this first session we looked at one of Kenneth Tynan's reviews of the Berliner Ensemble as an example of a more classical approach to writing on performance.

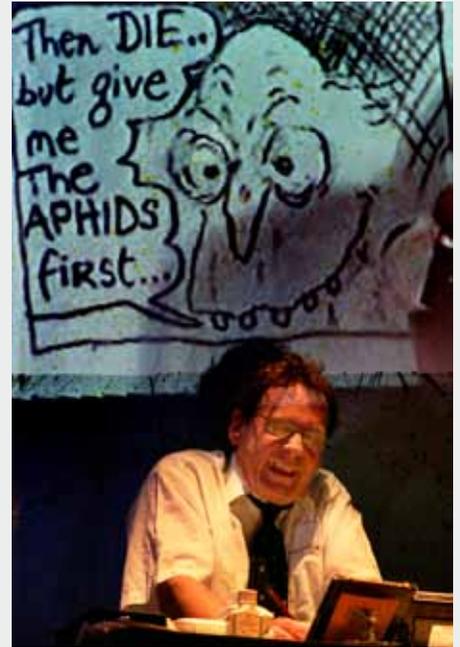
For all of its lofty erudition, this writing surprised and inspired me with its cultural breadth of reference and witty, lyric verbal

grapplings with performance languages. His writing challenged my assumption that traditional literary criticism was anathemic to non-literary forms and reminded me how rarely I saw great reviews for more formally experimental work that treat the content with as much respect as its vehicle.

The challenge set for our writers was to develop their processes of using written critical responses to expressively articulate the nature of new work and their opinion of it. The festival context proposed a particular emphasis as a programme of theatre with a relatively broad appeal but with selected shows that drew from a range of forms including cabaret, physical theatre, live music, puppetry, and devised work. Each theatre visit was accompanied by a member of Total Theatre Magazine's editorial team allowing us to offer close feedback on both the journalistic form and content of the reviews during this central phase of the project. Each participant received both written editorial comment on their writing plus a one-on-one tutorial session to discuss the comments and their responses in more detail.

The final workshop session gave us a chance to discuss the work seen together (we asked participants not to discuss the shows with each other whilst they were still developing their writing) whilst starting, tentatively, to define some of the formal qualities of an effective piece of critical writing (one key initial question – effective for whom?). Troubleshooting issues thrown up by the experience of writing for the project brought up some interesting questions – from the practical ('how do you write and watch at the same time?') to the philosophical ('how do you create a good ending?').

As you will see in the material following, every participant wrote a review of Forkbeard Fantasy's new show *The Colour of Nonsense* and their responses excavate some common ground as well as illustrating fascinating divergences in response. We explored in the project the parallel responses of the critical (or perhaps artistic) analysis of whether a show is successful within its own terms vs. the subjective reaction to elements that you enjoy or not. The opportunity to explore multiple reviews of a single show really illustrated for me the dynamism of this model and is a process that feels of particular relevance to work seeking to challenge performance conventions.



The Writing Performance Project took place 27 September – 10 November 2010, hosted by the Hazlitt Theatre, Maidstone and Canterbury Festival. It was led by Cathy Westbrook on behalf of PANeK, and by Beccy Smith on behalf of Total Theatre Magazine, assisted by John Ellingsworth and Cassie Werber.

Total Theatre Magazine is interested in developing further Writing Performance modules with other partners. If you would like to discuss this, email editorial@totaltheatre.org.uk

PANeK (Performing Arts Network Kent) is a county-wide network of practitioners, promoters and organisations that aims to support and develop new theatre and performance in Kent. www.panek.org.uk

PANeK's are hosting a discussion (in Open Space) on the performing arts infrastructure in Kent at: Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury 12 January 2011, 10am-1pm. To reserve a place, email cathy@panek.org.uk

PANeK is funded by the national lottery through Arts Council England; Kent County Council; East Kent Local Authority Arts Partnership; and the Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury University.

Beccy Smith and her team of writers all saw Forkbeard Fantasy's *The Colour of Nonsense* at the Theatre Royal, Margate on 23 October 2010. See over for the reviews. www.forkbeardfantasy.co.uk

PANeK | Total Theatre Magazine – Writing Performance: Forkbeard Fantasy The Colour of Nonsense



The first five minutes set the tone gleefully: a middle-aged man (played by Chris Britton) arrives at his office; the rain, his slog up flights of stairs, the oddball characters he passes along the way, are all conjured via Foley sound performed live on stage (by Ed Jobling) on a baroque sound desk. The world is madcap and the message clear – a complete, artificial reality can be conjured through art. The man, we learn, is a conceptual artist whose current commission – ‘Nonsense’ – is proving slippery. This frame offers us a doorway into some of the show’s most tenderly treated material: verse and animations (by Tim Britton) based on Edward Lear’s poems and philosophic riffs on the nature of art.

But the world of our three artists – Splash, Line and Scuro – delves deeper in its exploration. Forkbeard’s trademark collision of live action with filmed frames and animations, which effortlessly and hilariously pepper the performance, foregrounds the mobility of illusion and reality in the theatre. In a show whose material seems made for Forkbeard, *The Colour of Nonsense* starts to dismantle the idea of art, and illusion, itself, as the trio embark on a commission to make an invisible artwork. Whilst obviously drawing from the Emperor’s New Clothes, their treatment goes further in its satire and its final ambiguous gesture that the illusion is both fantasy and real. For what else is theatre if not the illusion simultaneously real and imagined?

These rich and involving ideas are ingeniously packaged in a colourful melee of visual and comedic storytelling. Preposterous masks, cartoon, live animation, the warm charm of thirty year’s of collaboration, some very silly characters, and one very clever parrot puppet vent – the show can occasionally feel over-packed but certainly offers a wild and exhilarating ride with a company for whom fantasy is a trademark.

Beccy Smith is a freelance dramaturg, director of Touched Theatre, and Total Theatre Magazine Reviews Editor

Trepidation mixed with excitement is the best way to describe my feelings when entering the Theatre Royal Margate for Forkbeard Fantasy’s *The Colour of Nonsense*. Suppose I don’t get it? Suppose it’s too highbrow? Suppose everyone is laughing – or worse, crying! – and I just join in without knowing why! Suppose there is just that one little bit of me – a fly in the ointment if you like – that says, ‘But who is to say whether this is funny, sad, relevant?’ Hooray for that fly – ‘Cedric’ – star of *The Colour of Nonsense*, and the valued pet of Line, Scuro and Splash, conceptual artists of some renown (twenty years ago), now facing a looming deadline for a Milanese exhibition that they haven’t even started work on. When Hermione, their agent, abandons the three and gives the exhibition instead to a delighted young Turk snapping at their heels, they are left with their exquisite tulip miniatures, hysterical comic book, and the comic musings of a pantomime parrot. Enter the sinister Angstrom with a commission so provocative they cannot resist...

With a sigh of relief, here is the acknowledgement that contemporary art can have us wondering if we are in some way being duped. This is a breath of fresh air from all that theatre that takes theatre so seriously. *The Colour of Nonsense* owes much to Hans Christian Andersen for the basic premise and yet manages to be powerfully moving, particularly with the delightful animated rendition of the Edward Lear poem, ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’.

Mandy Hare is the Theatre and Events Manager at the Hazlitt Arts Centre in Maidstone

Set in the studio of the cartoon-like characters of Line, Splash and Scuro, *The Colour of Nonsense* begins with three artists at work creating an installation called ‘Nonsense’ for a big exhibition. Line leads the narrative as the creator of a secret comic book detailing the everyday lives of the studio. Splash fell

from the top of the art pile ten, no twenty, years ago and wears the wig, shades and suit of a 1950s game show host or vaudeville entertainer. Scuro, 50% performer, 50% technician, skulks in the shadows lost in his world of sound. Chris and Tim Britton in particular are wonderfully entertaining performers, their age and background (they’ve worked together for over 30 years and aren’t professionally trained actors) enhance their presence.

The Forkbeard multimedia trademark of performers controlling the sound, projections and puppets on stage creates an inclusive live experience. Playing multiple roles the cast introduce other characters including the villain Angstrom and the Stanley Baxteresque Hermione. These characters showcase Forkbeard’s use of technology and theatrical gags (Hermione only appears on a screen which represents an elevator), but there were a few too many characters, individual stories and themes going on without the opportunity to explore, understand and absorb each one.

Amongst the absurdity of Cedric the talking fly, tulipomaniacs and invisible artwork, lies an understanding of the human condition. A charming illustrative animation of the Edward Lear poem ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’ catches you quite off guard, provoking within me a genuine emotional response. As Line says: ‘It’s a truly wondrous thing to be always searching for something you really love but will never attain.’

Natalie Eacersall is a professional actress with writing, devising and directing experience, and an MA in Theatre Practices from Rose Bruford College

The delight in *The Colour of Nonsense* is how it skilfully persuades us to abandon ourselves to its nonsensical world and remain there. In this, the piece’s key influence could not be clearer: the irreverent tone of Edward Lear’s poetry pervades throughout. Indeed, through



this lens *The Colour of Nonsense* revels in a heightened sense of the ridiculous to better reflect the absurdity inherent in striving for order in the first place.

Events spiral out of control at a farcical pace as the artists Splash, Line and Scuro struggle to generate material for a 'Nonsense' exhibition. Amidst the chaos, the ultimate Invisible Artwork is born, lauded as the epitome of conceptual art and sure to save the trio's fortunes, representing, as it does, absolutely nothing. Inventively realised, with effective inter-textual references including *The Emperor's New Clothes*, the exaggerated characters intrigue us, and drive the narrative well for the most part, only occasionally lapsing into a pantomime style that grates a little.

Forkbeard Fantasy have a long-established reputation for inventive multimedia theatre, and this production utilises imaginative effects to create engaging narratives examining society's thirst for something 'new': Line disappears from stage to follow Lear's animated Dong, climbing a filmic 'abstract staircase' which is beautifully executed, and characters on screens pass actors objects which quickly become real. Here boundaries between recorded and live action and reality and fantasy are gleefully blurred until one happily ignores the joins. Yet what appeals most is the robust storytelling, and the sheer creative energy that it is its result.

Sarah Davies is a drama lecturer, playwright and director based in Kent, with specialisms in Contemporary Theatre and Scriptwriting

The Earth has flooded and humans live in tower blocks in the North Pole. Plant life is reduced to treasured collections and only jellyfish are left in the sea (made into chewy sandwiches!). In this dismal future live conceptual artists Splash, Line and Scuro, who are preparing an art exhibition titled Nonsense. The stage is set as a cluttered, top-floor studio, ideal for pantomime entrances through



imaginary windows, exits up temporary stairs and the baddie falling down a lift shaft, somewhere off-stage-left.

The Colour of Nonsense took three worlds and jumbled them up into one stream of slapstick, anarchic action. Us in the theatre, the North Pole future and the past through Edward Lear's evocative poetry and illustrations, woven together in a bubble of rare innocence. Forkbeard Fantasy's comedy theatre was devoid of all smutty, lurid or demeaning jokes. However, with too much going on, the allusion to our human indecision to react to the environmental collapse heading our way was lost in the pursuit of a quick laugh. Sitting on red velvet, in a spectacular Georgian Theatre, my mind wandered to Margate Theatre Royal's past and to those who had shared the stage with the three men in daft costumes, now fooling around up there. Perhaps that was it! To realise the nonsense of sitting in a theatre when the sea, just down the road, is slowly rising.

Alice Taylor is a drama and arts educationalist working across the South East

The Colour of Nonsense tackled theatre from an angle I hadn't personally experienced before. The play was crammed full of intelligent observations and insights on human and social behaviour, and packaged colourfully in theatrical nonsense! The play uses film, animation, and a collection of props – techniques which at times seemed to have moulded the development of the script rather than to have been created in service of it. Nonetheless, one couldn't help getting the strong sense that there was a collaborative familiarity that allowed the performers to be somewhat less attached to their strange onstage props and technical goings-on than a less experienced performance group would have been. There was also the sense that this was a performance that had grown from the performers' own understanding of what they personally found amusing rather than a direct desire to please the audience, and this gave

a kind of childlike innocence to the overall performance which was at the same time in no way childish.

This maturity of the actors and their obvious cohesion allowed them to focus on the intricacies of the production and the well-developed storyline and script. The script was made up of a number of astute observations on human behaviour that were beautifully concealed in a combination of poetry, rhyme, animation and sheer nonsense! The overall effect was delightful and one felt fully immersed in the perceptions of the individuals engaged in the performance while at the same time kept at bay by their own evident confidence in their art.

Lorraine Iwa Kashdan is a poet, a performer, the director of *The Word*, and the editor of social-i

The Colour of Nonsense takes its narrative thrust from *The Emperor's New Clothes*, where seeing and believing are complicated by people's willingness to be deceived. In this case the invisible clothes are an invisible artwork commissioned by a tulip obsessed millionaire and the artwork is, at first, a screaming success...

We see people drop out of and into projected video, interact and converse with it. But do we ever *really* believe they just jumped out of the screen? No. Our reason tells us otherwise, we register that and move on.

There seems to be something deep about the ideas at play here. If seeing is believing, and you cannot see the thing that is to be believed... what do you do? Play along? Stand alone and risk being made a fool? By the end of *The Colour of Nonsense* people start to believe their eyes and see nothing when they look at the invisible artwork and the show ends in a panic. This seems to me to be the crux of the problem.

For all of its skill and narrative creativity *The Colour of Nonsense* fails to really look at, open up, a potentially fascinating ground where seeing and believing can be held up, pulled apart. Instead, with some competent skill we get a slight taste of what it is like to see and believe, without ever being satisfied as an audience member that something has been changed/learned/inspected/analysed. Instead, the surface was tantalisingly scratched but the piece was always subservient to the humour, grotesquery, theatrical tricks and technology which are Forkbeard Fantasy's trademark.

Rick Bollinger is a Kent based theatre practitioner and writer

All images: Forkbeard Fantasy *The Colour of Nonsense*. All photos by Maisie Hill, except Tulip Head (page 36 right), which is by Forkbeard Fantasy

UPDATE

LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME FESTIVAL RETURNS FOR 2011

A bright light in a depressive season, the London International Mime Festival returns for 2011 with the customary mix of the bizarre and the sublime.

Josef Nadj, a genreless titan whose work has produced some of the pivotal performances of the last half century, returns to the Mime Festival with *Les Corbeaux* (*The Crows*), a duet between Nadj and jazz musician Akosh Szelevényi that evokes the spirit of the bird using little more than white paper and a barrel of black paint. As with LIMF08 show *Paso Doble* – a sculpture performance enacted in front of, on top of, behind and in a giant wall of clay – *Les Corbeaux* sees Nadj's roaming intellect wandering the grounds between visual art and choreography.

Also from France, and coming to LIMF after a year of triumphant homeland performances, Compagnie MPTA/Mathurin Bolze present *Du Goudron et des Plumes* (*Tar and Feathers*), a grand adaptation of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* that plays out on a destructible, suspended stage – perhaps a ship or vessel. Festival regulars will remember Bolze from his 2009 collaboration with Hedi Thabet, the spare and beautiful *Ali*.

From the UK, harness aerial specialists Upswing are presenting the London premiere of a new piece, *Fallen*, that draws on the life story of director Vicki Amedume's mother, a Ghanaian asylum seeker. Folding themes of migration, exodus and identity into a contemporary love story, it incorporates animation from Paper Cinema's Nic Rawling. Also based in the UK, and old-hands at LIMF, puppetry company FaultyOptic return with a world premiere, *Flogging a Dead Horse*, which 'starts 11 kms down in the deepest ocean, where ink blots, intercoms and moon theory are all part of an investigation into the similarities between seabed sludge and the human brain'.

Exhibiting an enduring affection for wicked and nightmare puppets, this year LIMF invite back Spanish company Teatro Corsario with *La Maldición de Poe* (*The Curse of Poe*), their take on the stories of the famous and much-adapted gothic writer, plus there's a piece conceived and directed by former Buchinger's Boot Marionettes creative director Patrick Sims (working now under the company name Les Antiaclastes), *Hilum*, which features the same fetishistic and macabre cut of puppet as previous shows *Vestibular Folds* and *The Armature of the Absolute* (and offers the apotheosis of a Mime Festival one-sentence synopsis: 'A micro comic-tragedy based on the cycles of the washing machine and set in the basement of a rundown museum of natural history.').



Akhe Gobo



Compagnie MPTA/Mathurin Bolze Du Goudron et des Plumes



Anagoor Tempesta

Then, conceptually twinned and screaming out for some sort of ticket deal, there's *The Art of Dying*, by Danish clowns Paolo Nani & Kristjan Ingimarsson, and an updated version of Jos Houben's performance-lecture analysis of physical comedy, *The Art of Laughter*. Further demonstrating the practice, Compagnia 2+1 present *La Porta*, an extended riff on a series of classic entrance and exit routines that's toured the big old-style circuses: Roncalli, Monti and Knie, and Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey; and then, with darker thoughts and sharper teeth, Geoff Sobelle and Charlotte Ford's *Flesh and Blood & Fish and Fowl*, a piece placing the grotesque bouffon in the ugly and claustrophobic world of the modern office. Recently seen at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, *Flesh and Blood* was nominated for a Total Theatre Award (in the Physical and Visual Theatre category) and won a Fringe First.

From Italy, there's Anagoor's *Tempesta*, a lushly realised multimedia piece inspired by the Renaissance artist Giorgione; from France, formalist director Aurélien Bory – seen previously on these shores with *Les Sept Planches de la Ruse*, his piece inspired by the mathematics of the Chinese tangram puzzle – presents *Sans Objet*, a three-way piece between acrobats Olivier Alenda and Olivier Boyer and an industrial robotic arm that used to work piecing together cars; Russian improv-

technologists Akhe Engineering Theatre offer seventeen short vignettes collected together as *Gobo. Digital Glossary*; French artists Jean-Paul Lefeuvre & Didier André continue their close and patient work at the crossing-point of circus and object theatre; and, in the Roundhouse's Studio Theatre, Finland's Circo Aereo present a miniature one-man circus show from Jani Nuttinen, who as well as performing the piece is responsible for the direction, the script, and the lighting and set and costume design.

As usual there are Meet the Artist events and a workshop programme that includes: Angela de Castro's How to be a Stupid; Introduction to Corporeal Mime by Theatre de l'Ange Fou; Introduction to Commedia as a Performance Tool by Barry Grantham; Stuck With You (on clown duos) with Geoff Sobelle and Charlotte Ford; Jonathan Young's Clown Through Mask; Gavin Glover's Puppet as Performer; and Creating Theatre and Performance by former Lecoq head of pedagogy, and founder of LISP, Thomas Prattki.

See the LIMF website for full details.

The London International Mime Festival runs 15-30 January 2011 at the Barbican, the ICA, the Royal Opera House's Linbury Studio Theatre, the Roundhouse, and the Southbank Centre.
www.mimelondon.com

UPDATE ORGANISATIONS



Live Art Development Agency



Puppet Place

Puppet Place, the artform support organisation in the South West, has recently announced the dates for the next Bristol Festival of Puppetry, 25 August – 4 September 2011. Building on the success of the first festival in 2009, the programme will be a mix of international, local and national acts for all ages. There will also be a professionals programme providing opportunities for puppeteers and others working in animation to develop skills and meet each other. In the meantime Puppet Place continues to run a series of Puppet Surgeries tailored to respond to the needs of puppeteers. If you want particular training or advice, let the Place know and they will do their very best to help you. For further details about the festival and Puppet Surgeries please visit www.puppetplace.org

Live Art Development Agency: Featuring newly commissioned performances by Martin O'Brien and Noëmi Lakmaier, a retrospective by Disabled Avant-Garde, and a series of panel discussions, polemics and screenings by artists and thinkers, Restock, Rethink, Reflect 2: Live Art and Disability aspires to reflect, map and archive the ways in which live art has been, and continues to be, a potent platform for artists to explore notions of identity and representation; and to resource and empower artists now and in the future. The event takes place 4 & 5 March 2011 at Club Row, Arnold Circus. www.thisisliveart.co.uk

UPDATE VENUES



Kazuko Hohki Evidence for the Existence of Borrowers at BAC

BAC: Running the Christmas season at BAC, two gratifyingly non-festive shows: *The Animals & Children Took to the Streets*, the new piece from 1927 (former TT Award winners with *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*) introducing the sprawling, stinking tenement block, Bayou Mansions (8 December 2010 – 8 January 2011); and *The Great Escape (A Borrower's Tale)*, a revision of Kazuko Hohki's (also TT Award winning) *Evidence for the Existence of Borrowers*, this time aimed at the 6-11 age group (4-31 December). www.bac.org.uk

Jacksons Lane: This Christmas Jacksons Lane will be teaming up with the internationally renowned puppet company Little Angel Theatre to bring family audiences a wonderful adaptation of Roald Dahl's classic story *Fantastic Mr Fox*. Mr Fox has three very nasty enemies, Boggis, Bunce and Bean. These greedy farmers hate Mr Fox so much they will stop at nothing to get rid of him. They try to shoot, starve and dig him out of his hole, however Mr Fox is much cleverer than they are and has a cunning plan of his own. Running 4-31 December 2010. www.jacksonslane.org.uk



1927 *The Animals and The Children Took to the Streets* at BAC



Chloe Déchery *Marie* at CPT



Pins and Needles *The Elves and the Shoemakers* at Bristol's Tobacco Factory



Little Angel Theatre *The Fantastic Mr Fox* at Jacksons Lane

Camden People's Theatre: 2011 kicks off at CPT with the return of Elyssa Livergant's CPT-developed *A kiss from the last red squirrel*, along with showings of new work from old friends dANTE OR dIE and artist Chloe Déchery with *Marie*. DogOrange's *Ward No.6* takes up residency in February, followed hot on the heels by *Sprint 2011*, a month long celebration of the best contemporary performance – the full line-up of performances, workshops and discussions will be announced in January. See the website for details and information about companies developing work at CPT. www.cpttheatre.co.uk

The Barbican: Moving into 2011, the Barbican's BITE season refreshes again, beginning with two LIMF shows (see separate news item) and then moving into a programme that's all about returning companies and past connections. Following on from the nine-hour, panoramic *Lipsynch* two years ago, Robert Lepage returns with *The Blue Dragon* (17-26 February); theatre maestro Peter Brook is at the venue once again with an interpretation of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* (23-27 March); and Toneelgroep Amsterdam, last seen at the Barbican with their six-hour Shakespeare marathon *Roman Tragedies*, bring *Antonioni Project*, an ambitious staging of Michelangelo Antonioni's ground-breaking 1960s film trilogy *L'Avventura*, *La Notte* and *L'Eclisse* (1-5 February). www.barbican.org.uk

The Tobacco Factory: Snook's Shoe Shop has fallen on hard times. Mr and Mrs Snookmeyer have only enough leather for one last pair of shoes. They're going to need a Christmas miracle to save their business. When midnight strikes, help arrives in the form of two mischievous elves with an unsurpassed talent for shoemaking. *The Elves and the Shoemakers*, an exciting new adaptation of the Brothers Grimm classic fairytale, produced by Pins and Needles Productions, will play at The Brewery Theatre in Bristol 17 December 2010 - 9 January 2011. www.tobaccofactorytheatre.com | www.pinsandneedlesproductions.co.uk

UPDATE TRAINING + PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Spymonkey

Aerial Journeys with John-Paul Zaccarini:

John-Paul Zaccarini (Company FZ) is running a two-day courses in Bristol next January. Aimed at aerialists working in the static disciplines, the workshop explores the narratives inherent in aerial practice, and will lead the participants through to the creation of something both challenging and surprising that will provide solid skills and fresh ideas for creating new work. 15 & 16 January 2011, 10am - 4pm. £160 / £140 concession (concession rate available to early bird bookers up to one month before the course).

www.companyfz.com

Clown Through Mask: A synthesis of Native North American and European clowning traditions, this introductory course explores how the clown can act as mirror to the audience's own humanity. Rather than defining the clown as stupid or naïve, participants become beautifully ridiculous by facing and expressing all aspects of the self by each making six masks. In this intensive week, participants will each make, wear and clown with the first mask; exploring presence, colour, innocence and experience. This visionary training is for performers and artists open to working through the body, voice and imagination. Led by Jonathan Young, artistic director of Shams. 24 - 28 January, 10am - 5.30pm, central London as part of the London International Mime Festival. www.shams.org.uk

Jonathan Kay Masterclass: Fooling is a unique technique that introduces the architecture of your own inner stage – upon which you are able to perform in any space and at any time, using improvisation and your own imagination. This work stretches past ego, allowing you to feel at ease in any situation and comfortable talking intimately with anyone, be they a beggar or a king. Aimed at professionals with at least five years experience in their work and a desire to perform. 15-30 January 2011, Brighton. www.jonathankay.co.uk



John-Paul Zaccarini of Company FZ

Urban Performance Project Workshop:

This intensive weekend workshop will focus on the use of the body and the voice to explore and develop physical presence. Working with various leaders and their different approaches, the actor will discover techniques to liberate the source energy, develop clarity in movement, and uncover a more vital and authentic presence. Under the direction of Hotel Medea's creators the participants will experience different elements of their performance research and their approach to performance in which presence, energy and precision are the basis for creativity.

11 & 12 December at Stratford Circus, London. 9am-9pm; £48. info@para-active.com

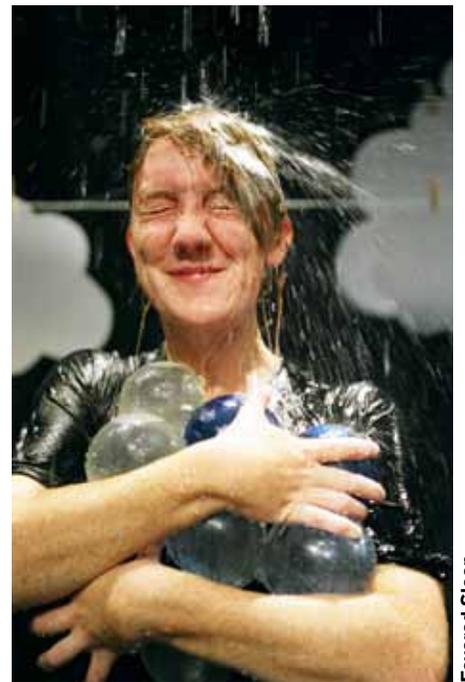
Pig Iron School: Philadelphia's Obie Award winning Pig Iron Theatre Company has announced the opening of The Pig Iron School for Advanced Performance Training, a two-year, intensive training programme in physical and ensemble generated theatre. Students will work directly with one of America's leading companies, and the course is ideal for both recent university graduates, young actors and directors, and established working artists seeking post-secondary training. Now accepting applications for autumn 2011. For more details contact info@pigironschool.org

Spymonkey Clown Masterclass: Participants will learn to develop what makes them funny, hone their skills and discover how to make an audience belly laugh whilst being part of a great group dynamic. The performer who dares to stand before a crowd, unafraid to make mistakes and find pleasure in being wonderfully silly will reap fruitful rewards. Suitable for theatre professionals and students 18+. Led by Aitor Basauri, Spymonkey co-founder, clown teacher at Phillipe Gaulier School, Paris and Cirque Du Soleil, Montreal and Las Vegas. At the People Show Studios, London 28 February – 4 March 2011. £250 (£230 concessions). To book call +44 1273 670282 or visit www.spymonkey.co.uk/workshops.htm

UPDATE PERFORMER + COMPANY



Gomito Productions



Fevered Sleep



Walk The Plank



Horse + Bamboo

Bottlefed spent the autumn in Norway, running workshops and performing at Feitaboogie Festival Bergen and Nordic Black Theatre Oslo. Additionally the company finalised a promotional film for Haringey Youth Council. In November/December they performed *Hold Me Until You Break* at Noche Scratxe Vitoria (Spain) and were resident at Centre Dürrenmatt Neuchatel (Switzerland) developing a new work as part of 'Concerts Résonances'. This performance will be repeated at Jazzwerkstatt Bern in February 2010. During spring 2011 Bottlefed will run another Creative Partnerships project at Bulmershe Secondary, working with teachers to develop creative teaching methods using technology.
www.bottlefed.org | info@bottlefed.org

Famous and Divine: After showing their new work at Prototype, a work-in-progress event at the Tobacco Factory, Bristol, Famous and Divine are now developing *Fugitive Songs* to preview at the University Theatre, Bath Spa University 18 March 2011. Two women appear on an empty stage; they are responding to the call of a piece of music. They find themselves in a landscape of desire and fantasy, fugitives from their everyday lives. As their sense of self erodes they discover a realm of unravelling identities reflecting the films they have seen, the dreams they have dreamt, and the songs they yearn to sing.
www.famousanddivine.co.uk

Fevered Sleep: The creators of *Brilliant* and *The Forest* return with a show about drips, drops and downpours. Created especially for three and four year-olds, *And the Rain Falls Down* is a visually stunning celebration of the watery things in the world. There are opportunities to get wet: if your child wants to join in, please bring a change of clothing and a towel. Changing areas will be provided. At The Young Vic, London 24 February – 12 March 2011.
www.feveredsleep.co.uk

Full Beam Visual Theatre: Full Beam have announced they will be part of the SITE residency scheme set up by Tobacco Factory Theatre and Theatre Bristol. The company will be using their residency to research and develop ideas using puppetry and multimedia for a new piece inspired by David Hwang's play *M Butterfly*, exploring relationships between East & West in the Digital Age and reflecting on the themes of identity and self-representation found in Hwang's work.
www.tobaccofactorytheatre.com | www.fullbeamvisualtheatre.org.uk

Gomito Productions: A Christmas-loving chestnut seller arrives in a new town to celebrate his favourite time of year, but discovers that all traces of festivity are missing. No lights, no tinsel, no toys. They have all been banned in the wake of one of the most terrible events ever, The Great Christmas Disaster. He manages to rekindle the spirit of the season in a timid new friend and with the help of an eccentric old toymaker they embark on a mission to return the Christmas cheer to the townspeople. Gomito Productions present *A Toymaker's Christmas* at The Junction, Cambridge 7 December 2010 – 2 January 2011 (excluding 17, 25 & 26 December and 1 January).
www.gomito.co.uk



Pan-Gottic Circus Theatre



Full Beam Visual Theatre



Wet Picnic

Green Ginger: Illuminate, the organisers of the Longest Night event in Bristol have commissioned Green Ginger to create an animated shop window for the eastern end of North Street in BS3. The company will be working with robotics engineers David McGoran and Ben Winstone alongside modelmaker Rosie Wakeley. Meanwhile, Chris Pirie, artistic director of Green Ginger, will be hosting the first in a series of regular Puppet Surgeries on behalf of Puppet Place, Bristol's artform support organisation. Puppeteers are invited to bring along a puppet or animated element, either finished or in prototype stage, to an informal workshop designed to discover the possibilities and maximise the potential of their creations.

www.greenginger.net

Horse + Bamboo: It's not always easy making friends, especially when you live in a lighthouse surrounded by dangerous rocks, towering waves and troublemaking seagulls. An exciting opportunity for a tea party with a friend arises when the supply boat comes, but the lighthouse keeper's nervousness turns what could have been a delight into a disaster. It is only when a storm blows in and real disaster looms that he can find the courage to save the day and rebuild his friendship. Written, directed and designed by Alison Duddle and Bob Frith, and with music by Chris Davies, *Storm in a Teacup* will be touring extensively through the beginning of next year, starting at the Royal Exchange Studio, Manchester on 12 January. See the website for full tour dates: www.horseandbamboo.org

Metro-Boulot-Dodo are back in the workshop making the final part of their Four Seasons series of work, *Summer*. In 2011 all four large-scale installations will be touring individually and simultaneously in a number of cities across the UK. Four Seasons follows Polly's journey from 8 to 80 years old, charting innocence, love, loss, regret and acceptance along the way. MBD will also be collaborating with Companynia se Teatre de Catalunya to deliver an exciting new project for Meridians in 2011. A commission based in Singapore is also on the cards plus a site-specific project at the National Trust property Cannons Ashby. www.metro-boulot-dodo.com

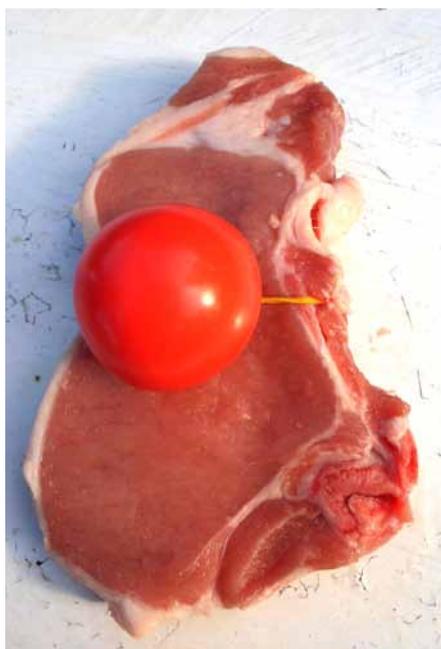
Mimbre: After a successful tour in UK and Europe in 2010, Mimbre are now taking bookings for *Until Now* for summer 2011. Whilst *Until Now* continues touring Mimbre will also be following up a successful R&D at The National Theatre with the creation of a new show *Bodies Falling Upwards*. mimbre are currently looking for commissioners and supporters for the project which will be produced in 2011 and tour in 2012. www.mimbre.co.uk | info@mimbre.co.uk

Nola Rae will be directing a new clown drama, *Almost a Classic*, in Stockholm 1-8 December, with a premiere on 8 December at the city's Teater Tre, moving then to France to work as choreographer with Rolando Villazón on his new production of Massenet's Opera *Werther* at Lyon Opera House, which premieres 24 January 2011. In February of next year there are currently two confirmed dates for *Elizabeth's Last Stand* – 17 February, Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea; and 19 February, Ucheldre Centre, Holyhead – but keep an eye on the website for more. www.nolarae.com

PanGottic Circus-Theatre: After picking up an award at a French Clown Festival and playing across Europe, PanGottic are touring nationally this spring with their critically acclaimed debut show *Full Twist* before heading back to the continent for another summer on the European Festival circuit. Telling an epic tale full of pathos and absurdity, *Full Twist* goes from the very first date right through to marriage and babies, weaving in a quirky sub-plot using large masks in which the cleaning staff find romance over rubber gloves. PanGottic are also currently developing their new full-length performance *Yalla Yalla*, a collaboration with musician and composer Vid Warren, who will be performing live on stage. A work-in-progress showing will take place beginning of 2011 at Jackson's Lane Theatre, London before a two-week run at the Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol. www.pangottic.com



State of Emergency



Nola Rae



Faceless Company



Rajni Shah

Pickled Image: Little Red Riding Hood is out on stage telling the world the same old story about Grandma and the Big Bad Wolf, blah, blah, blah! Come backstage and meet Mr B.B. Wolf, renowned thespian and notorious villain, as he takes a break between scenes to set the record straight. Is Red Riding Hood as innocent as she seems? Is Grandma as sweet as she claims? And as for those three little pigs... Pickled Image use puppetry, shadows and songs to create a spectacular and hilarious exposé of the truth behind these classic fairytales. For all big kids over five who love a tasty tail. Are you afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf? Touring throughout spring 2011.
www.rempjects.com/Wolf_Tales.html | www.pickledimage.co.uk

Rajni Shah Projects: With *Glorious*, Rajni Shah and company have created a haunting and unusual new musical which will feature local musicians and performances by local residents at each location on its UK tour. The piece explores the spaces of both fear and hope that have emerged as a result of an increased awareness towards climate change, shifts in border policies, and the dramatic impact of the financial collapse. At a time when many people feel disempowered and frustrated, this production beautifully embraces a sense of hope in an unknown future. *Glorious* will preview 26 February 2011 as part of NottDance, Nottingham.
www.rajnishah.com/glorious

Shams: Following a successful Edinburgh run with *Reykjavik*, Shams are preparing to tour the show to venues nationally in the spring. This autumn, the company have also begun work on a new piece of visual theatre, *Thin Ice* (working title), for 2011. A man sits frozen solid in a remote Arctic weather station. Based on historical sources, *Thin Ice* is a wartime thriller set in Greenland 1940, and will feature Shams' imaginative use of space, image and text within a richly-layered narrative.
www.shams.org.uk

Peggy Shaw and Clod Ensemble: In collaboration with Clod Ensemble, legendary New York performance artist Peggy Shaw takes audiences on a journey across the landscape of her own body in *Must*. Renowned for her gender-bending autobiographical work, she recounts her extraordinary experiences of the medical profession from her current perspective as a 65-year-old lesbian grandmother. *Must* weaves together the stories of a lifetime, with projected microscopic images, and live musicians performing a powerful score for piano, double bass and violin. At The Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster 8 March 2011.
www.splitbritches.com | www.clodensemble.com | www.fueltheatre.com

Pen-ultimate: Set in a seedy underworld of high-rollers, gangsters and con men, Pen-ultimate's *A Night On The Tiles* mixes tightly woven wordplay with send-ups of heist, caper and kung-fu movies. With dramaturgy from hip-hop pioneer Will Power and direction by Montserrat Gili, the show blends spoken word and dark humour with digital animation. Pen-ultimate is a diverse collective of internationally recognised poets, actors, MCs and playwrights – Ben Mellor, Ali Gadema aka Frisko Dan, Martin Stannage aka Visceral, Niven Ganner and Samira Arhin-Acquaah aka Lucidity. Tour starts 4 March 2011 at The Broadway Barking and finishes at Arts Alive in Shropshire 2 April.
www.pen-ultimate.net



The Devil's Violin Company

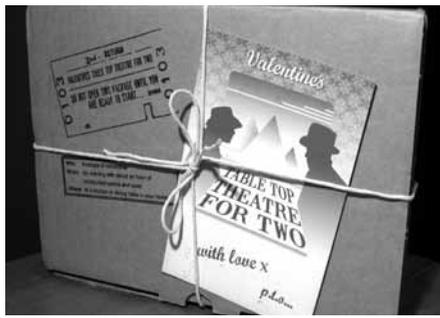


Table Top Theatre



Pen-ultimate



Paper Birds



Picked Image

State of Emergency: *Desert Crossings* is a landscape where the physical and metaphysical merge. A collaboration between South West based producers State of Emergency and South African choreographer Gregory Maqoma of Vuyani Dance Theatre, the performance works with five dancers drawn from different cultural backgrounds. Inspired by the similarities between the UK South West Jurassic Coast and the Skeleton Coast of Namibia, Gregory Maqoma examines human evolution and how the landscape influences us. Touring 16 February to 31 March 2011, with venues including The Place, London 1 March; and Pegasus Theatre, Oxford 25 & 26 February.
www.stateofemergencyltd.com

Table Top Theatre: Looking for a theatrical alternative to the usual gift of flowers and chocolates at Valentine's Day? *Table Top Theatre for Two* provides a romantic interlude and some time out of time, evoking the classic black and white movie era in your home. A mystery package contains everything needed to set the scene across a table for a unique Valentine's journey that begins when two strangers meet on a train. Instructions, scripts, mini props and surprise objects are all included to help players create their own personal piece of theatre and capture the essence of Valentine's Day. Just £15 per couple. To find out more or purchase visit:
www.once.uk.com

Théâtre Sans Frontières are touring their brand new production in simple French for 8 to 12 year olds, *Les Aventures de Lapin*, to schools February - April 2011. Based on amusing tales from the French-speaking Caribbean, *Les Aventures de Lapin* has evolved from a LinkedUp collaborative drama and French project with schools in North and South Tyneside.
www.tsf.org.uk

The Devil's Violin Company: This is where the story spirits live. This is the place where heroes learn fear. A beautiful bird sings of a dark secret and Death is imprisoned in the shell of a nut. Powerful storytelling and music combo The Devil's Violin Company continue to tour their current show, *The Singing Bones*, a piece that spins music and words together to create a richly evocative landscape.
www.thedevilsviolin.co.uk

The Faceless Company are taking their dysfunctional family of Snowmen on Christmas tour again this year. Whilst Mum shops for bras and Dad tries desperately to get to the pub, Junior runs amok in the town centre. This year's festive antics take place in Centerparcs (Cumbria and Nottingham), Featherstone, Wakefield and Leigh. Faceless will also be heading to Bayswater in London to involve 150 school children in a Lantern procession.
www.facelessco.com

The Paper Birds: This December The Paper Birds will begin an ACE-funded research and development period for their next show, working with Sue Parrish from Sphinx Theatre and Rod Dixon from Red Ladder. The company will also host a 'Feminist Future's' symposium on the 3rd December at Leeds Met University to inspire a dialogue that marks the path for the future of feminist theatre. The Paper Birds' next work is in the making, so take a look at their website for upcoming scratch performances. The company will also be touring *Others* across the UK spring 2010 – check the website for all tour dates.
www.thepaperbirds.com

Uninvited Guests: Let's raise our glasses to long lost loves and current lovers, to mums, to dads and to absent friends. *Love Letters Straight From Your Heart* is an event that is somewhere between a wedding reception, a wake and a radio dedication show. The performers speak of their own and other's loves – deep, passionate, ambivalent and unrequited – and dedicate songs to them. At Tobacco Factory, Bristol 22-23 January 2011; Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick 27-30 January 2011; and The Old Book Binders, Oxford 15 & 16 January 2011.
www.uninvited-guests.net

Unpacked are performing their new children's theatre show *Robin and the Big Freeze*, commissioned by Brighton Dome, at the Pavilion Theatre 8-12 December and then at the Peepul Centre in Leicester 13-18 December. A festive family treat with live music, puppetry and bird watching for all – whether you're fleeing the nest or ruling the roost this Christmas. Music by Ben Glasstone. The company are also touring *The Show Must Go On* (supported by the Puppet Centre Trust) and *Jumping Mouse* throughout 2011.
www.unpacked.org

Walk the Plank: Walk the Plank, working together with director Mark Murphy, are producing a spectacular opening show called *This Side, The Other Side* in Turku (Finland) to mark the beginning of its European Capital of Culture year. Aerial performance, massed choirs, an original score, fire, pyrotechnics and special effects will come together around the theme 'communication' – inspired by the city's current position as a telecommunications hub, as well as its ship-building heritage. A major participation programme, involving 2000 local people, will leave a lasting impression on Turku, and the tens of thousands of spectators expected to see the show.
www.walktheplank.co.uk

Wet Picnic: After several months in the swelteringly hot climate of Shanghai performing their brand new street show, *Time For Tea*, Wet Picnic have returned to the cooler climes of the UK and are busy getting ready for a residency at Kent's Slip 6 Creation Centre, where they will be putting the final touches to *Time For Tea* ready for 2011 touring. The company were delighted to receive Arts Council funding for this project, as well as many commissions and lots of support from festivals where they will be performing the show next year.
www.wordpress.com/wetpicnic



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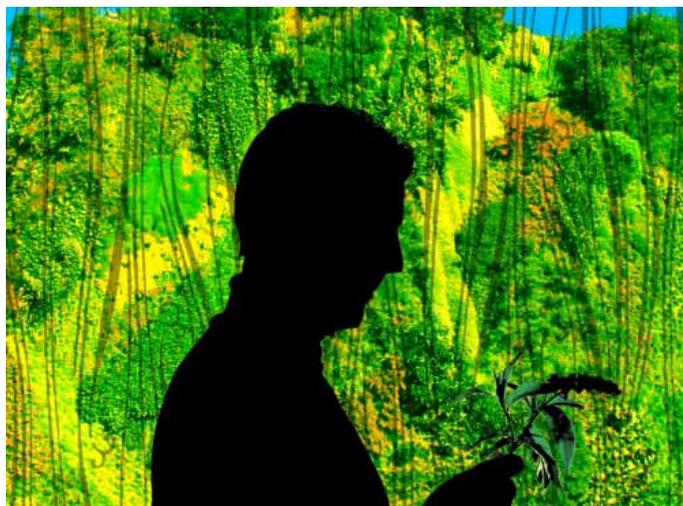
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Out & About



David Leddy Susurrus



Kieran Hurley Hitch. Photo Niall Walker

Crash and burn – Pippa Bailey feels the winter gloom, but there are glimmers of light too

Out & About | Pippa Bailey

As I write, it's another bleak November in the not-so-United Kingdom, and the arts community is struggling to work out how the next round of government funding cuts will affect the sector. During Halloween, scary rumours filled the air. 'I heard that 16% of arts companies won't exist in a year,' came a dramatic whisper during a recent event. There is certainly a level of high drama in the media as reactions to the extensive public sector cuts spread across the nation. Arts Council England has been cut by 29.6 % over the next three years. In the scheme of things this is devastating but not terminal. The Comprehensive Spending Review has delivered a blow for the Arts Council, but actually the full extent of the decisions will not be clear for some months. I predict that the street arts sector, creating free shows and events for some of the poorer communities, will be amongst the hardest hit because of the cuts to local authorities. But suffice it to say we are in for hard times all round. However, the artistic community is resilient and some changes may even be beneficial. Arts Council England have opened their application process for any company wishing to be funded over a two to three year period, and these are due 24 January 2011.

Another rumour that I encourage everyone to circulate is that a consortium of entrepreneurial arts organisations are planning to pitch to take over the running of the National Theatre. Exciting! This is the sort of creative activism that might bring some of the changes we need.

In mid October, I visited Seoul in South Korea with three other producers courtesy of Visiting Arts and the Korean Arts Management Service (KAMS). Cathie Boyd from Cryptic Theatre in Scotland, Miquel Santos from RedOrange who works in

experimental music and Eckhard Thiemann, a freelance dance programmer and producer, were in our party. We spent several days together while KAMS arranged a series of seminars and meetings with some of the leading festival directors and practitioners in Korea. Then we had additional research time to pursue our own interests. South Korea is a fascinating country and the rapid rate of development and industrialisation seems to have mainlined western culture into the veins of its society. Theatre, musicals, hip-hop, ballet, dance theatre, mime and site-specific performance are all finding their space in the landscape but with little connection to the traditional Korean artforms. I attended the Performing Arts Market in Seoul (PAMS) and saw a huge range of live performance. I was particularly impressed by the musical group Metamorphosis, and by traditional Pansori singer Jaram Lee. Both honour cultural heritage whilst successfully finding a contemporary voice and new application for their talents. I visited Gwangju, a city in the south where a new five billion pound Asian Centre for Culture is being built. This extraordinary venture is a good example of the lengths the South Korean government are going to place culture at the heart of regeneration. This was the site of a massacre in 1980 when a demonstration against the newly installed military government of Chun Doo-hwan resulted in hundreds of civilians being killed. Interestingly the new construction has no green action plan, which seemed incomprehensible this side of the world. But Asia still seems to be booming, the atmosphere is buoyant and, in comparison to us, Korea seems to have money to burn.

In Glasgow during IETM (the European Theatre Meeting) at the beginning of November, the dark stone buildings glared down on the 500 delegates. Despite attempts

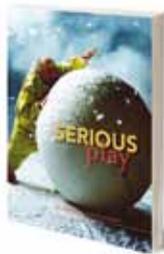
to celebrate the Scottish culture on offer – the event showcasing some brilliant work, including the Total Theatre Award winning show *Roadkill* (see feature elsewhere in this magazine) – there was a sombre mood. The organizers of IETM attempted to shake up the agenda and the plenary session featured keynote speakers from North America: Todd Lester, founder of freeDimensional (which aims to support culture in the service of free expression, justice and equality) and of the Creative Resistance Fund (which helps artists in crisis find refuge); and Mike Daisey, a masterful solo performer who challenges his audiences to think about the connections between our behaviour and its effect on remote poor places in the world. Both offered radical approaches to managing this global crisis. I did have some qualms about the choice of North American guests leading a European meeting (the usual French translation was casually dropped without comment), especially when some would argue that the problems we are facing can be traced back to the USA. Both men mentioned other influences on their work but none of these were women, despite gender being on the agenda in other sessions. For the better part of the meeting, through the many working groups and casual conversations, I longed for more radical solutions whilst many managers talked about campaigns to promote the value of the arts (although the subtext was to try and maintain the status quo).

The Glasgow meeting coincided with Bonfire Night and perhaps I wasn't the only one wondering how the spirit of Guy Fawkes might serve some useful purpose now...

Pippa Bailey is director of Total Theatre, who produce the Total Theatre Awards. See www.totaltheatre.org.uk

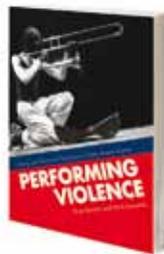
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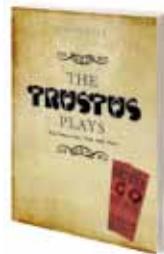
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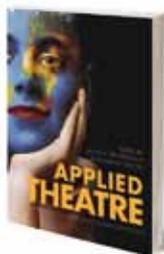
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