

Spring 2012 Volume 24 Issue 01

[totaltheatre.org.uk](http://totaltheatre.org.uk)

# TOTALTHEATRE

## MAGAZINE



**ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD: FROM LANDGUARD POINT TO LONDON BUS TOPS, LONE TWIN AND THE LIONHEART PROJECT  
THE DEVIL AND MISTER PUNCH! JULIAN CROUCH, IN HIS OWN WORDS  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK - A WORLDVIEW OF PERFORMANCE USA  
HAVING A WHALE OF A TIME: LEVIATHAN PART THE SECOND  
PLUS: BEING THERE WITH LITTLE BULB, THE WORKS OF NIE, AND REVIEWS FROM THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL MIME  
FESTIVAL, IF ONLY...! AT BLUECOAT LIVERPOOL, AND THE SACRED SEASON AT CHELSEA THEATRE**

Produced by Turtle Key Arts

# 1 BEACH ROAD



## UK TOUR

*"thoughtful, unsettling,  
beautifully conceived"*  
THE GUARDIAN

*"affecting physical  
theatre"* THE TIMES

*"endlessly  
inventive"* THE METRO

*"extraordinary  
two-hander"*  
THE STAGE

[redcapetheatre.co.uk](http://redcapetheatre.co.uk)

Unity Theatre, Liverpool	21 Feb	0844 873 2888
Lakeside Theatre, Colchester	24 Feb	01206 873 288
South Street, Reading	28 Feb	0118 960 6060
Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton	29 Feb	01902 321 321
The Civic, Barnsley	1 Mar	01226 327 000
Theatre Royal, Margate	6 Mar	01227 787 787
Bridport Arts Centre	11 Mar	01308 424 204
Oxford Playhouse Studio	12-13 Mar	01865 305 305
Royal & Derngate, Northampton	14 Mar	01604 624 811
St. Mary's Uni, Twickenham	19 Mar	020 8964 5060
Stowe School	21 Mar	01280 818 146
Corn Exchange, Newbury	22 Mar	01635 522 733



# Discover

your creative potential at the University of Winchester

The Department of Performing Arts offers a wide range of courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level including the following:

- FDA Creative Industries
- BA (Hons) Choreography and Dance
- BA (Hons) Contemporary Performance
- BA (Hons) Drama
- BA (Hons) Performance Management
- BA (Hons) Street Arts
- Vocal and Choral Studies (Combined Honours)
- MA Cultural and Arts Management
- MA Devised Performance
- MA Popular Performances
- MA Theatre and Media as Development

For details on the full range of courses offered by the Faculty of Arts visit: [www.winchester.ac.uk/arts](http://www.winchester.ac.uk/arts)

Telephone: 01962 827234

Email: [course.enquiries@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:course.enquiries@winchester.ac.uk)



---

# TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

## Spring 2012 Volume 24 Issue 01

---

Welcome to the spring 2012 edition of Total Theatre. Do I need to remind you that this June sees the coming of the Olympics to our fair land? It's been the subject of all sorts of debates and grumbles within the arts world, but at last – for better or worse – the time is almost nigh.

So, to provide a little background for those not from these parts, or those who are perhaps on a seven-year arts news hiatus: Given that the same government department that funds the arts is also responsible for sport, the announcement, in 2005, of London's successful Olympic bid for 2012 was met with wary scepticism in some artistic quarters. Wouldn't this mean that arts funding would suffer? We were reassured that alongside the Olympics would run the Cultural Olympiad, a scheme that would create a whole succession of arts events that would circle the sports events that in turn would circle the Olympics and Paralympics themselves. How exactly this would manifest remained unclear for a long time. Your trusty editor attended numerous conferences, seminars and lectures delivered by various Cultural Olympiad big-wigs and emerged none the wiser, for the most part.

Eventually it emerged that a key initiative would be the Artists Taking the Lead fund, in which, rather than spread the available money across a large number of projects, one artist or company from each UK region would get a whopping great lump sum to create an artwork for 2012 (with work in public space / work that engaged the community high on the agenda).

Of course, there was then a mad scramble, with all and sundry working in every medium and in every region putting in their bids, knowing that this was the one big pot of Cultural Olympiad funding that would be allocated – and hey presto, twelve projects were chosen. In these pages, we offer you a tour of the goods on offer, including Imagineer Production's street theatre/large-scale puppetry initiative, *Godiva Awakes*; and the interesting looking *Adain Avion* project, a mobile art space set in a DC-9 fuselage. We also have fuller features on two of the projects that we feel might be of particular interest to Total Theatre readers: *On Landguard Point* by Pacitti Company, and Lone Twin's *The Boat Project*.

Moving away from the Olympics – indeed, far far away to the shores of North America – our Worldview special for this issue sees Robert Ayers, a long-time resident of New York and renowned 'voice' on the US performance art scene, giving us the low-down on current and recent Happenings in the Big Apple. Talking of Voices, our regular feature of that name here presents Improbable's Julian Crouch, fresh from his success with the creation of *The Devil and Mister Punch* (which had its UK premiere at the Barbican in February 2012). Elsewhere in the magazine, we have part two of Living Structures' diary on the making of new show *Leviathan*; a personal view of the works of the internationally renowned New International Encounter; and a threeway look at the latest show from enterprising young company Little Bulb Theatre.

So plenty to tickle your fancy as the nights grow shorter and the days grow longer towards the Spring equinox – for those in the northern hemisphere anyway. As I am writing this from Brazil in February, where it is late summer and the end-of-the-holidays Carnival season, I am aware that in an increasingly international world, seasonal demarcations have very different associations!

Which brings me to say that in this new global world, Total Theatre is currently reflecting on the best way forward as the key UK publication for performer-centred, physical and visual forms of theatre. What is the best medium for our message? Does print have a special value that should be preserved, or is an electronic publication that can be subscribed to and/or an open access website the best means in this day and age? Should the focus be on UK work, or should we embrace the world a little more fully?

Your views on any of the above questions are more than welcome!

Dorothy Max Prior  
Editor

Feedback and suggestions to: [editorial@totaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:editorial@totaltheatre.org.uk)

---

### TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE

---

#### Editor

Dorothy Max Prior  
[editorial@totaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:editorial@totaltheatre.org.uk)

#### Deputy Editor

John Ellingsworth  
[listings@totaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:listings@totaltheatre.org.uk)

#### Reviews Editor

Beccy Smith  
[magazine@totaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:magazine@totaltheatre.org.uk)

#### Advertising &

#### Subscriptions Manager

Christian Francis  
[info@totaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:info@totaltheatre.org.uk)  
[advertising@totaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:advertising@totaltheatre.org.uk)

#### Design

Studio Tonne  
[studio@studiotonne.com](mailto:studio@studiotonne.com)

#### Printing

Andus  
[andus@mistral.co.uk](mailto:andus@mistral.co.uk)

#### Published by:

University of Winchester in association  
with Total Theatre

Total Theatre Magazine  
University of Winchester  
Faculty of Arts  
Winchester SO22 4NR

#### CONTACT DETAILS

Administration:  
Total Theatre Magazine  
University of Winchester  
Faculty of Arts  
Winchester  
SO22 4NR  
Tel: 01962 827092

#### Editorial:

Total Theatre Magazine  
The Basement @ Argus Lofts  
24 Kensington Street  
Brighton BN1 4AJ  
Tel: 07752 142526

[www.totaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk)  
[www.totaltheatrereview.com](http://www.totaltheatrereview.com)

**Copy and ads booking deadline for the next edition is 1 April 2012. Total Theatre Volume 24 Issue 02 Summer 2012 will be published May 2012.**

© Total Theatre Magazine  
All rights reserved. ISSN 0960-6106.

The views expressed or opinions stated in Total Theatre Magazine are not necessarily the views of the editor or publishers. Similarly, statements made or opinions expressed by the advertisers are not necessarily shared by the editor or publishers. Reasonable care has been taken to avoid error in the magazine but no liability will be accepted for any errors which may occur. No material in this publication may be reproduced in any way without the consent in writing of the publisher. The publishers will not accept responsibility for the safe return of unsolicited material. We assume permission to publish any unsolicited material unless otherwise stated in writing.





# In Here

## FEATURES

<b>Artists Taking the Lead</b>	6
Thomas Wilson writes on <i>On Landguard Point</i> , an interview with Lone Twin, and Total Theatre's tour of all twelve projects	
<b>Work in Progress</b>	18
Leviathan: What nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it? The second part of an artists' diary by Living Structures	
<b>Worldview USA</b>	21
Robert Ayers on New York's still-thriving performance art scene	
<b>Black Holes and Shining Lights</b>	32
Hannah Sullivan on enterprising regional venues	

## REGULARS

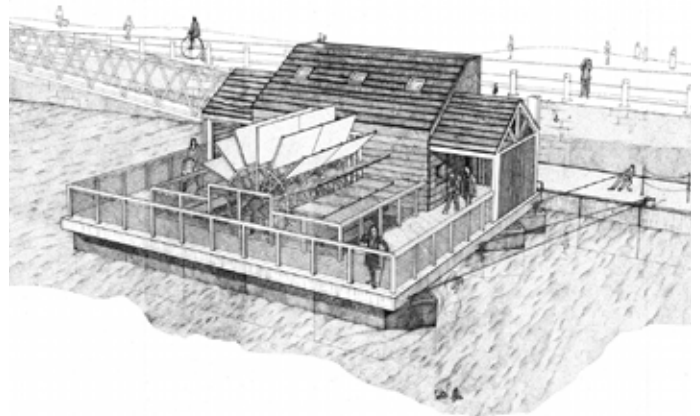
<b>Voices</b>	24
Improbable's Julian Crouch, in his own words	
<b>Being There</b>	26
A three-way reflection on <i>The Marvellous and Unlikely Fete of Little Upper Downing</i> by Little Bulb Theatre	
<b>The Works</b>	28
A personal view of New International Encounter, by Beccy Smith	
<b>Out There</b>	46
Total Theatre's preview of the UK summer season 2012	

## REVIEWS

<b>Let me tell you a story</b>	35
Dorothy Max Prior at the London International Mime Festival	
<b>Lost in Space</b>	38
Terry O'Donovan compares Hofesh Shechter & Antony Gormley's <i>Survivor</i> with the work of Hiroaki Umeda	
<b>If Only...!</b>	40
Multifaceted performance at Liverpool's Bluecoat, as witnessed by Tim Jeeves	
<b>Keeping the Faith</b>	42
Honour Bayes reports from the SACRED season at Chelsea Theatre	

Front cover image: Dreamthinkspeak's *Before / Sleep*, a commission for Brighton Festival 2012  
www.brightonfestival.org  
Photo: Emma Critchley

# ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



A ten-metre Lady Godiva marching at the head of a peloton; a series of LED art installations on bus shelter rooftops; a mysterious city-wide project directed by two legendary stop-motion animators; an aeroplane fuselage art-space dragged into town by local teams; a living column of sinuous white cloud rising from Liverpool's old docks; a secret forest football pitch; an electro-acoustic tidemill powered by the River Tyne; a multi-part community art project excavating memories; a sea-going boat pieced together from tennis rackets and pianos and guitars and other sundry wood; three really big lions; a sculpture assembled from thousands of donated objects; and a nowhereisland steered by ad hoc crowdsourced governance.

The flagship project of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad, Artists Taking the Lead is an ambitious £5.4 million programme funding twelve large-scale commissions – one in each of the nine English regions and one each for the nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are all, in some way, linked to the idea of 'public art' – to community and site – and are all set to culminate during the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Otherwise, they're about as different as a collection of projects can be. Here Total Theatre takes you on a nationwide tour...

## Images:

Clockwise from top left: Marc Rees, *Adain Avion* (photo Warren Orchard); The Pacitti Company, *On Landguard Point*; *Bus-Tops*; Lone Twin, *The Boat Project*; Ed Carter and Owl Project, *Flow*; Imagineer Productions, *Godiva Awakes*



## ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD

## On Landguard Point

Thomas Wilson discusses The Pacitti Company's project for the commission awarded for Artists Taking the Lead: East of England



On Landguard Point | Thomas Wilson

### Context

The forthcoming London Olympics Games, in the mould set by recent Olympics, is to be accompanied by a Cultural Olympiad. This Olympiad is 'designed to give everyone in the UK a chance to be part of London 2012 and inspire creativity across all forms of culture, especially among young people'.

In meeting this aim the Arts Council, alongside a range of other initiatives, has commissioned twelve artist-led projects from across the UK, gathered under the title Artists Taking the Lead. Whilst some of these large-scale projects have met with scepticism from certain sections of the mainstream press, collectively they represent an adventurous spirit in the programming of public artworks, embracing a wide range of artistic practices.

As with the majority of the Olympic-funded schemes, each Artists Taking the Lead project features widespread public-engagement as a central remit. The Arts Council have taken a bold step in commissioning The Pacitti Company's *On Landguard Point* as the selected project for the East of England. The Pacitti Company, long-standing experimenters in performance, have for a number of years grown the range and reach of their practice, continuing to make their own work, but also taking on the role of commissioning and curating other artists, not least through their biennial, and soon to be annual, SPILL Festival. *On Landguard Point* is their most significant project to date, both in terms of budget and scale, running from the summer of 2011 up to the Olympics themselves. In form and content it reflects

not only their commitment to the development of their own artistic practice but also their prominent role in the promotion, advocacy and championing of contemporary performance, alongside a deep-seated desire to engage a wide range of audiences who may not have encountered this kind of work before.

*On Landguard Point* comprises a wide-range of intertwined activities, both participatory and performative, all of which ultimately contribute to the content of a feature-length film, directed by Becky Edmunds and Lucy Cash, with an original-score by Michael Nyman, to be premiered in the spring of 2012. The *Landguard* projects, many of which ran in the summer of 2011, incorporated an array of differing activities including archaeological digs, an outdoor feast, a range of workshops and training sessions, the commission and performance of a new score by Michael Nyman, an alternative tour of Felixstowe and other outdoor participatory performances.

The film itself is the central product of the project, an episodic encapsulation of both the public performances and events, and a host of, initially, less public artistic acts. Thus the film will be both a document and an individual artwork, allowing *On Landguard Point* to extend its scope beyond the geographic boundaries of the region. In the process of filming, the camera varies in its prominence: at times it is foregrounded as another partner in the process, at other times it is fleetingly present, recording specific moments. This fluctuating presence presents an intriguing dynamic to the live projects. What will be interesting to see is how the film, potentially the part of the project



# ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



to have the widest reach, embodies the flavour of the various projects whilst at the same time finding its own identity as a discrete art object in dialogue with Pacitti Company's and the directors' reflection on, and interpretation of, the Olympic values.

Alongside these active artistic projects, Pacitti Company have set out to gather experiences and memories from residents of the Eastern Counties. These are compiled as responses to a series of carefully selected symbols in an online Encyclopedia, and as donated recipes in an online cookbook. What is interesting about this approach is the cross-fertilisation across the separate activities, not only literally in the forthcoming film, but also in the underlying themes and concerns of the project. These themes and concerns also have a long-standing root in The Pacitti Company's previous work, not least of all the SPILL festival.

## SPILLing Over

Part of the genesis of *On Landguard Point* lies in The Pacitti Company's SPILL festival, a biennial festival of performance that has seen Robert Pacitti embrace curator and producer in his expanding portfolio of roles. Central to SPILL has been Pacitti's vision of his role as a 'host' to established international and emerging UK artists. This model also underlies the way in which the Pacitti Company have approached the composition of the final film for *On Landguard Point*. Thus, the film sees Rajni Shah, Harminder Judge, Julia Bardsley and Kira O'Reilly, Carla Esperanza Tommasini, Wayne McGregor and others, alongside Pacitti regulars Sheila Ghelani and Richard Eton, making a range of work for the camera. This dispersal of the responsibility for the content

of a work is endemic to Pacitti Company's mode of working, and harks back to Robert Pacitti's long-standing practice of inviting artists to help construct his work. This premise has manifested itself in works such as the *Bum Boy* series (collaborations with Michael Atavar and Pascal Brannan) and the SPILL Tarot.

Informing this approach is a spirit of 'generosity' that Pacitti himself acknowledges has a politicised root; this generosity is also directed towards audiences as well as fellow performers. In this regard Pacitti has mentioned his vision of the importance of participation and activism. Speaking in 2011 Pacitti summarised *On Landguard Point's* aim to 'activate a whole series of participatory platforms, events and programmes and then encourage people to participate'. At the core of this was Pacitti's attempt to find a way into the work that was neither 'inviting people to a live performance that then becomes filmed and that becomes the film, ...[nor] inviting people to come and watch us making a film, [but] something in between'. Through this participation Pacitti seeks to empower the participants as agents of change. In *On Landguard Point* this centres around a change in the perception of 'home', especially for those who live in the East of England.

## At the Edges of the World

In shaping the project Robert Pacitti has returned to his native Suffolk, basing much of the project in this county, specifically in Felixstowe, just north of the eponymous Landguard Point. Landguard Point is the home to Landguard Fort, a solid, squat and imposing eighteenth-century building, originally built in the sixteenth-century to protect the Eastern coast from sea-bourne invasion. The pentagonal fort, the



# ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



On Landguard Point | Thomas Wilson

only fort in the UK to withstand a full-scale invasion by the Dutch in 1667, sits amongst the gravel dunes alongside Felixstowe Port, the route through which the majority of the UK's imports travel today. This borderland-site, now protected by English Heritage, is at the heart of Pacitti's concerns with 'fringe-spaces', 'hidden knowledge', and, by implication, the inherent plurality and hybridity of culture.

For one of the participatory events, as part of September 2011's 'Felixstowe Weekender', Pacitti Company hosted a tea dance. The tea dance, a blend of the formal and the social, replete with codes of behaviour and action yet also one of the most welcoming of 'English traditions', also features the two ingredients par excellence of British imperialism: tea and sugar. Thus Pacitti Company invited a playful intersection of the legacy of Britain's dominance of maritime trade, alongside one of the sites that reinforced the establishment of this trade in competition with other European powers. The fort's hard stone floor and imposing brick walls bounced back the dulcet strains of easy-listening classics, lending a hard edge to the gentle frivolity.

## Dig and Sow

The Pacitti Company have sustained a long-standing relationship with current archaeological practice, principally through their work with Professor Martin Jones of Cambridge University, an expert in the archaeology of food. Prof. Jones is one of Pacitti Company's regular guest 'performers', contributing through his pithy and enthusiastic expositions on the cultural heritage of foodstuffs and their consumption. His expert talk, delivered as part of the Felixstowe Weekender on a bus, featured a crisp exposition on the nature of the biscuit, the traveller's repast, delivered in Prof. Jones' precise and ebullient manner. This reflection on the ways in which a sense of 'home' can be embodied within an object that nourishes the traveller has similar echoes with *On Landguard Point's* Encyclopaedia, in which people sustain a connection to a geographic or social position through objects and images.

For *On Landguard Point*, Pacitti Company have extended their relationship with Cambridge University and archaeology, collaborating

on a series of amateur digs across the Eastern Counties, supervised by Dr Carenza Lewis of Access Cambridge Archaeology (and formerly of Channel 4's *Time Team*). This project, carried out in allotments and gardens across the autumn of 2011, not only removed and catalogued historical artefacts but also 'planted' silver charms, symbolic of the counties. In this way *On Landguard Point* continues Pacitti Company's ongoing examination of the practices of archiving performance. Thus in the Dig and Sow project not only are traditional notions of archiving employed (the meticulous categorisation, storage and eventual evaluation of data) but also methods of archiving ephemeral moments (through the embodiment of an experience in an object). This spirit of archiving is mirrored in *On Landguard Point's* approach to digital spaces and embraces the blurring of 'classical' artistic practices.

## An Edible Compass

Each of the three SPILL festivals to date have focused on increasing the level of dialogue between artists and audiences. This has happened through established formats, but also via an increasing array of shared events. The most prominent of these are the SPILL feasts, a chance for audiences to sit down and eat with the artists and production teams behind the festival. This model of participation has proved a nourishing part of Pacitti's attempt to increase the connection between makers and consumers of art, and its redeployment during *On Landguard Point* served to shift the emphasis from artistic practice to social practice.

On a chilly day in July 2011, Pacitti Company held a large outdoor feast at the 'Museum of East Anglian Life' in Stowmarket, Suffolk. The museum is in fact a 75-acre site, focusing on the agricultural heritage of the region. Located a good mile from the front gate, alongside a creaky-wooden windmill, stood a long trestle table laid for dinner. To this feast the guests, the general public, bought various concoctions, either from their own culinary heritage or from *On Landguard Point's* online cookbook. From gingerbreads to stews, and salads to rarebit, this 'hotch-potch' of food echoed the fluid and hybrid nature of cuisine. This most 'intercultural' of human activities serves as a living archive of historical trade and conquest, as well as providing a context

# ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



for strangers to meet. Although there were a number of large groups, including a birthday party, there were also couples who had stumbled across the project earlier in the day.

In this quintessentially 'English' space where participants are confronted with strangers it is also a peculiar 'double event'. For whilst the patterns of eating and sharing food with strangers play out along the trestle tables, there is also the presence of the film crew, capturing the event. They both record the activity and pose an invitation to stage action for the camera – so that the event begins to take on a dual performative identity. The 'daily performance' undertaken when meeting and eating with strangers and the conscious 'performance' when placed in view of the camera.

## Digital Space

A number of the artists and companies selected for Artists Taking the Lead have utilised digital media in recruiting, recording and developing their projects. In the case of Pacitti Company this has manifested itself in two ways. The first is an online 'Cookbook for the East', and the second is a growing 'People's Encyclopaedia'. This collection of 205 symbols operates beyond a source of factual information. Thus, in the spirit of the first *Encyclopaedia* of the Enlightenment, through documenting people's experiences, stories and reflections and translating them into symbols, it seeks to not only catalogue knowledge but also set up deeper resonances and provocations. Thus *On Landguard Point*'s encyclopaedia brings specific local legend (such as the Orford Merman) into collision with the prosaic ('a tree on a caravan'), alongside more universally redolent images (such as a 'swallow' or a 'compass'). This visual electronic document is in part a reflection of Pacitti's acknowledgement of the shifting patterns of knowledge in an increasingly digitised 'post-industrial' society where there are 'generations of people who are completely digital savvy'. And that: 'we don't have to receive information in those straight narrative lines anymore... so [it makes sense] for those of us that have been composing cut up narratives, multi-narratives, no narratives, alternative narratives or information that is presented artistically interdisciplinarily, or which brings together multiple forms of media to explore what happens when you collapse unexpected distance or space to create something new.' These images are not confined to the Internet, but also find their way onto marketing and other objects, populating 'real space'.

## From a Seaside Town: The Experts' Talk

Pacitti Company's established reputation for 'rubbing' ideas against each other found further manifestation in the *3 Minute Expert Talks*. Meeting outside a Felixstowe church hall, an eclectic collection of locals and 'tourists' are led to, and from, a series of three-minute talks in various locations around the Felixstowe seafront, including a tattooist in his shop, a drummer on the 'prom', a 'trail-writer' in a pub, and a dairy farmer in an ice-cream parlour.

Each location and each expert appears 'in costume' and introduces aspects of their expertise. What is delightful about these talks is the way that the passion and confidence of the expert manifests itself, alongside the inherent quality of performativity in their discipline. A sea-swimmer speaks in firm and steady tones, echoing the gentle waves from which he has emerged; whilst maternal Lady Mayor, graceful and passionate, warmly rounded off the tour of her town whilst her audience sat on the Council Chamber's carpet drinking tea and eating biscuits, the whole scene bringing to the fore the peculiar hint of the eccentric with which the tour was conceived.

This tour of Felixstowe, via the activities of its residents, is a delightful model that smuggles the essence of plurality that features so prominently, and sometimes unrecognised, in many UK towns. The meandering route it takes, including a short bus ride out to Landguard Fort for a ghost story with the 'Man in Black', refreshingly provides a glimpse into mundane public and commercial spaces that are oft overlooked in the tourist brochure.

## Legacy

What Pacitti Company have achieved in the gathering of content for their feature-film is a series of delightful and penetrating dialogues. Whilst the film may come to linger as a concrete art-object, alongside the artefacts from the 'digs', the recipes from the cookbook and the symbols from the encyclopedia, the ephemeral memories of these activities is a subtler legacy. In a time when the foundations of the UK's socio-economic and cultural climate have begun to be questioned, Pacitti Company continues to offer alternative models of artistic and cultural practice – models that embrace the intangible and delicate web of experience and 'connectedness' alongside the quantifiable. In this respect *On Landguard Point* delves beneath the headlines of the Olympic movement, finding a simplicity in daily and popular activities, whilst maintaining a careful eye on the ways in which cultural activity might activate the spectator into new ways of seeing.

Robert Pacitti quotes taken from an interview conducted by the author.

A series of outdoor events stretching from summer 2011 to the 2012 London Olympic Games, Pacitti Company's *On Landguard Point* is the East of England commission for Arts Council England's Artists Taking the Lead programme. Inspired by the histories and culture of the East, *On Landguard Point*'s multitude of events will collectively form the content of a new feature film, by Becky Edmunds and Lucy Cash, which will premiere in 2012.

[www.onlandguardpoint.com](http://www.onlandguardpoint.com)  
[www.pacitticompany.com](http://www.pacitticompany.com)  
[www.spillfestival.co.uk](http://www.spillfestival.co.uk)  
[www.accesscambridgearchaeology.wordpress.com](http://www.accesscambridgearchaeology.wordpress.com)

All images from *On Landguard Point* courtesy of the company



## ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



# A Thing Built to Move: The Boat Project

David Williams interviews Lone Twin artistic directors  
Gary Winters and Gregg Whelan about The Boat Project

The South East commission for Artists Taking the Lead, Lone Twin's *The Boat Project* is using the latest yacht building methods to turn wooden objects donated by people from across the South East into a seaworthy archive of stories and memories.

From February – August 2011 Lone Twin asked the people of the South East to bring them wood – but not just any old wood. Whether pencil or piano, and whether exotic as Zebrawood or as familiar as pine, they wanted something that had a story to tell. 1,200 people made a donation, and the project entered its second and current phase: the build, with the boat shed open to curious passers-by.

Following a maiden voyage in summer 2012, the boat will be gifted back to the South East region as a permanent resource for the public.

*I've just seen the Boat Project boat in an almost completed form at the Boat Show in London. And it's attracting an enormous amount of interest, both as an object in its own right – an exquisitely crafted sailing vessel – and in terms of how its materials have been assembled and the stories it 'holds'. What were the initial ideas and triggers for the project?*

**Gregg:** The project began some eleven years ago. We were in the middle of all the Lone Twin walking and water pieces – *The Days Of The Sledgehammer Have Gone* series – which attempted to merge our watery selves with other bodies: our bodies of water meeting other bodies of water – lakes, rivers, seas. Those pieces used the idea of a journey as a frame, beginning with a departure and ending with an arrival, each built from a collection of stories that occurred, in whatever way, en route. In the middle of that series, in Norway, it became clear that it would be entirely logical to build a boat. Earth's human geography – where we've settled and thrived – is due entirely to our relationship to water, first for the fundamental needs of life and then for everything else. The world met itself, was revealed to itself, by way of journeys made at sea. Ships and boats allowed for an entirely new set of narratives to develop, so it became really clear that a boat was the next thing to work on.



*You're known internationally for your performance work since the late 1990s: primarily as a duo, but also with the company you formed, Lone Twin Theatre, and in other public performance collaborations – for example with a town crier, or amateur dancers. On the surface the building of a boat seems a radical shift of direction, although as you've already suggested, The Boat Project is a continuation of earlier interests and ways of working at the same time as it's a new departure, a different kind of art practice. Where do you see some of the connections, and the differences?*

**Gary:** The main connections are around ideas of group activity, what that can cause or put into effect, and our ongoing interests in storytelling. In much of the duo work we've attempted to gather a group around the activity of the pieces – walking, singing, dancing, cycling, staying up all night – and explore the democracy of that moment. Those pieces were also about the image of a group of people doing something together, and the question, 'What happens when people come together?' Some of our works, whether intentionally or not, extended beyond the usual frame of the show itself. In our first piece *On Everest*, for example, we playfully suggested that, as the audience left their seats at the end and walked out into their everyday life, they were walking back down the mountain we'd notionally taken them up during the show. And in some of our early outdoor site works, *Totem* or *Twenty-four Four*, we were taken by the fact that many years later people would contact us and say they were still thinking about us on that particular street, that somehow we had changed that place for them. Maybe that wasn't something we set out to do, but we were interested in what performance or a gathering could produce. Rather than something purely internal or hypothetical, it could be something physical and have a life, or job, of its own. So that's probably a difference here too – we're making something permanent that will go on to have a whole life of its own. Also, with *The Boat Project*, on the face of it there's no 'show' or moment of congress in a usual sense, although the maiden voyage will take on some of that. And maybe a tone from the duo work isn't present, but hearing all of those stories about the objects, and us telling others about the stories, in a curated way, feels like very familiar territory. Finally, it's important to say that in many of the pieces, including *The Boat Project*, we've found new collaborators, professionals, specialists, to make the work with, which slightly diffracts the 'brand' in a way, but for us that's good.

*You've talked extensively in the past about your work in terms of setting up situations in which people are invited to meet and exchange things – stories, materials of different kinds, energies. And all sorts of temporary 'communities' seem to be implicated in this project. Is this how you conceive of the project – as a mechanism or site for social interaction, exchange and different kinds of participation?*

**Gregg:** Absolutely, that's what seemed to be on offer as the idea developed, but perhaps more than that it's what it needed. Once we fixed on wanting to build the boat, we realised that we alone couldn't do it, that it needed people; beyond needing the wood donations we needed people to actually build the thing, to design it, to put it together. So it needed a committed community of folk who could all invest in the value of the task, who could see that if we managed it we'd have done something quite dramatic and told a great story together. And then there's the huge group of people who gave something of



themselves to the project, a group now assembled and arranged in object form as a boat. The project is about those people. It's about what those people came together to make, and what coming together achieves – in very simple terms it's about what we've been doing with our lives, who we've loved, where we've lived, the jobs we've done, our parents, our friends, our children and our marking of those people and events. In terms of the rest of our work I'd say it's a very explicit version of the pieces you mention, of meetings and communities and interaction – but rather than throw up a fleeting framing of those things as potentials, it goes the whole hog and makes something good of them, a thing built to move, to travel.

*There are many aspects to The Boat Project – the gathering of wood, the building of a boat, the production of a book archiving the stories related to each piece of wood. Then after the launch of the boat in May and its sea trials a series of curated events are planned for the summer months in various ports of call on its maiden voyage along the south coast, and the boat takes on a different kind of role. Could you give a flavour of the kinds of events you're planning?*

**Gary:** This is the moment that's kind of like the show, when everyone can see and celebrate what's been going on over the last two years. We knew the boat would be arriving by water to many of the places it will visit, so we were keen to embrace some of the traditions that come with a docking – the sense of a welcome party or flotilla, the sharing of stories from the passage, the community hosting and taking in the crew, good luck charms and a blessing for the departure. So each of these practices, and others specific to the maritime or nautical connections of the stopping points, have been considered for the programme of events on the maiden voyage, alongside moments that embrace the themes of the project as a whole: collections, journeys, stories, and so on. Our own specific contribution, apart from the boat, is an artist's commission onboard the boat to make a version of a ship's log, which will produce a cumulative, episodic work to record some of the sights, sounds and experiences onboard during the voyage. Practically, we've been working with partner organisations who will host the boat for its maiden voyage between May and July. There are five places where the boat will be for a weekend or longer, and other places en route where we moor up and stay for a night or two, as well as the passages between, where we can be spotted in action as it were. The main stopping points are Portsmouth, Brighton, Hastings, Margate, then the boat will be trailered up to Milton Keynes for the city's International Festival. Finally we shift down to Weymouth for the period of the Olympic sailing there.

Having collected donations through the spring of 2011, the *Boat Project* boat is nearing completion. In March 2012 the build phase ends, in May the boat will be christened (following an open competition to suggest a name), and 7 May the boat will be launched from Thornham Marina, Emsworth.

The Boat Project is the winning Artists Taking the Lead commission for the South East region and is funded by Arts Council England.

[www.theboatproject.com](http://www.theboatproject.com) / [www.lonetwin.com](http://www.lonetwin.com)

All images Lone Twin, *The Boat Project*. Photo credits: p.12 Toby Adamson; p.13 left Toby Adamson; p.13 right Michael Austen



## ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



Godiva Awakes

# Godiva Awakes

‘We wanted her to be characterful, full of purpose, determined – a woman of all ages. Open, naïve, curious to discover, to connect to the people of Coventry and the world. We wanted her to be very tall.’ – Jane Hytch and Kathi Leahy, Imagineer Productions

Emerging from Coventry and drawing on the history and legend of the city’s most famous icon, *Godiva Awakes* will see a ten-metre high Lady Godiva puppet ride from Coventry to London to deliver the Book of Intent, a symbolic collection of thoughts, messages and ideas co-authored by 220 young people responding to the themes of equality, fairness and social justice that lie at the heart of the Godiva myth.

As with most of the Artists Taking the Lead commissions, Godiva Awakes has many parts and many collaborators. Produced by the Coventry-based Imagineer Productions, the project combines the professional expertise of fashion, carnival and SFX designers, composers, engineers, textile artists and pyrotechnicians; brings in dancers, actors, aerialists, musicians and carnivalists; and secures the involvement of several hundred young people from across the West Midlands.

Godiva herself will be quite a sight: a rod-operated puppet constructed from lightweight helium tubes, she will be clothed in a coat of gold, yellow and red designed by textile artist Julia O’Connell, and will ride atop the Cyclopedia, a specially designed carriage driven by a peloton of 100 cyclists that will take her to London (via the A5!) after a carnival procession through the streets of Coventry.

Rather than spending their entire resources on a one-off event,

however, Imagineer Productions have, from the start, had a particularly keen and integrated sense of the project’s legacy. As producers Jane Hytch and Kathi Leahy explain, their goal is in fact to use the Olympics as the catalyst to create a new tradition: ‘Five years ago we went to Viareggio in Italy and were inspired by the tall papier mache figures made for carnival there. We had both holidayed before in Europe, France, Italy and Spain, where there is a tradition of street festivals and processions. Often they are religious and saints are paraded in the streets once a year with whole villages and communities coming out to see them; it’s a special tradition among those communities... It was on the way home, travelling on a train from Viareggio to Florence, that we began to talk about Lady Godiva and how our own town, Coventry, did not really celebrate her in any style. We began to imagine a new Godiva, one for the 21st century on the scale of Gulliver. We imagined that she had been sleeping for 1000 years and that she could wake up again in Coventry each year for the next 1000 years...’

The work of ensuring the long-term survival of the project has already begun, and in 2013 Godiva will be presented with her Chamber, a permanent house in the centre of Coventry where the great lady will be visible through steel chainmail curtains – at rest but ready to wake again...

Lady Godiva will awake on 28 July 2012 to begin her journey across the country. Lasting seven days (29 July – 5 August 2012) this will take her from Rugby to Northampton, then to Milton Keynes and on to Luton, then to Hatfield then Waltham Abbey, arriving finally at Waltham Forest. *Godiva Awakes* is the West Midlands commission for the Artists Taking the Lead project.

[www.imagineerproductions.co.uk](http://www.imagineerproductions.co.uk)

Image: Imagineer Productions, *Godiva Awakes*

# ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



## Adain Avion

Rivalling *On Landguard Point* for one of the busiest and most varied programmes of an Artists Taking the Lead project, *Adain Avion* is centred around a mobile art space built into the wingless fuselage of an old DC-9 airplane. Originally discovered by the Spanish sculptor and designer Eduardo Cajal in 1992, and having served as an art venue in Spain ever since, the plane is being brought over for a Welsh summer that will see it transported to four different locations – Swansea, Ebbw Vale, Llandudno and Llandow. At each it will be dragged into town by a large team of local people gathered from sports clubs, youth groups, community organisations and members of the public, with the ceremony accompanied by an ‘arrival anthem’ specially composed by musician John Hardy.

For the project’s curator Marc Rees, the structure’s former use resonates with the themes of international connection that the Olympics embodies, but by bringing the Adain Avion plane to Wales his aim is to infuse the space with the ‘Welshness of the square mile’, letting it take its character from the rich community and history of each place it rests in.

So in the town of Ebbw Vale a *Ghost Parade* will commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the closure of the Ebbw Vale Steel Works, an installation and film-screening will draw material from the archives of the British Steel Collection, and Tanja Răman’s piece *Cold Rolling* will be devised with ten dancers from Ballet Cymru using blueprints of the old Steel Works as an architectural starting-point. In Swansea, Catrin James’ *Guerilla Restoration* will treat the neglected architectural design features found on many of the city’s post-war buildings, and a temporary installation assembled by Hyde + Hyde architects, *The Collective Memory of a City*, will reflect on the historic structures of the industrial revolution found in Swansea. In seaside Llandudno, artist Carwyn Evans presents an exhibition of photography and video both inspired by and housed within the empty 50s shelters lining the town’s promenade.

There are many more events besides, with the eclecticism of the programme reflecting Rees’ background as a multidisciplinary artist



who’s worked extensively in the past with physical theatre companies like Brith Gof, Earthfall and DV8. Within the line-up, Rees identifies a few pieces of particular interest to Total Theatre: Citrus Arts’ commission to create an aerial piece around the brief of a fateful presidential visit (*Adain Avion* becoming *Air Force One*); Portuguese choreographer Fillipa Francisco’s six-week project to work with local dancers in Llandudno to create a Folk Dance Flash Mob; and artist Cai Tomos’ collaboration with the former rink skater Margot Catlin, *A Solo for Margot*.

All the Adain Avion events will be recorded for the Black Box, a full video documentation of the project that will be available as an unedited archive, but which will also be shaped into a short film that will screen on monitors placed under the glass floor of the fuselage when the plane touches down at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in Llandow, its final destination, in early August 2012.

The Adain Avion art space will be in Swansea 24-30 June, Ebbw Vale 1-7 July, Llandudno 8-14 July, and Llandow, for the National Eisteddfod of Wales, 4-11 August 2012. The project is the Artists Taking the Lead commission for Wales.

[www.adainavion.org](http://www.adainavion.org)

Images: Top: The Adain Avion plane. Bottom: curator Marc Rees (photo Warren Orchard)



# ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD

## The Following Pack



The Following Pack

### Lionheart Project

One of the lower-key commissions, *Lionheart Project* is a travelling sculptural menagerie of three giant, prowling lions that will be driven in an illuminated glass case all over the East Midlands from May 2012, stopping off at various locations before heading down to the Natural History Museum in time for the Games. The project's artist, Shauna Richardson, is chiefly known for her work as a 'crochetdermist', sculpting realistic life-size animals with crocheted fur, and this is the process she'll once again employ for the *Lionheart Project*. The three lions, emblematic of those on Richard the Lionheart's crest, have been sculpted from polystyrene resting on steel skeletons, and the frame will be overlaid with crocheted coats hand-stitched using locally-sourced Peak District wool. Alongside the travelling exhibition, there's a Guerilla Project encouraging impromptu textile installations (lamppost warmers and woolly rats and so on) and the project invites studio visits.

East Midlands | [www.lionheartproject.com](http://www.lionheartproject.com)

### Nowhereisland

Exploring the idea of the nation state and themes of environmental, civic and human responsibility, Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland* is an odd mix of conceptual artwork, education project and sociological experiment that began with the extraction of a quantity of earth and soil from an island in the High Arctic region of Svalbard. The territory was sailed south, out of the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Norway and into territorial waters where it was subsequently declared a new island nation – Nowhereisland. The Nowhereisland land will eventually lie at the heart of a floating structure that'll be pulled by tugboat on a 500 mile trip around the south west coast of England, its journey tracked by an on-land embassy, but the project is already well underway. A Declaration of Nowhereisland drawn up by the team of researchers, scientists and thinkers who went on the original Arctic expedition allows anyone to become a citizen of Nowhereisland, and, once they've done so, to participate in collectively writing the nation's Constitution (clauses are upvoted into a Top 10, which currently includes 'Wherever we



may consider building a wall, fence or barrier we should instead place a table' and 'Every Nowhereian has the right to imagine a different future'). Each week a resident thinker writes a letter to Nowhereisland and its citizens to explore the topics of citizenship and international cooperation with which the project grapples.

South West | [www.nowhereisland.org](http://www.nowhereisland.org)

### Column

Known for his 'solid-light' installations which cast planes of projected light to create the illusion of solid yet ethereal three-dimensional objects, visual artist Anthony McCall will be creating a new work, *Column*, for the North West commission – the simplest of the Artists Taking the Leads but also the project with potentially the widest audience. *Column* will be a high, thin, spinning tunnel of mist rising from Liverpool's old dockyards, Wirral Waters, and disappearing into the sky. The artwork will be about twenty metres in diameter, visible from a distance of up to 100km, and responds to Liverpool's estuary weather: on a clear day the column will be a clean, white, sinuous line; under rain it will be a barely discernible grey smudge, lost in places; and in strong winds the column will bend and veer. *Column*, which relies on the installation of underwater motors to catalyse the process that produces the mist, is due to be installed in the coming months and will be one of the countdown events for the London 2012 Festival.

North West | [www.anthonymccall.com](http://www.anthonymccall.com)

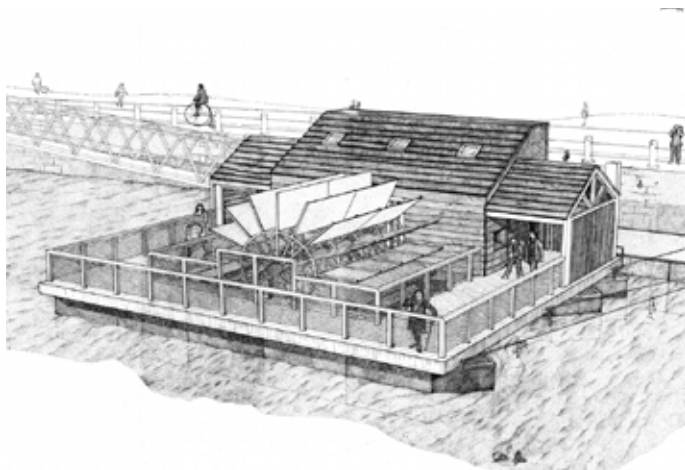
# ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



## Bus-Tops

A collaboration between the artistic directors of Art Public, Alfie Dennen and Paula Le Dieu, and a team of creative technologists, the project *Bus-Tops* has installed LED screens on the tops of thirty London bus shelters. Each of these is a grid of 256 x 80 monochromatic red LEDs that can achieve different shades through variable brightness, spelling out words or converting drawings or photographs into red and black digital art. Visible from the top decks of passing buses, the screens display both work by invited artists (with a new artist each month) and images or animations sent in by the public, who can use a tool on the *Bus-Tops* website to draw their artworks pixel by pixel. In January the featured artist was Mark Titchner, whose *31 Day Programme* was an evolving series of messages and motivational challenges reflecting on the relationship between advertisement images and human ambition; through the rest of the year the project will host work by Carla Arocha + Stephane Schraenen, Jemima Brown, Jasmina Cibic, Michelle Deignan, Kate Davis, Ian Monroe, Conrad Ventur, and Zoe Walker & Neil Bromwich.

London | [www.bus-tops.com](http://www.bus-tops.com)



## Flow

A collaboration between music and arts producer Ed Carter and the artists collective Owl Project, *Flow* is inspired by the long history of 'water organs' – hydraulically powered mechanisms that are thought to have first appeared somewhere in the 3rd Century BC and which by the 15th Century had evolved into complex automated instruments similar to the barrel organ. In constructing a modern equivalent, *Flow* plays with the meaning of 'instrument' as both a musical device and a tool for scientific measurement by building a tide mill on the River Tyne that will operate simultaneously as a sonic sculpture and a working laboratory. The mill will have a number of instruments – such as a 'salinity sampler sequencer', a series of electrodes that dip into water and emit tones (on an analog synth) controlled by the level of conductivity – to measure the temperature, speed, salinity and pollution of the River Tyne, converting the data into an ever-changing site-specific composition. The project will open to the public in March 2012, with the millhouse moored on the North bank of the Tyne outside Newcastle's BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art.

North East | [www.flowmill.org](http://www.flowmill.org)



# ARTISTS TAKING THE LEAD



## Nest

Another commission, like *The Boat Project*, that uses donated objects as the talismans of everyday lives, *Nest* will see thousands of possessions collected from towns and villages across Northern Ireland, with a baggage label attached to each item to catalogue who donated it, how they originally came by the object, and what it means to them. In Belfast the takings will be assembled, by a team of artists and designers, into a gigantic sculpture that will then become the centrepiece and focal point for a large-scale music and choral event, written and directed by project leads John McIlduff and Brian Irvine and inspired and performed by the people of Northern Ireland. This will take place at the venue T13 in the heart of the Titanic Quarter, Belfast on 20, 21 & 22 July 2012.

Northern Ireland | [www.dumbworld.co.uk](http://www.dumbworld.co.uk)

## Forest Pitch

Located deep inside a commercial forest plantation a couple of miles east of Selkirk in the Scottish Borders, artist Craig Coulthard's *Forest Pitch* is a woodland football pitch furnished with goalposts and shelter built from the trees felled to create the clearing. On 21 July 2012 the site will play host to two amateur football matches – with male and female teams – where the players will all be recent British citizens or those with Indefinite Leave to Remain who are currently living in Scotland. Teasing out issues of national identity, community and site – and, of course, sporting occasions as junctions of all three – the *Forest Pitch* matches will be spectated by local communities, friends and families of the players, and the local public. After the Games, the pitch will be accessible to the public and will be left to nature to grow whichever way it will.

Scotland | [www.forestpitch.org](http://www.forestpitch.org)



## OverWorlds & UnderWorlds

Deliberately kept under a veil of mystery, *OverWorlds & UnderWorlds*, the Artists Taking the Lead commission for Yorkshire, is the first major endeavour of Leeds Canvas, a consortium of eight arts organisations inviting and producing large-scale city-wide projects that use Leeds as their backdrop. Leading on *OverWorlds & UnderWorlds* are the Quay Brothers, twin directors famous for their work in stop-motion animation, whose proposition here is to explore 'the flow of people and water through the city' and to look at how 'myth suddenly erupts and transforms space into another dimension and then subsides, leaving the everyday altered and somehow different'. The ludic nature of the project – which we know at least will take place 18-20 May 2012 and involve composers, choreographers, artists and makers from the Yorkshire region – makes the exact scope of the event uncertain, but one of the key sites will be the Dark Arches, a complex of 19th Century tunnels through which flows the River Aire.

Yorkshire | [www.overworldsandunderworlds.com](http://www.overworldsandunderworlds.com)

For more on all the Artists Taking the Lead projects see:  
[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

### Images

Page 15: Images of the *Nowhereisland* Arctic expedition (photos Max McClure, courtesy Situations). Page 16 clockwise: *Bus-Tops*; Ed Carter and Owl Project, *Flow*; *Bus-Tops*. Page 17 clockwise: Brian Irvine and John McIlduff, *Nest*; Craig Coulthard, *Forest Pitch* (photo Angela Catlin) x2; Brian Irvine and John McIlduff, *Nest*

## WORK IN PROGRESS

# Leviathan: What nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it?

In the second instalment of a three-part feature, Living Structures document their research and development process in the creation of new show Leviathan



Living Structure's new show *Leviathan* engulfs its audience in an abstract world that recalls scenes, moods and ideas inspired by Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*. It takes its audiences through an adventurous journey involving spatial transformation, large installation, physical theatre and original soundscape.

## All Hands on Deck

In part one of our account (Total Theatre Magazine Volume 23 Issue 04) we told you a little about our research period at the Pinter Centre and our first moves when entering Trinity Buoy Wharf in early November 2011. In this second part we'll dive a little deeper into the daunting and thrilling challenges, learning curves and wonderful surprises that we encountered during the process of creating material for our Research and Development showings, which took place between 30 November and 2 December 2011.

## Set Design: From the drawings to the full-scale build

'As in all of Living Structures' work, *Leviathan* takes place within a set conceived to transform the expanse, shape and texture of the space in which the performance takes place. The materiality of the space is intended to be as much a storyteller as the body and voice of the performers.

One of our greatest challenges in terms of building was the horizontal suspension of the 15m long and 10m wide sail, one of our core set features. In the beginning of the show it functions as a vast projection screen (a mesmerising sea of lapping waves) and after a series of transformations it ends up engulfing the audience, in a sort of metaphorical ritual of communal drowning.

In order for this to work the screen must not have too much slack,





but the bulk of the fabric turns out to be far too heavy for the ratchet straps that were supposed to tension it. Everybody has been involved in working on the structure, bolting rostra, sewing and hemming the vast sheets of fabric. This was supposed to be a moment of ‘moral boosting’, where everyone would marvel at the striking image of the stretched sail, but now it hangs in-between the rostra like a wet towel. I hasten to ensure everyone that this was to be expected and that all we need are some minor adjustments and some better ratchets. This is true – I really believe that it is but I also know this is only the beginning: we still have to find a way to raise the sail, and to lower and stretch it out above the audience in the end.’

*Klaus Kruse, process notes*

#### Costume Design – When Russian Constructivism meets reality

Early in the planning period we established that we were to give great attention to the costume designs for *Leviathan* and that we would collaborate with professional designers for this. Klaus brings a vague idea to the table: basing the costume design on geometric shapes. Ula picks up on this and consolidates the idea, introducing us to a selection of costume designs from Russian Constructivism. The group gets very excited about it all, to the point that we decide we’d like this style to be the basis for our overall visual aesthetic.

In early devising sessions at the Pinter Centre, we had started to work with yellow raincoats. We had devised some really solid material with this element but the bulky shapeless yellow raincoats were the absolute opposite to the strongly defined geometrical pattern that we had now chosen to work with. Our costume designers Philippa Thomas and George Ellison were confused and we didn’t seem to be able to pinpoint what we really wanted. For several days everything felt up in the air. How to make a costume based on geometrical shapes that can also work in terms of flexibility and clarity of movement? Time was running short and we needed to make some concrete decisions in order to insure the confectioning would take place within our deadlines.

In a desperate attempt to save Russian Constructivism, Ula, who never in her life had used a sewing machine before, whipped up a pair of trousers in style (using Gaffer tape to give the illusion of a crotch). There was much discussion – and almost tears – over lines, angles and tastes but over the next couple of days George and Philippa designed a prototype that worked without the Gaffer, which everybody loved.

#### Set Building Versus Rehearsal – A conflict inherent in our work

‘Living Structures’ sets are designed to physically transform space. The devices we use for this are mostly very low-tech but fairly complex from an operational point of view. The mechanisms we construct are usually primarily hand operated by the performers, as part of the performance. Our work always responds to some specific features of the spaces we perform in, but fundamentally creates environments that are self-sustaining.

The entire cast and crew contributes to the building and making of set and props. Over the years we have refined areas of expertise within our team of long-term and project-based collaborators but overall Living Structures’ processes are still very hands-on on all fronts. This ‘everybody does everything attitude’ has both positive and negative implications. On the one hand there is a great spirit of shared ownership over the space design, on the other, there is a tendency for the building aspect to take over and to infringe on rehearsals.

We were already half way into our time at Trinity Buoy Wharf. Some excellent scenes had been created but we desperately needed to develop more performance material from within the space. We needed to devise, to improvise with our set and with each other. We knew that what could emerge from this interaction was beyond anything we could imagine by thinking alone, but there just never seemed to be enough time.

In a way, in Living Structures’ work, things are never entirely ready. New ideas and possibilities always come up and often they require minor (sometimes huge!) adaptations to the set and props. But our problem at this stage was that not even our initial set ideas were ready. We’d been a bit ambitious (again!), and there was still a lot of work to do.

We’ve been very good in keeping up with our yoga sessions at the start of each morning. The whole group seems to agree on how this new routine has been really great for our physical maintenance and creative focus. But we are also all starting to get very anxious about how much the set building is seriously infringing on rehearsals. I keep reminding Klaus that we have to make more time for scene study and devising and we become very aware that things will never be ready for this unless we decide they are, unless we give them a cut-off point. We need our performers to be as strong as our visuals and so we begin to find strategic moments in which I take core performers aside to work on various exercises (presence, precision, strength) whilst Klaus and other builders advance with the set.’

*Dani d’Emilia, process notes*



‘The lack of time for exploration transpired similarly in our vocal work and we were confronted by the difference between the vocal pieces that were composed outside of the rehearsal process and those that were devised within rehearsals. Verity’s luscious compositions often involve incredibly complex harmonies, so often there was some difficulty when trying to bring them into the scenes as performers couldn’t be too dispersed in space, breathless or in awkward physical positions. Scenes often had to adapt to songs.

Although pre-composed songs form an important aspect of our work I realise now that we need to give more time and space to voice exploration in order to progress the work towards a voice and movement approach that is more integrated, experimental and artistically challenging.’

*Klaus Kruse, process notes*

### Setting Sail

Amidst the various spatial, temporal and financial challenges the show started to take shape and we finally got the sail tightly stretched across the space. We bathed in the magnificence of the image of Dugald [Ferguson] emerging from the sea and magically swimming across to the sound of whales and mourning widows. Many more striking moments started to come together, the space became a player in its own right, a part of the ensemble. Though we were only preparing for research and development showings, clearly a new grand vision of Living Structures was coming alive.

To be continued...



This article is the second of a three-part series that documents the development of Living Structures’ *Leviathan*. This instalment was written by company members Klaus Kruse and Dani d’Emilia.

*Leviathan* has been in development with the support of Arts Council England, The Old Vic Tunnels, University College Falmouth, Trinity Buoy Wharf and The Pinter Centre (Goldsmith University of London). The show will premiere later in 2012.

Living Structures was formed in 2007 by Klaus Kruse, Dani d’Emilia, Ula Dajerling, Verity Standen and Dugald Ferguson.

For more information about the company and its artists, and about *Leviathan* and other works, see: [www.livingstructures.co.uk](http://www.livingstructures.co.uk)

All images are of the work in progress, Living Structures’ *Leviathan*. Photos by Aleksandra Karpowicz.



## WORLDVIEW USA

## NEW YORK, NEW YORK

New York City remains at the forefront of contemporary performance art. Long-time resident Robert Ayers names the names



Worldview - New York, New York | Robert Ayers

Perhaps there's no better place than New York for thinking in terms of a world view, because this city is one of the world's great cultural crossroads. Artists and audiences are constantly moving in and out, and that makes for a mix so rich that it is sometimes beguiling. So, in attempting this glimpse of what is happening here, I decided I'd seek opinions from three of the most influential performance people in the city.

Martha Wilson is Founding Director of Franklin Furnace which, since as long ago as 1976, has been 'making the world safe for avant garde art', and – probably more than any other institution – has kept the spirit of performance art alive and well in New York City and beyond. Nowadays they support artists through the open-entry Franklin Furnace Fund, which you will see referred to below.

RoseLee Goldberg is the celebrated author of *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* and Founding Director and Curator of Performa which, since 2005, has worked with almost every other forward-looking arts organisation in the city to put together its enormous biennial.

Sabine Breitwieser has, since October, been Chief Curator of Media and Performance Art at one of the most important museums in the world, the Museum of Modern Art. Her department has existed in its present form since 2009.

Predictably, each of these three highly individual individuals responded to my enquiry about the best of current performance in the city in their own way. (And of course they all enthused about work that they'd been involved in.)

Martha actually gave me a top eleven of things she's seen recently. Let's begin the countdown with her numbers 11, 10, and 9:

'11. Michael Shannon's *Mistakes Were Made* was the best theatre piece of last year. There was a puppet fish in an aquarium.

'10. In 2011 David Herskovitz's Target Margin Theater did *The Tempest* and their own piece *Second Language*. They're always up to great stuff.

'9. David Greenspan did a piece entitled *Go Back To Where You Are*, which I thought was strange. He was great as the bad guy in *Coraline* at MCC Theater a couple of years back.'

Sabine drew my attention to a piece that underscores New York's status as an international nexus. *Combatant Status Review Tribunals*, pp. 002954–003064: *A Public Reading* is a first collaboration between a group of German, Danish, and American artists – Andrea Geyer, Sharon Hayes, Ashley Hunt, Katya Sander, and David Thorne. Staged at MoMA's Bauhaus staircase as part of Performa 11 in November 2011, this was a four-hour public reading of unedited transcripts from the review tribunals held at Guantanamo Bay in 2004 and 2005. According



to Sabine, who was responsible for presenting the piece, “This was an amazing experience for the audience – some of the people quoted are still in prison – but also quite magic for the readers, who switched into the roles of the different protagonists as the performance proceeded.” She goes on: ‘I believe Sharon Hayes is the most interesting young performance artist in New York today – and probably in a wider geographical context as well. In her work she is re-enacting historical public events by not just simply revisiting them as is often the case now, but by examining the state and the contemporary relevance of these public actions. In a very interesting way she is also connecting a public action with the private, thus demonstrating how much these formerly two separate spheres got intertwined.’

Martha’s countdown continues:

‘8. Elevator Repair Service did a great re-enactment of *The Great Gatsby* by reading every single word in six-hour marathon performances at the Public Theater.

‘7. More in the direction of theatre, Young Jean Lee did an *Untitled Feminist Show*. The New York Times called her “hands down, the most adventurous downtown playwright of her generation”.

‘6. Holly Hughes did a great show at Dixon Place called *Dog and Pony Show (Bring Your Own Pony)*, which was about lesbianism among many other things.’

The Performa biennials have evolved into what many people regard as the most important performance festival in the world. RoseLee told me, ‘I think of a work as being exciting in relation to its context. The Performa Commissions come about as much because of an artist’s past work, as for the potential that seems to be built into their ideas. It’s the success of what they make during Performa that is so special.’ She cites Ragnar Kjartansson’s ‘stunning’ piece *Bliss* from Performa 11 by way of illustration.

‘He came into my office to discuss his commission and said, “there’s no more beautiful song than ‘Contessa, perdono’ from the end of *The Marriage of Figaro*, where all the characters ask each other for forgiveness.” He started singing the tenor role in my office, and told me that: “It would be absolute bliss to hear this song over and over.” (Hence the title!) The result was a live, twelve-hour loop, in full costume, with full orchestra of the single three-minute song sung by five opera singers. It was stunning! I had imagined that by the end they’d all be falling apart, with their hands around their throats. But no, twelve hours later, they were at full throttle. At midnight the audience was up on its feet, cheering and clapping for ten minutes!’

More from Martha:

‘5. Franklin Furnace Fundwinner Dread Scott makes ‘revolutionary art to propel history forward’. *Money to Burn* was enacted on Wall Street last June. He burned \$500, \$5 at a time, while asking traders to join him.

‘4. Pablo Helguera was Franklin Furnace’s Performa Fellow this year. *The Well-Tempered Exposition* (structured around Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*) undertakes a comprehensive study of the dialogic forms of performance. Book I (of 24) of this performance was presented at Performa 11.

‘3. Over the past year Liz Magic Laser has been working with actors on a project called *Flight*, a performance based on on-foot chase scenes from popular cinema that occur on stairs. The first version of *Flight* debuted at P.S.1 this past April, with scenes from *Battleship Potemkin*, *M*, *Niagara*, *The Shining*, and *28 Days Later*.’

RoseLee is also a big admirer of Liz Magic Laser: ‘She created something quite extraordinary, a piece called *I Feel Your Pain*, which takes place in a movie theatre. It is both a clever take on American politics and a surprisingly theatrical play on the intimacy of the movie





theatre. There are eight actors – four couples – planted in the audience and a small film crew that moves around the theatre to capture their conversations in sequence, which are projected live onto the screen. Liz was inspired by the “living newspapers” of the Russian Constructivists,’ RoseLee explains, ‘which was news produced each day by actors, and she looked into what might be the equivalent of our daily news in America. She came up with the chatty broadcasts of TV news and transposed the texts of interviews between the likes of Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin. Their words, taken verbatim from a broadcast, becomes a scene between a young couple. It’s very, very clever.’

Martha’s top two:

‘2. *Dynasty Handbag* (Jibz Cameron) is another Fundwinner whom I love. Her *Ob, Death* is a non-linear trek through encounters with death and dying. She “observes, investigates, and participates in conventionalities surrounding death with the aid of the many voices in her head and the hopeful objectivity of a true outsider”.

‘1. *Room for Cream* was an episodic lesbian soap opera which occurred every month for three years, ending last summer. It was written by Fundwinner Brooke O’Harra, founding director (with composer Brendan Connelly) of The Theatre of a Two-headed Calf, who performed it. It opened up a conversation about performance, humour and queer identity, and it was very good.’

We’ll give the last word to Sabine, who, like Martha and RoseLee, is constantly looking backward and forward at the same time. ‘Andrea Fraser was already engaged in performance at a time when hardly anyone was doing it. I can’t wait to see her new work that’s just been announced.’

Robert Ayers interviewed Martha Wilson, RoseLee Goldberg and Sabine Breitwieser for Total Theatre Magazine January 2012.

Founded in 1976, Franklin Furnace is a physical and online archive dedicated to ‘serving artists by providing both physical and virtual venues for the presentation of time-based visual art’. Each year its Franklin Furnace awards offer grants of between \$2,000 and \$10,000 to emerging artists to allow them to produce major works in New York.  
[www.franklinfurnace.org](http://www.franklinfurnace.org)

Performa is an international biennial of new visual art performance. Performa 11, the fourth edition, was held 1-21 November 2011 in New York City.  
[www.performa-arts.org](http://www.performa-arts.org)

Founded in 1929 as an educational institution, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) is one of the world heavyweights among art museums. It houses an extensive Media and Performance Art department with holdings dating from the early 1960s.  
[www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org)

Images  
Page 21: Dread Scott, *Money to Burn*. Page 22: Liz Magic Laser, *I Feel Your Pain*. Page 23: *Combatant Status Review Tribunals*, pp.002954–003064: *A Public Reading*

# VOICES

Julian Crouch of Improbable, in his own words



**I made masks and puppets all through my childhood.** I remember once finding a book in the library about paper sculpture, and I thought I could give it a go. The paper sculptures in the book were clean and white and neat, but I didn't have the patience to read it properly or follow instructions, so the things I made were from newspaper stuck together with brown gum tape.

**Why masks and puppets?** Probably because they're small enough to make in your bedroom, and when I was young I was too shy to properly occupy a room with other people in it. I suppose I got over that eventually...

**I had no art school training.** I learned early on that I didn't like being taught art in a formal situation, and the work I did at school was not nearly as compelling as the things I made in my bedroom.

**So I went to Edinburgh University instead to study the history of art.** I was not a good student and slowly became nocturnal, awake at night and asleep during the day. But I made masks and after I'd amassed a collection touted them round the theatre companies of Edinburgh in two black bin liners, offering my services at a cut price rate. I got a few jobs this way, and made enough masks to exhibit them.

**I do also do shows without masks and puppets, although I know now that even a cardboard cut-out tree can enter a stage enthusiastically or tragically.** I actually dabble in most artforms. I still play music, and compose for theatre, and I paint and draw and illustrate and write... I don't really dance, but maybe I will in the future. I am interested in stories principally, and I don't really care where they come from or through which form they manifest themselves.

**My life and influences always seem like a wild goose chase... one thing leads me here... and then there.** I am not interested in originality, but I am interested in personality. I am not particularly interested in the worship of good ideas. I often wonder whether any old idea might do – just as long as you push that one idea all the way.

**Improbable came about when Phelim McDermott and I were both working at the Leicester Haymarket at the same time** – he in the studio (with Lee Simpson), and me in the main house. He needed a designer for a production of *Dr Faustus* at Nottingham Playhouse and that turned out to be me. We worked freelance in the rep theatres for two or three years, and then got a little tired of the 'bums on seats' pressure of those houses. We wanted to do more experimental work, and went to the Arts Council for funding. They said we had to become a company to get funding, and we had just done a show called *Improbable Tales*...

**Of all the Improbable shows I loved doing *Sticky* for its intimate bigness and I loved *Spirit* for its intimate smallness.** *Lifegame* is special to me too. It truly did feel like the distilled essence of what theatre is for.

**I love making more than anything, because it seems like meditation to me.** It's where I feel most comfortable. I love the dance between leading and following that happens when you use your hands. It's the best way of writing that I know.

**I have now moved to Brooklyn, New York with my family, and Improbable is going through big changes.** I stepped down as a decision-making artistic director almost a year ago, but we have continued to make work together this year. My current project, *The Devil and Mister Punch*, is the last I'm doing as Improbable for now, but the future is open. Phelim and myself have been asked to do





another Met Opera production in the 2017/18 season, so we may well be making work together well into our 50s!

I think at the time I started *The Devil and Mister Punch* I wanted something different from the ‘high art’ of the Met Opera, and the brash arrogance of the Broadway system, and I wanted to play in the gutter. It seems to me that puppetry has historically been the gutter art – ignored by the academics and historians. When theatre has seemed too politically dangerous and has been banned (as it has been in both Britain and America at various points through history), the puppets have slipped along the gutter, deemed too low to be worth banning... But sometimes one can see the moon and the heavens reflected in the water of the gutter, and I suppose that’s what I am drawn to.

**Punch is interesting. Not always likeable.** Sometimes extremely irritating and often hard to watch. But he is truly ancient, and in some ways he is the unofficial and unwilling God of all puppets. He is a configuration of nose and chin. Ours doesn’t even have a hump or speak with a swazzle voice, but he is still unmistakable. I didn’t pick him because I liked him. In fact I picked him because I wanted to do a show about puppeteers who didn’t really like puppets.

**Punch became the killer we know when the marionette theatre became unpopular and uneconomic to run.** Their shows involved too many people. What has been passed down to us is the stripped-down, lean version. Rods and strings became glove. The murderer in Punch is to do with human hands... one man in a booth with two puppets raised above his head. To keep the story moving one of them has to go, and dancing and death are the glove puppets’ forte. One clubs the other, and the showman can slip out his hand to leave a limp corpse. The free hand slips into the next character, who enters, and we are onto the next beat.

**Punch was the first puppet I ever made, and I think some kind of base point for the very idea of puppetry in general.** The characters in that story are deep in most of us, and they are for me. They speak to something centuries older than myself. But there is much in the show that deals with more recent experiences. The Punch part of the show is only the story within the story. In reality this show is about puppeteers, double acts, love and conflict.

**I wanted to do a show as an innocent, and I wanted to have fun.** As the work unfurled though, I found that I was in some way telling the story of what it’s like to try and put on shows, and what it’s like to fail. *The Devil And Mr Punch* pretty much starts with two old vaudevillians watching a dog type at a typewriter. It may seem random, but a lot of my life can be summed up by that image.



Julian Crouch is a director, designer, writer, maker and teacher whose career has spanned theatre, opera, film and television. He formed Improbable along with Lee Simpson, Nick Sweeting and Phelim McDermott in 1996, and their productions together have included *Amino*, *70 Hill Lane*, *Lifegame*, *Coma*, *Spirit*, *Sticky*, and *The Wolves in the Walls* (a co-production with National Theatre of Scotland based on the book by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean). In 2007 Improbable and ENO premiered a major new interpretation of Philip Glass’ *Satyagraha* that was remounted at The Metropolitan Opera, New York in 2008, 2010 and 2011.

Outside of Improbable, in 1998 Julian and Phelim collaborated on the infamous and long-lived *Shockheaded Peter* for the production company Cultural Industry, while more recently Julian has worked as a designer on the multi award-winning *Jerry Springer – The Opera*; the *Addams Family* musical, which opened on Broadway in April 2010; the Metropolitan Opera and ENO co-production of John Adams’ *Doctor Atomic*; and the Metropolitan Opera’s recent Baroque opera *The Enchanted Island*, as well as their 125th Anniversary Gala.

Improbable’s *The Devil and Mister Punch*, a tragic comedy of manslaughter and love, played at the Barbican 2-25 February 2012.

Julian’s forthcoming projects include working as a designer on a new interpretation of Prokofiev’s *Cinderella*, choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon for Dutch National Ballet and San Francisco Ballet, and illustrating a new children’s book called *Maggot Moon*. [www.improbable.co.uk](http://www.improbable.co.uk)

All images from Improbable’s *The Devil and Mister Punch* and courtesy of the company

# BEING THERE

A three-way reflection on *The Marvellous and Unlikely Fete of Little Upper Downing* by Little Bulb Theatre



As the audience filters in, I'm all smiles and seating suggestions, pumping out our homemade folky melodies on my accordion. But underneath I'm wondering whether our experiment of bringing this show made for village halls to Bristol's discerning theatre-going crowd will pay off. Will we get them onboard with the village hall vibe?

Although we had grown rather fond of the empty maroon chairs that we'd been delivering light comedy to all afternoon, playing to a real audience is invigorating. *Little Upper Downing* is a show that welcomes rogue activity and improv, and from the outset this brave party of strangers feed us the ammunition to do just that. Occasionally they even steal the show.

By the time our symbolic 'Hate Balloons' are unleashed, involving audience members by having them hurl 'plastic effigies of hate' across the aisle at each other to demonstrate the bitter animosity that divides the villages of our story, it feels like a community is forming – something that generally comes ready-made when you perform to a village.

Soon enough we're immersed in characteristic chaos, rollerblading through farcical scenes of manly weaving, pub revelry and 'lovey stuff', only mildly fluffing up the newly re-devised Fog ribbon-dance. There's a smattering of costume mishaps and our new unravelling Fete banner (a source of pride earlier in the day) sticks mid-reveal; not a great look.

Fortunately, it's a structure that can harness calamity, and this audience is supportive. And despite Clare and I accidentally throwing bunting into Alex's shaving-foam-clad face somewhat sabotaging the poignant final image, plus Dominic questionably rhyming Edinburgh with

'bedding-fur' within his nightly improvised song, I think we got away with it.

Whether it's a village hall or a city theatre, the space creates a context that definitely impacts the show. But tonight it hits me anew that the attitude of the audience within that space overrides this. We never know what they'll give us. So even though our small show made for rural touring isn't what we'd describe as 'experimental' theatre, for me it always ends up feeling like an experiment.

**Shamira Turner is a performer and deviser in Little Bulb Theatre**

The first time I saw this show, I made a pilgrimage across Devon through the dark and fog to the tiny hamlet of Dunster on the edge of Exmoor, where it was playing in the village hall as part of the rural touring scheme. It was all whitewashed walls, squash and biscuits and people who'd never heard of Little Bulb. This time all I have to do is step out of my office, walk through the theatre foyer and join the queue into the auditorium. It's all black tabs, boutique beer and quite a few paid-up members of the Little Bulb fan club. From one-time tithe barn to converted tobacco factory, to quote the four-strong roving contingency of the Little Upper Downing Folk Society, 'it's different, and yet strangely similar'.

By my standards, at ten minutes to curtain up I'm very early, and I realise it's because I want to get in there quick – I don't want to miss a thing. Entering the bunting-decked space to the warm and easy strains of a folk tune that may or may not be familiar, performed by a beaming





ensemble who greet us one by one, I find myself envying, as I often do, those audience members who are about to experience a remarkable company or show for the first time. I can already feel the stupid grin of unequivocal joy that this unreasonably young and talented company never fail to provoke in me twitching in my jaw.

The people I'm with ask me anxiously if there's any 'audience participation' and I'm surprised that I find it hard to answer. A problematic term at the best of times, right now it seems at once an overstatement and inadequate. I'm usually as alive as the next person to the threat of 'having to do something' in the name of art and the myriad opportunities for humiliation it represents, but curiously, I realise that what I'm most looking forward to about seeing the show again is being involved. Over the next couple of hours, we're called upon to be the warring inhabitants of Little and Upper Downing and bat balloons at one another; during a sticky moment when there's an unfavourable performer-to-character ratio, one audience member becomes a player, donning a hat and extemporising with touching sincerity; another is cast as the village baddy and gamely plays a starring role in the felling-by-custard-pie of one of the protagonists. And if we want to, at the end, we can sing.

There's superabundance of natural charm and a seemingly limitless capacity for incorporating anarchy and mishap (I can't think of another company who would with such relish exploit the snapping of the double bass's D-string in the opening number for all its comic potential). Little Bulb don't take themselves at all seriously, but crucially they take the enterprise very seriously – which is perhaps the only way you can take something so supremely silly. For yes, there's a huge nudge and an enormous wink to this show (perhaps magnified further by this new context where its theatrical modus operandi feels more knowing), but the biggest thing about it is its heart. It's the generosity of the performances that elicits a similarly generous response from audiences and that makes the feeling of universal elation, which is why this show is such a gift not only to the rural touring scheme for which it was made, but also to other touring circuits. It doesn't just stand up outside its natural habitat; it stands up, improvises a folk reel and then shows you how to do it.

**Carrie Rhys-Davies runs the Tobacco Factory Theatre's learning and participation programme (TF+) and is Associate Producer at Theatre Bristol.**



An excitedly attentive audience greet Little Bulb's every word with silence and every silence with applause during a pre-show of folk music played by the company. Dressed in greens, browns and leather jerkins, the Bulbs don't even need to start talking (in slightly dodgy 'Farmer Giles' accents) for the audience to start laughing. I'd say this is in equal measure because the actors are very funny and because the audience is really up for a laugh. A bond is established before the show begins. Four members of the Little Upper Downing Folk Society are here to tell us the story of how their once-feuding villages were reunited by the heroic folk band The Roaring Badgers. Christopher Roaring was a singer-songwriter from Upper Downing, Derek Badger came from Little Downing and played a 'little guitar', and they met one night by accident in the Great Divide... Jumping from narrative to narrative, character to character, and village to village ('very different, but strangely similar'), Little Bulb whip up a pastiche of rural life, telling a sweet story with gusto, sometimes rather raucously. Simple set and props, quality homemade folk music, an over-egged comparison with *Romeo and Juliet* and a daring reliance on audience interaction all contribute to the celebratory, intimate, charming atmosphere.

The company divide the audience in two to represent the villages. Tonight's audience would have gladly left their seats and engaged in full-on battle had they been encouraged – and it was rather a shame that the theatre venue did not allow it. I began to wish we were all transported to a sunny day at a real village fete. The immediacy and freshness of the performance would have been stunning on the street or at a festival – and I can see how it has worked well in small rural venues. In the Tobacco Factory, on the first night of the tour, it occasionally felt too rough, too improvised, too stand-up. This is a minor criticism but it had the effect of sometimes highlighting a lack of depth. There is fun and laughter aplenty at the village fete but the characters are witty caricatures rather than moving portrayals.

#### Geraldine Harris

The performance of *The Marvellous and Unlikely Fete of Little Upper Downing* written about here took place at the Tobacco Factory Theatre 18 January 2012. [www.tobaccofactorytheatre.com](http://www.tobaccofactorytheatre.com)

The show is touring to community spaces and art centres 15 February – 25 March 2012. For more on Little Bulb see [www.littlebulbtheatre.com](http://www.littlebulbtheatre.com)

All images: Little Bulb Theatre, *The Marvellous and Unlikely Fete of Little Upper Downing*; courtesy of the company

# THE WORKS

A personal view of the works of New International  
Encounter by Beccy Smith



In 2001, in a chilly gym on the outskirts of Prague, three practitioners who had been teaching together locally decided their shared theatrical ambitions could translate into making a show. They wanted to make a piece of work that worked within its landscape – that welcomed in the local people from the village in which it was being created, and that related to the complex history which had shaped the imagination of this corner of Europe. They shared an aesthetic: an emphasis on performance as a collective experience shared with the audience, using a hybrid of visual styles (clown, puppetry, object theatre and music) to negate differences in nationality and language. And so Alex Byrne and Iva and Kjell Moberg began work on the production that would eventually become *My Long Journey Home*, a re-imagination of the true story of András Tamás, a Hungarian boy press-ganged onto the Eastern Front and lost in a Russian asylum for 53 years. It's a compelling story, exploring the barriers of language and the convulsions of politics and war that characterise Europe's recent history. The production also established core processes: drawing together a band of performers of different nationalities, who shared skills in music as well as acting, to form a company who lived and worked together in a country foreign to many of them. *My Long Journey Home* was a hit when it premiered at the MTM festival in Mostar and Iva and Kjell, now also acting as the company's producers, decided to focus on getting the work out to further audiences, with the three directors partly self-funding an initial tour. In the decade since its premiere the show has toured to 23 countries and the name New International Encounter has become synonymous with infectious

ensemble performance whose playfulness, enthusiasm and panache supports the telling of some of Europe's most powerful true stories.

Ten years on and I am visiting the closing performance of a successful and substantial family Christmas production, commissioned by The Junction and successfully garnering national reviews. The show is making its presence felt in the city, stepping up into the mainstream in a way Christmas children's shows are especially apt at. As I circuit one of the main roundabouts in Cambridge, a huge tarpaulin banner announces the run with a cartoonish snow-clad gingerbread house that makes me double-take – for a moment I don't recognise the production I've come to see.

For this is a company whose aesthetic, whether portraying the sepia tones of 1930s Germany or the punky landscape of '70s Russia, has always embodied a particularly theatrical style, one that spawned a hundred imitators as young visual devising companies really took off in the noughties. A sort of spatial rendering of the devising process: open, often freeform staging, focused through physical direction and the use of practical lights and sound; a jigsaw of workable objects and set pieces that established the flavour of their era and were animated and transformed through lively performance. And their shows have always, one way or another, been about theatre-making. The transparency of their form – as hapless clown storytellers make a tentative offer to share a tale – invites us to share the process, to complete the illusions ourselves. Their works are always also characterised by excellent,





detailed performances, both physical and psychological. Such open-handed transparency in their dramaturgy demands a quality of musical and acting performance as a counterbalance (*My Long Journey Home* was nominated for 'Best Ensemble Performance' in The Stage Awards for Acting Excellence on the Fringe in 2004 and the awards have come thick and fast since) and this is what strikes such enjoyable contrast in NIE's shows, as we are moved between collaborating on the theatre being made before us and being transported by it. Academics might call such a shifting dramaturgy post-dramatic.

So what will a mainstream family audience, seduced by the neon tones of sticky, stripy candy make of it all?

NIE have often been described as a company that cast a spell over their audience. Their humble performance style invites us in and their clown-esque focus on us and our reactions continuously checks its own use throughout the performance. And *Hansel and Gretel* proves to be no exception. Starting small, with a silent line-up downstage that metaphorically beckons their young audience closer before exploding into music and storytelling, it reminds me of just how suitable for children NIE's style is. It's not just the exuberant playfulness of the ensemble's intimacy, always a joy to feel temporarily part of, but also the no-nonsense theatricality, never seeking to hide the means by which the moments of magic are made. Both qualities have a particular appeal for younger audiences unconditioned to the unspoken 'rules' of illusory theatre. In fact, the enthusiastic support of ASSITEJ (the forward-looking international association of theatres for children and young people) has bolstered the company's international touring work for many years.

The company have transposed the fairytale into a decidedly festive, wintry setting (although the closing cries of 'It feels a bit like Christmas!' felt a little forced on my visit, but then it was January the 3<sup>rd</sup>), but have otherwise remained true to the original Grimm story. This being the third *Hansel and Gretel* production I've seen over the past twelve months I feel qualified to comment on their approach to the narrative and the show was a great illustration of the company's masterful handling of material: finding ways to

accommodate the awkward repetitions that underpin the fairytale's structure and confronting head-on the bleakness of the content – child abandonment, cannibalism and murder, all tied up in a cautionary bow. Encountering NIE without the core cast members who have become so familiar over the past ten years – who have grown up in the family of the company and now settled to have families of their own – had the effect of throwing the company's work into relief. Their storytelling mode, which allows performers to position themselves in relation to the story, supported some sophisticated readings, offering up a couple of critiques of the Woodcutter's terrible choices, and brought home the ramifications of the children's murderous actions. Their folksy Eastern European scoring emphasised the story's Central European roots. This was the most elaborate set I have seen the company employ, but nevertheless the emphasis on key transformative objects – a bed, a tree stump, a ukelele – and a variety of on-stage powered mechanics such as a very pleasing system of pulleys, meant that the emphasis remained squarely on the performers, who owned the space from the moment we crossed the threshold and were welcomed into their home.

If I don't always feel they have fully adapted their language for their younger audience – particularly their textual style, which remains rapid, ironic and peppered with interesting and sometimes abstract ideas – there's certainly much for me as an adult to enjoy.

It's a combination of this stylistic robustness and the tightness of the ensemble that makes NIE's work so enduring and resonant, supporting their approach to a real breadth of material. The company's first three productions – *My Long Journey Home* (2001), *Everything Falls Apart* (2002) and *The End of Everything Ever* (2004) – formed The European Trilogy, sharing an emphasis on some of the key narratives of that Continent's history: displacement, war, separation (Agata's fateful disappearing act by nibbling her own nametag on the kindertransport in *The End of Everything Ever* has become a shorthand for the glorious 'Oh Fuck' moment in devised storytelling). These are epic tales that reach across history (a lifetime of Russia's recent past is held in *Everything Falls Apart*). Such sweep feels like a natural emphasis for a company whose creative team effortlessly accommodates more than eight nationalities. The 2006-8 show, *Instant Epic*, showcased this quality of







their storytelling, creating a newly improvised show each night with audiences and artists from companies in Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and the UK at London's BAC.

Over time, whilst continuing to keep the above-mentioned shows in repertoire and touring the world, NIE have pushed harder at the edges of their form, increasingly exploring promenade and site-specific methods and seeking new ways to access stories that embody experiences of place and identity through participation. 2009's *My Life with the Dogs* saw the company pushing their aesthetic in new directions with a more electric scoring, 80s palette and punky style to retell the much mythologised true story of 'wild child' Ivan Mishukov. As the storytellers transformed their ensemble into a pack of hugely sympathetic, ravenous and loyal wild dogs, this production highlighted for me the company's ongoing emphasis on fracture-points in our civilisation placed by their interest in exploring key stories from modern European history.

In 2011's *Tales from a Sea Journey / Hav*, the company worked for the first time with a writer, acclaimed Norwegian poet Sjórn, who collaborated on the re-casting of sea myths, shanties and real life experiences drawn from a residency on the cargo vessel GMA-CGM Fort St Louis, creating a marriage of content and form that perfectly suited the company's approach. In Linz for *Das Schiff* (2009), Peterborough for *Tales from the Middle of Town* (2010) and London for the ongoing *Tales from the Thames* (2012), the company have developed a model of participation that works over a sustained period (up to three years in Peterborough) to develop stories with children to people their productions with characters and ideas that connect intimately to the places, and sites (a shopping centre, a historical steamship) where they are performed.

In 2011 NIE celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a publication and a programme of performances and events which, hosted by Dramatikkens Hus in Oslo, illustrated the influence of and affection for the company in Northern Europe. Their pan-European approach to evolving an extensive and gifted creative team has proven a canny business model, allowing them to spread their support and partnerships, but has been born out of a commitment to broad theatrical styles, to shared heritage and identity. As the company enters



its eleventh year, with eight shows across at least seven countries in the pipeline, and an evolving cast and creative team, I am reminded that the most powerful, and enduring, quality of their work is the sense of shared exhilaration and joy communicated by their performances. As long as this quality, which seems grounded in a close ensemble enjoying their abundant creativity together, remains, I have no doubt the company will continue reinventing itself well into the future.

*Tales from a Sea Journey* is touring the UK in March, in June NIE are presenting a site-specific show created for and with young people in co-production with the Unicorn Theatre in London, and *Hansel and Gretel* will be played again for Christmas 2012. Elsewhere in the world, NIE are touring *Twist*, their co-production with Kopergieterij across Belgium and Holland; touring the European Trilogy to festivals in Korea, Austria and Germany; and developing a new show based on Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger* with Danish company Theater Mollen.

[www.nie-theatre.com](http://www.nie-theatre.com)

#### Images

Page 28: *Tales from a Sea Journey* (photo Jiří N Jelínek). Page 29: Rehearsals in Pleasance Courtyard, Edinburgh for *The End of Everything Ever* (photo Elke Laleman). Page 30: *Everything Falls Apart* (photo: Tobias Metz). Page 31 top: *Tales from a Sea Journey* (photo Jiří N Jelínek); bottom: *Hansel & Gretel* (photo: Claire Haigh)

# Black Holes and Shining Lights

Hannah Sullivan sounds the horn for those enterprising regional venues programming contemporary theatre and performance



Parabola Arts Centre in Cheltenham opened its doors in February 2011, bringing new performance to the Gloucestershire region – a part of the UK not previously known for being at the forefront of contemporary theatre programming. What’s interesting is that Parabola Arts Centre (PAC) is now presenting a programme that could stand its ground against the key fringe theatres in the urban centres of London and Bristol. To date, Parabola has hosted Analogue, Uninvited Guests and Tim Crouch and in the coming season (spring 2012) will present Theatre Ad Infinitum, whose *Translunar Paradise* was a sold out hit at both the Edinburgh Fringe and the London International Mime Festival, and the Total Theatre Award-winning Bunk Puppets.

Whilst working at PAC I have witnessed the centre building a relationship both with its local Cheltenham community and with the artists it has hosted, determined to establish and sustain itself as a centre of new performance.

PAC programme director Allegra Galvin thinks of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Herefordshire as a ‘black hole’ in terms of contemporary performance – the regular touring circuit forms a ring-road around it, connecting Birmingham, Oxford, Bath, Bristol, and Cardiff. Allegra recognises that these regions are under threat of losing young creatives as opportunities and activity are literally passing by. Therefore PAC’s mission is focused towards inspiring young audiences – or as Allegra puts it, ‘future audiences’ – to attend exciting and experimental performance. She feels that devised performance encourages ‘bravery

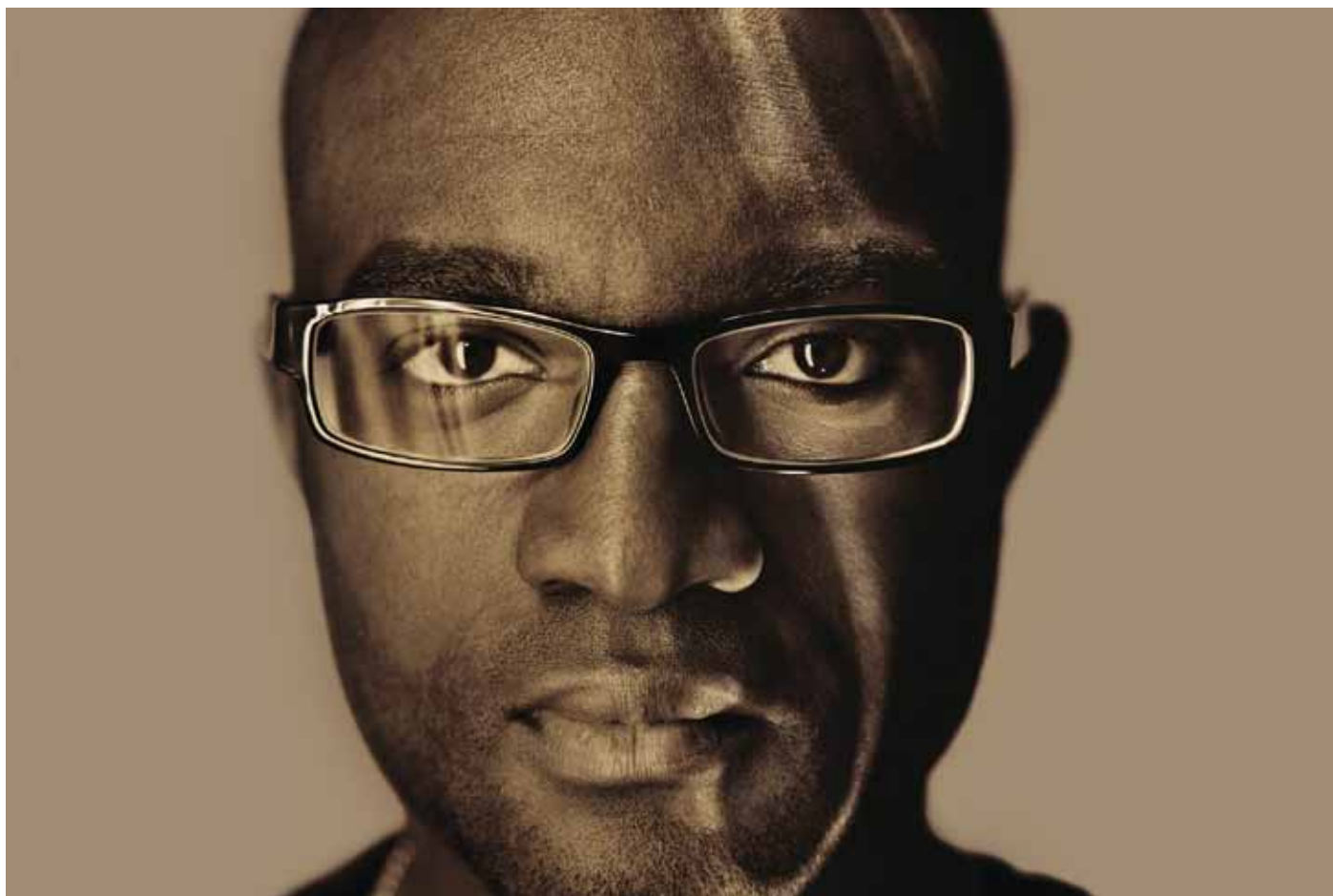
and imagination within learning’, and that explorative theatre ‘can encourage its audience to take on a similar attitude to work and education’. PAC hope to recast Gloucestershire as a place where creativity can and does happen.

For example, Parabola Arts Centre programmes and offers residential development for emerging artists and projects, such as the Gloucestershire company Stand and Stare, who are currently working on *The Guild of Cheesemakers* at PAC, an immersive work that is part theatre, part wine and cheese tasting. Ultimately, they are aiming for a regional tour of the piece in Gloucestershire.

Allegra says her essential questions as a producer would be: ‘What’s new, who’s making it, and who is it for?’ With that in mind, she has set up the Try Something New event at PAC – the ‘something new’ applying both to artists and to audiences! Artists try out short new works-in-progress and audiences experience theatre that is not staged in the theatre but presented throughout the building. Parabola Arts Centre is keen to encourage its young and upcoming artists and its audiences that they don’t have to leave the region to see and make great performance.

So is Parabola a unique case, or are there a growing number of venues in the country’s market towns or suburbs – neither ‘urban theatres’ nor ‘rural touring’ sites – that are charged with a mission to deliver ‘new performance’ to their local communities? To find out I contacted





a number of venues and organisations in other regions: Beaford Arts in North Devon, Triggered At / China Plate Theatre in the West Midlands, Carriageworks and Emerge festival in Yorkshire, ARC in the North East, and Farnham Maltings in the South East. I have found that each organisation has its unique take on how to tackle new work, new audiences, and supporting their region.

I spoke first to Farnham Maltings' director Gavin Stride. Farnham Maltings are a few years ahead of Parabola in running a contemporary venue outside of the urban metropolis, and have gained a well-deserved reputation for both their programming and their support of artists. Gavin feels that working 'in the shadow of London' provincial venues have totally different rules. Regional venues cannot sell contemporary theatre to a contemporary audience in the way that this is done in London – this just won't work in Colchester or Farnham. Crucial to Farnham Maltings' work as a producing house is the acknowledgement of the potential context of the work: knowing who will want to hear it, and what it is saying. Gavin emphasises that this is also the responsibility of the artists, and says that it is often companies that are provincial in origin, such as Little Bulb Theatre Company, that have been successful with the work they have produced through Farnham Maltings.

Farnham Maltings is housed in a former brewery in Surrey. Work is made in residence, but existing work is also programmed. The organisation offers small grants for drama projects in their first stages under their No Strings Attached scheme. It is also, alongside Brighton Festival, responsible for Caravan, an international marketing festival that is shaped around the question, 'What does it mean to be an English theatre company?' This year's national showcase of twenty curated artists includes Bryony Kimmings and Inua Ellams and will take place in Brighton in May during the Brighton Festival.

When asked about the selection of artists working at Farnham Maltings, Gavin said that the artists can be from anywhere, and that it's not regionally restricted, but they must show an interest in the South East audience. Farnham Maltings is also a partner within a new project called House, which aims to ensure the health of touring theatre in the South East by working with 50 venues across the region, ensuring that the artists are properly programmed with an agreed

fee (rather than the risky box office split so often offered). As well, the centre offers essential producing support for companies who are struggling to pitch their show to people and places they don't know.

So that's the word from two venues in the South: what's the story from comparable venues in the North of England? Richard Bonham of Carriageworks in Leeds feels that the relationships between venues, creating effective producing models, have made it easier to make work. But what is increasingly difficult is how to distribute the work. Where to? And with what money? A project such as House may provide a solution.

A platform created by Carriageworks, Stage@Leeds and Severn Arts, the Emerge festival is the place to be for new Yorkshire artists. After starting out three years ago as a week of scratch nights, Emerge is now a year-round mentoring scheme with 'shop window' performances. One of the first shows to come out of this scheme is Naomi Rothwell's puppetry and storytelling show, *The Dreams of Philomina*.

In the North East, Stockton-on-Tees' ARC serves the valley with a multi-arts programme. Annabel Turpin, their chief executive, describes one of the venue's main goals as being 'to raise aspirations'. She says the region has undergone much change, particularly in the employment landscape, which in turn affects people's lifestyles, and that 'it is the venue's social mission to help people make sense of the current world, to embrace change and equip them with skills and knowledge to face today's challenges'. It is through the work they programme itself, and how that programme engages with the public, that these goals can be reached.

Annabel arrived at ARC three years ago, bringing many exciting companies with her. There was concern that audience numbers would be low, but Annabel's philosophy is that if you don't put on the work, then no one will have the opportunity to see it; it is worth the risk as it is the only way to develop audiences.

A major initiative for ARC in 2012 is to make their artist development programme ARCADE a core part of the venue's activity. ARCADE is an interesting model for engaging and supporting local artists. It is a membership scheme for professional practitioners making



performance in the Tees Valley region. It offers regular scratch nights, professional development workshops, one-to-one surgeries, opportunities to perform at ARC and free tickets. A very attractive package to any working artist, and so it is not surprising that on the last count it had gathered 140 members.

ARC is also part of Bridging the Gap, in partnership with Newcastle Theatre Royal and The Maltings in Berwick, which is a project development scheme offering space and performances in these three venues. In its third year, Bridging the Gap is currently working with theatre-maker Daniel Bye on the creation of *Ash*. This is one of many collaborative projects that aims to 'create new platforms and pathways'.

Moving down to the West Midlands: Triggered At, run by China Plate Theatre, is an organisation based at Warwick Arts Centre with the mission to keep it a world-class venue. It is a structured commissioning programme offering artists the opportunity to develop a first idea into a first draft, with hands on support, dramaturgical advice, space, a commissioning fee, and performance opportunities. This opportunity attracts world-class artists into a venue that even without this initiative has an enviable reputation for luring international artists of great repute through its doors: for example, Peter Brook is a regular visitor. Triggered At will this year be supporting Mark Murphy's aerialist and animation spectacle *Take a Deep Breath* and Shunt luminary David Rosenberg's new project *Ring*, a sound journey in complete darkness.

Ed Collier, co-director of China Plate Theatre, stresses the importance of venues within a particular region working collectively to create a network. Individually each venue is not strong enough to support the amount of work being made. And so the arrival of new organisations and venues, such as Parabola Arts Centre, is a welcome contribution.

Let's move now to the South West... Beaford Arts in North Devon, as any Devonshire wild child would, seems to have a brilliant personality based on its community programme and its understanding of the importance of having a good time. Obviously built on a foundation of hard work and excellent producing skills, Beaford Arts produces work for the community spaces of North Devon, many of which are not theatres. Mark Wallace, director of Beaford Arts, detailed the difference between producing work for the theatre versus work presented in community spaces: 'on entering the theatre the audience are tacitly joining a group that is interested in the theatre, but when the local community goes to an event in the pub, or the church, or the village hall, their expectations are different'. They are there principally to spend time with family, friends and neighbours, and as long as the performances programmed fulfil this promise, they engage with the work enthusiastically. Mark also found it interesting to note that these audiences are usually very open to relational or participatory work – more so than a theatre audience.

The organisation has a strong connection to the region through a huge body of volunteers, who in each town promote and help in deciding the programme. The work therefore becomes part of a community's life. In past seasons Beaford Arts have worked with Cartoon de Salvo with a rural tour of *Pub Rock* (in rural pubs); have programmed Laura Muiridge's *Running on Air* set in a VW camper van, with the VW overlooking the Atlantic at Croyde Bay; and presented Wonderbar's *Small Space* in a village kitchen.

Currently Beaford Arts are working with Kilter Theatre on a new site-generic rural work for a North Devon Village, to be presented autumn 2012. Mark Wallace's own favourite in the upcoming season is a rural performance of Chris Goode's *The Adventures of Wound Man and Shirley*.

One of the reasons for Beaford Arts' success in programming new performance into rural settings is due to its integration of local people in the project as advocates and volunteers. Beaford Arts has been running for 45 years and so is a deeply rooted part of the region.

Talking to the inspirational directors and programmers of these venues outside of our big cities, it is clear that they have built successful working models by giving care and attention to the quality of the work presented – through their knowledge of and engagement with their local community; and by nurturing and supporting artists both within their region and from further afield, nationally or internationally.

The venue I am currently working with, Parabola Arts Centre, is just a year-old, so on the very beginnings of its journey, but it has already made a sound start in all of the above, and is hopefully set to join its more established peers as a flag on the map for anyone with a serious interest in contemporary theatre and performance.

Opened in October 2009, Parabola Arts Centre supports emerging artists in the Gloucestershire region, concentrating on work that stretches the definitions of theatre, music and dance. Later this year PAC will host performances by Analogue, Inua Ellams, Chris Goode, and Lost Dog, among others.  
[www.parabolaartscentre.co.uk](http://www.parabolaartscentre.co.uk)

Run out of Greenwarren House in the village of Beaford, Beaford Arts operates a rural touring circuit that encompasses more than 30 local Devonshire villages, with venues ranging from halls to ancient churches, barns, beaches, clifftops and sand dunes.  
[www.beaford-arts.org.uk](http://www.beaford-arts.org.uk)

Triggered at Warwick Arts Centre commissions new work by giving artists time to develop concepts, physical space to work in, an audience to reflect on the work, dramaturgical and producing support, and a commission fee. The scheme is led by Ed Collier and Paul Warwick of China Plate.  
[www.warwickartscentre.co.uk](http://www.warwickartscentre.co.uk) / [www.chinaplatetheatre.com](http://www.chinaplatetheatre.com)

Situated at the heart of Leeds' Millennium Square, The Carriageworks is a theatre providing extensive support to artists in the North. It runs the Freshly Picked initiative, an annual showcase of the best physical and contemporary theatre from across the UK, as well as (with stage@leeds and Seven) the Emerge festival, a programme of performances and workshops tied to the year-round Emerge Leeds platform.  
[www.carriageworkstheatre.org.uk](http://www.carriageworkstheatre.org.uk) / [www.emergeleeds.co.uk](http://www.emergeleeds.co.uk)

With a programme of live performance, cinema, visual arts and participatory and community projects, ARC serves the whole of Stockton and the Tees Valley. At present the venue's two associate theatre companies are Rabbit Damage and Vivid Theatre Company.  
[www.arconline.co.uk](http://www.arconline.co.uk)

Farnham Maltings operates both as a community arts and entertainment venue and as a creative organisation. Among its current stable of associate companies are Dancing Brick, Little Bulb and Ockham's Razor, while its resident companies are Max Humphries, Pursued by a Bear, StopGAP, and The Dance Movement. Farnham Maltings is also one of the hosts for the Puppet Centre's Puppets About residency and runs the Caravan showcase alongside Brighton Festival.  
[www.farnhammaltings.com](http://www.farnhammaltings.com) / [www.caravanshowcase.org.uk](http://www.caravanshowcase.org.uk)

Images  
Page 32: Made in China, *We Hope That You're Happy (Why Would We Lie?)*.  
Page 33: Inua Ellams, *Black T-Shirt Collection* (photo Franklyn Rodgers).  
Page 34: Laura Muiridge, *Running On Air* (photo: Joe Martin)



There are many ways to tell a tale, as witnessed by Dorothy Max Prior at the London International Mime Festival 2012

# Let me tell you a story



Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin...

Total Theatre readers are likely to understand that 'mime' embraces far more than the historic 'pantomime' form based on silent, mimetic gesture – but unless, like me, you were in the privileged position of seeing a week's worth of shows at LIMF, you might be surprised by just how broad a range of storytelling forms can be found under this umbrella. And what great stories were told!

Camille Boitel's *L'Immediat*, for example, is an extraordinary hour-long exposition of the fragility of life and our delicate and constantly renegotiated relationship with the material world – a story told through visual image, physical action, sound, and light.

Over the past three decades and more of its existence, LIMF has been instrumental in educating audiences to understand that a story can be told by physical or visual means – yet still there is some resistance to seeing the story that is unfolding in word-free theatre. At the post-show discussion after *L'Immediat*, someone asked, 'Was there a story you wanted to get across to us?' To which the company's answer was short and swift: 'Yes – the last hour you've just seen was it.' People sometimes want to be handed a magic key that somehow unlocks a performance text for them, rather than do the interpreting work themselves – but the thing is, what you see is

what you get. And in this case, what you get is a lot.

The first scene is an astonishing feat of physical and visual theatre: the whole vast, deep stage of the Barbican main house is a great sculptural construction of metal machinery, scrapyards junk, distressed furniture, wobbling walls, and precariously perched ladders and lights. All the chaos of contemporary industrial life is here, biding its time. Seven performers – with the best slapstick and physical clowning skills you are likely to see in a long while – negotiate this terrifying world, which literally falls down all around them. Once every plank and box and light and bed has hit back, and every inch of floor space is littered with detritus, someone calls 'time out', the house lights go up, and our team (clad in tattered nighties, thrift-shop fur coats, and battered boots) grab brooms and race around furiously until every morsel is cleared up and, just five minutes later, we are presented with a bare black stage that sits and waits ominously for whatever might next occur...

The start is so strong that nothing could completely live up to it – yet the company manage to keep our attention, each subsequent scene presenting a different wonky world in which the inanimate objects have the upper hand. There's the wardrobes-are-full-of-secrets scene, a farcical dash from one door-crashing closet to another; the

life-lived-out-at-45-degrees scene, which uses all those classic mime tricks of walking, standing, leaning and pulling off-centre to extraordinary effect; and, in one of those 'break with the onstage action' scenes so beloved of French contemporary circus companies, a symphony of sound and light played out upon and amongst the audience. Camille Boitel made his mark as a member of James Thiérée's *Junebug Symphony* company, and that heritage is apparent in *L'Immediat* – not only in the ultra-high standards of physical performance skills, but also in the shape-shifting tricks and turns of the piece, the episodic storytelling, and the creation of surreal and dreamy alternate worlds.

Also at the Barbican – in the smaller space, The Pit, which they sold out very easily for the whole run – were Theatre Ad Infinitum with *Translunar Paradise*, a wordless wonder of a show that uses mask very cleverly to tell a story, both universal and specific, of a love that outlives death. It's about bereavement, yes, and letting go of a lost love – but as company co-director Nir Paldi points out in their post-show discussion, it is ultimately mostly about the nature of love within long-term relationships: the struggle to assert independence whilst nurturing togetherness; the phenomenal bonds and tensions within lives lived in tandem. When an audience member praises the precision of the visual storytelling, and asks the company about their choices in use of form, Nir and company



co-director/performer George Mann give a very eloquent explanation of their processes and decisions, citing their training at the Jacques Lecoq school in Paris as instrumental in giving them the skills to use whatever means they wished to use to tell their tales. So they use whatever form they feel best fits the story they want to tell. For example, the company's previous show *The Big Smoke* was focused very strongly around spoken and sung word; *Translunar Paradise* is a word-free mask piece; and *Odyssey* combines spoken storytelling and intense physical acting to relate its tale at a breakneck speed.

This places them in rather a different position to companies that have chosen to stick with one particular theatre form – puppetry, say, as has been the choice for both Blind Summit and Invisible Thread. But although puppetry is the broad-stroke choice for both the above companies, within that choice are many and various further choices in the storytelling techniques employed.

Blind Summit first: *The Table* (the opening show for this year's festival) is actually a trilogy of pieces. The first, and most substantial, introduces us to Moses, a puppet eternally trapped on a tabletop, who purports to tell the tale of the last twelve hours of the life of his Biblical namesake, in real time. It's a stunning piece, using the excellent three-man Bunraku skills of Mark Down, Nick Barnes and Sean Garratt – deconstructed for us by Moses, who feels free to ponder existentially on his existence as a cardboard-headed puppet stuck on a table, in the process giving us a very entertaining précis of the do's and don'ts of puppetry. Yes, it's 'Beckett-esque' – but it's also brilliant stand-up (the voice of Moses provided by 'head' puppeteer Mark Down). There are dramaturgical inconsistencies – and these don't include

the 'Deus Ex Machina' woman character who suddenly invades the puppet's space and muscles in on his table, prompting the cry, 'you're dramaturgically inconsistent, you are'. No, she's fine, actually – but what *is* a problem is the ending, in which Moses sort of melts away in a slow-mo 'dance' off the table. Made necessary, I suppose because the space needs to be re-set for the two shorter cabaret pieces that follow. But really, it seems logically that Moses should stay put, and we go. The other two pieces are, first, a clever visual skit on frames and framing, using three flats with booth-like 'window frames', and featuring a fast-paced arrival and departure of hats, props and masks; then rounding off the trilogy, a very funny mock *Nouvelle Vague* film 'storyboarded' live, in which stark black words written on white A4 sheets create the narrative, the papers pulled out from a small suitcase and displayed in swift succession in a kind of instant animation of words and images – our four performers resplendent in black turtle-neck sweaters, with small sheets of paper rolled into mock Gauloises sticking out from the sides of their mouths.

'Not that we want to encourage smoking,' says Mark in the discussion after the show, reflecting on the eternal cool of Godard and the New Wave. It emerges that part three came first: developed in a desire to create a follow-up to the company's acclaimed cabaret-show *Low Life* (loosely based on the life story of Charles Bukowski). The creation of the other two pieces followed, and a show was born. But I think I'm not alone in believing that Moses needs to be set free to have his own full show – the remaining two pieces could indeed provide the starting point for a brand-new cabaret-format show. But this all perhaps demonstrates that, when devising, the tale you first start to tell isn't necessarily the show that emerges...





What is also reflected on in the discussion is the use of a multiplicity of languages in the piece – Bunraku and other puppetry languages, the comedy stand-up style quick-fire spoken script of part one, the purely visual theatre of the second piece, the live film-storyboard of the final piece – and on this particular evening, this all added to and embellished by a signed interpretation by Jacqui Beckford, creating another interesting layering of ‘language’ onto the piece.

Also with puppetry as its chosen language came *Invisible Thread*, the company risen from the ashes of *Faulty Optic* under the direction of *Faulty* co-founder Liz Fraser. The company’s first full-length show *Plucked* was presented by LIMF 2012 following an autumn premiere at the Suspense London Puppetry Festival where it was reviewed on these pages by Beccy Smith (Total Theatre Volume 23 Issue 04). In her review, Beccy highlights the power of visual metaphor as storytelling device, to which I can only add that I concur wholeheartedly. The second half, in which the archetypal world of *The Crone* is explored, is particularly rich and resonant. What better metaphor for the state of menopausal womanhood than skirts raised to reveal a cascade of dry kindling? In the post-show talk, Liz spoke of her choice to create a mostly word-free piece of theatre, driven by the puppetry and the soundscape, although incorporating one section of poetic text that places the piece within the frame of a fairytale world. Personally, I wonder if this spoken section is necessary as what has been presented to this point signposts this world very adequately, and the visual/musical storytelling devices work beautifully. Is this an example of an artist not trusting her own visual storytelling powers – or merely a desire to add ever-more layers to the storytelling? Over at the Purcell Room at the Southbank Centre, French company ‘Toron Blues’ *Tendre Suie* is a corde lisse aerial duet inspired by Jean Paul

Sartre’s *Huis Clos* – the play famous for the line ‘hell is other people’. Using a minimum of staging – chairs, a table, a water bottle, a loose hanging rope, and a coiled hanging rope – our two-woman team run the gamut of human relationships. There’s childish spite in a spate of slaps and pokes as the ‘sisters’ sit side-by-side on their chairs, and child-like trust as one climbs the rope and the other tentatively joins her; silent screams of frustration as both battle for space on the rope, and red-lit embraces as they play the games that lovers play.

The weight of responsibility for other people is a metaphor most suited for exploration in aerial doubles, where the giving and receiving of weight is so integral, and where trust in another is crucial. In *Tendre Suie*, this is also taken down to ground level in a ‘dead weight’ sequence in which one woman laboriously attempts to shift the other from her chair, a scene that takes on a Gaulier-like clown dimension in its insistence of (literally and metaphorically) pushing to the max with this seemingly impossible task. Let no-one tell you that circus cannot be narrative: there are a thousand human stories in every scene that unfolds here...

Working with a very different form, but equally committed to visual storytelling, is Fleur Elise Noble, whose *2 Dimensional Life of Her* has as its starting point a desire ‘to find a way for drawing to exist in the world as a transitory process rather than a finished object’. On an L-shaped set made out of ripped, torn and scrunched paper (this set using the floor, back wall and side wall stage-left of the Barbican Pit, making that stage space seem at least twice its usual size) evolves a story that plays cleverly with the notion of the animated drawing, exploring perspective and ‘depth’, and inviting us to constantly question what exactly we are seeing. Thus, a 2D cut-out woman, rather like one of those ‘whited-out’ figures in police photos of bomb scenes, is placed forward of a screen, and the figure suddenly appears to take on life as a film of a woman is projected onto the cut-out. Film-woman then steps out of her cut-out and into the back-wall screen, opening drawn doors, peeling back walls to reveal other rooms within rooms, or whitewashing out those doors or walls with a mop and bucket.

As the piece evolves, cut-out woman, film woman, and a team of on-screen puppet helpers (a wonderfully spooky ensemble of bald Action Man dolls with ridiculously thick marionette strings) play a game of creation and destruction, a kind of constant animation of ever-evolving virtual houses populated by dolls or figures of various dimensions and depths. They are aided and abetted by an almost-invisible performer, seen only as a pair of legs scuttling across the stage under a sheet of card, or a hand turning down a corner of paper. Eventually, an on-film fire erupts and apparently consumes all onstage. Our performer (who, unsurprisingly, looks like film-woman) emerges to shout at the onscreen puppets, ‘I told you not to do the fire!’ then ordering a happy ending, which they dutifully deliver...

Driven by the multi-layered visuals of Fleur Elise Noble herself and by the soundscape of Jeremy Neideck (slopping water, creaking doors, ripping paper – and a horribly realistic crackling fire!), *2 Dimensional Life of Her* is a great example of contemporary visual theatre as storyteller – and like all the work that I saw at this year’s London International Mime Festival one that used a multiplicity of languages to explore the often unvoiced worlds of our inner lives, dreams, and fears.

Blind Summit *The Table*, Soho Theatre; *Invisible Thread Plucked*, Roundhouse; Camille Boitel *L’Immédiate*, Barbican Theatre; Theatre Ad Infinitum *Translunar Paradise*, Barbican Pit; Toron Blues *Tendre Suie*, Purcell Room Southbank Centre; Fleur Elise Noble *2 Dimensional Life of Her*, Barbican Pit.

Dorothy Max Prior chaired the post-show discussions for Blind Summit’s *The Table*, 16 January 2012; and *Invisible Thread’s Plucked*, 17 January 2012.

All shows presented as part of the London International Mime Festival 11–29 January 2012. [www.mimelondon.com](http://www.mimelondon.com)

#### Images:

Page 35: Blind Summit, *The Table*. Page 36: Cie L’Immédiate / Camille Boitel, *L’Immédiate* (photo Vincent Beaume). Page 37 top: Fleur Elise Noble, *2 Dimensional Life of Her*, bottom: Cie Toron Blues, *Tendre Suie*

Terry O'Donovan on the big, simple ideas of Hofesh Shechter & Antony Gormley's *Survivor* and the works of Hiroaki Umeda

# Lost in Space



Scheduled for the same week and playing at venues just a few miles apart, two works in the January 2012 theatrical calendar were notable for fusing dance, music and art – but with varying results. As part of the London International Mime Festival, Hiroaki Umeda presented two short pieces that aimed to ‘transmit sensations, rather than messages, to the audience’ – a pair of solo works in which he dances with light, sound and video projection. Meanwhile, over at the Barbican Centre, the current darling of the dance world, Hofesh Shechter, presented *Survivor*, a collaboration with eminent visual artist Antony Gormley in which over 100 drummers filled the stage for a show billed as Shechter’s ‘first major music performance work’.

Shechter has been experimenting with large-scale, rock-concert-like musical performances through his dance work since presenting a ‘Choreographer’s Cut’ version of *Uprising / In Your Rooms* at the Roundhouse in 2009. Audiences filled the pit of the Roundhouse as if they were at a rock gig, with many complaining that sightlines were horrendous. Otherwise, the results were exciting. A young, forward-thinking choreographer was breaking down barriers between artistic forms and injecting an edgy and rough energy into the dance world. Last year, Sadler’s Wells invited him to produce another ‘Choreographer’s Cut’ of his latest piece, *Political Mother*. The stalls seats were taken out of the Sadler’s Wells theatre, imitating the effect at the Roundhouse, and Shechter assembled a band of 24 musicians to rock out.

During this performance, Shechter appeared as a mix of evil dictator and rock star, shrieking inaudible lyrics into a microphone throughout the show. For *Survivor* he appears as a drummer and shrieker once again, and his core musical collaborators are 30 in number, with an extra 100 volunteer drummers thrown in for good measure. He and Gormley have stripped back the Barbican stage to reveal its vast depth and height. During a sprawling 75 minutes we are presented with a handful of stunning images and an album of repetitive drumming and musical ramblings.

A lone body in white stands stock-still facing the wall – a living

statue. A chink of light appears through a vast wall-like safety curtain, illuminating the audience. A line of bodies appears onstage, with lights gently swaying back and forth to reveal a face before disintegrating to an outline once again. *Survivor* explores the living statue in us all as we attempt to survive the life we find ourselves in.

Throughout the piece a cameraman follows much of the action. A huge screen is filled with what he shoots – a man lying in a bath fully clothed; a pianist getting further and further away as the camera is pulled into the lighting rig; the audience, with the cameraman zooming in on particular faces. The most effective of these moments is one of the rare dance sequences in which five men are filmed from above the stage. Sliding and spinning around meteorite-like weighted balls, their movements onscreen create a poetic homage to the human plight: we are all tiny dots in the universe, floating through a little life and unable to control many things around us. Elsewhere, a man is hoisted horizontally in the air and, stock-still, spins around accompanied by Shechter’s string musicians. It’s a quasi-religious image that is quietly affecting. It reminds us just how vulnerable we all are as we float through the terrain of life.

Throughout the piece, Gormley and Shechter fill the large screen with images of waterfalls, buildings being demolished, and most poignantly a flock of starlings that twist and turn like Shechter’s score. Alongside the banging of drums, there are moments of intense silence and quiet lonesome folk song. Towards the end, a youthful Joel Harries stands alone with his guitar to serenade us with his broken heart. As an entire piece, *Survivor* feels like an experiment between two artists on an epic scale. Interestingly, it is the quieter and more focused moments that emotionally connect and resonate long after you’ve taken out your earplugs.

In stark contrast to *Survivor*, Japan’s Hiroaki Umeda is alone onstage for both *Haptic* and *Holistic Strata*. Although he is similarly concerned with the lone body in space, his work pares everything down in order to explore sensations rather than meaning. *Haptic*, the first of his double bill at the Linbury Studio, explores colour and its relationship with





movement. Alone, Umeda occupies a stage framed with a lime green light. His body pulses and shimmers with tiny but precise movements. As the green turns to blue and then to purple the stage is entirely transformed. An electronic score accompanies Umeda's intricate choreography and seems to control Umeda and his environment. A single corridor of red envelops Umeda before the music escalates to a pounding level (for which Shechter's earplugs would have come in handy), and the stage is submerged into a sea of strobe lighting. It's like the Royal Opera House is being transformed into a nightclub.

Like Shechter, Umeda is quite the all-rounder. Having trained as a photographer, he set up his company S20 in 2000 to produce his own work, which he performs around the world. As well as dancing and choreographing, he is a sound, image and lighting designer. Both he and Shechter revel in the fusion of bold imagery with bodies in space and original music. Where Shechter's practice seems to stem from his personal and political concerns, Umeda sets out to make work that is felt and experienced.

*Haptic* certainly is an enjoyable theatrical experience, but doesn't add up to much else. *Holistic Strata*, on the other hand, is an incredibly powerful piece of experimentation. Umeda walks onto an empty stage. The lights go out as a crashing sound echoes through the theatre, and suddenly his body is filled with tiny bright dots. Another crash reverses the effect – his body is empty but the entire backdrop and stage is filled with these dots. Like *Haptic*'s use of colour to transport the body into a different setting, these dots immerse Umeda into a galaxy of atoms or stars. As they begin to move, Umeda's precise undulating and rippling evokes a similar effect to that of Shechter and Gormley's floating body and meteorite movement sequence. Umeda is plummeting alone through an unknown universe of stars. As the dots change direction, get bigger and smaller, swirling in different directions, the lights seem to transform into rain and snow, tears and dizziness. Unlike *Survivor*, which fills its 75 minutes with an assortment of images, ideas, bodies and music, *Holistic Strata* reduces everything to one simple image and idea, interrogating it to its core. The result is mesmerising – a roller-coaster ride of video, movement and music. The



technology at work is awe-inspiring and dizzying in effect, the music perfectly in sync with both body and image.

Ultimately, the concept wears thin towards the climax and Umeda would have served his purpose better were he to shave five minutes off the running time. This would allow us to applaud with wonder still in our eyes, minds and hearts. The beauty of the piece is in its (supposed) simplicity: Umeda offers us the opportunity to swim in its beauty and connect with it much like one would immerse oneself in a painting.

Both evenings of performance had glimpses of wonder and possibility in them, and now I have a request to the commissioners of dance, theatre, music or performance. Get Shechter, Gormley and Umeda to watch each other's pieces. Then lock them into a studio for a month with all of Umeda's technological bits and bobs (the light particles were controlled by body sensors), one drum (and only one drum), and their incredible skill. Let's have a 45 minute piece that explores the survivor in all of us and the fact that we are all lost particles searching for a way to survive this. I'm certain the result would be a beautiful and dizzying theatrical experience full of passion, big ideas and simplicity.

*Survivor*, by Hofesh Shechter and Antony Gormley, was presented at the Barbican Centre, London 12-14 January 2012.  
[www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

*Haptic* and *Holistic Strata*, by Hiroaki Umeda / S20, were at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Studio 16 & 17 January 2012 as part of the London International Mime Festival.  
[www.roh.org.uk](http://www.roh.org.uk) / [www.mimefest.co.uk](http://www.mimefest.co.uk)

Images:  
Page 38: Hiroaki Umeda, *Holistic Strata*. Page 39 left: Hofesh Shechter and Antony Gormley, *Survivor* (photo Tom Medwell); right: Hiroaki Umeda, *Haptic* (photo Bertrand Baudry)

Tim Jeeves makes parole and visits the Bluecoat for a night of multifaceted performance

# If Only...!



With four busy nights of performance strung over the winter and spring of 2011/12 and a two-day festival this coming April, *If Only...!* is a season of performance at Liverpool's Bluecoat curated with an emphasis on diversity of form. Last seen at the Bluecoat in 2010, *If Only...!* acts as a conduit for a variety of different artforms that are often marginalised (new music, improvised dance, live art, etcetera), the rationale behind the nights being that bringing these forms together with a dash of more broadly popular performance will introduce audiences to work that lies outside their usual interests. And, of course, the hope is to create an event that exists as more than the sum of its parts.

Presented under the theme 'If Only...! On Parole', the season's opening night contextualised the work it presented in relation to authority, be that the playful

commentary of Arts Council evaluation (with absurd cataloguing of everything in the space, a deliberately intrusive audience feedback form and a reminder of what else your £2.50 entrance could have been spent on), or the dour looking security guards and tent that (literally) occupy the stage when we enter. Nevertheless, behind such frivolity, there was a gentle reminder that, with the Bluecoat's live programme on hold and under review as of April 2011, there is a particular interest in any externally funded events that do take place in the building.

Much of the work presented featured an element of music, though aside from this, the only other constant of note was perhaps the ongoing diversification in the pieces presented.

Beginning with a live video feed of newspaper

manipulation from Anthony Cairns and our two compere curators for the evening (Rachel Sweeney and Mary Pearson), we immediately encounter something unsettling as meaning and aesthetic play cat and mouse with each other. Disquieting and at times awkward, the three figures absorbed in this self-preoccupied act develop a restless metaphor for the way events and their reporting in the press never settle into a cohesive entity, free from interference.

With an act this unstable, the end could only come violently; the two security guards, present throughout, eventually grow tired of the inward gaze of the performers and, after pushing, kicking and pulling the tent from the stage, produce a guitar and microphone and regale us with a number of cover versions of songs by Joni Mitchell and the like. Though well performed, and with each song charmingly introduced, something perhaps a little concerning lurks in this light-hearted twist of the evacuation of a tent city. The violence of such evictions can easily be forgotten when played for laughs in this manner, and though there is a convincing argument to be made for making light of the overly sombre, this manipulation of the protest aesthetic may have missed the mark a little.

There then followed the first of numerous appearances of Graculus, a free jazz / new music duo that featured a cello played with both a hand fan and electric toothbrush, taking the evening into yet another dimension (one half of this musical twosome, Phil Hargreaves, was the third of the evening's curators).

As was the case in the previous *If Only...!* season, the performances were not limited to the venue's ordinary spaces. After the interval, Anna Frisch presented *My Polar Disorder* in the corridor outside the restaurant; not the best location perhaps in terms of sight lines, though with a pole-dancing Minnie Mouse gyrating to blues riffs, certain niche preferences were bound to be met. The clash of symbolism was striking as the darling of childhood capitalism met new feminism and sexual provocation.

'Punk' is a tricky adjective – it conjures up something forty years old and images of John Lydon advertising butter – but nevertheless the energy in Mark Greenwood's emphatic performance as the frontman of the band Eyes begs for such labelling. The raw poetry in his found lyrics was hurled at the audience, while animation from Agnes





Hay provided a wonderful backdrop, her mindless mechanised world of marching monochromatic figures providing the perfect contrast to the violence in Greenwood's performance.

Perhaps the highlight of the evening came with Noel Perkins' magic act however. Incredibly simple, the piece consisted of simply sawing off various lengths of table leg whilst his glamorous assistant lay on top. Nevertheless, the threat of collapse was skilfully managed by both magician and assistant to form a narrative of danger and relief. The labour of sawing proved to be as engaging to watch as only another's discomfort can be, and in the sculptural image that resulted – as the assistant and Perkins propped themselves up on the dismembered table parts – they had created something beautiful to witness.

Graculus returned throughout the second half of the night, before providing accompaniment to the final act, Linda Wilton's tango demonstrations. Emphatically not your typical artist of the artistic vanguard, Wilton is of an age and bearing that suggests something more earthy. And it is from this contrast that the strength of her act came; there was a simplicity to the honesty of her and her partner as they performed their dances on the stage, a slight discomfort even that was endearing to behold.

With such diversity of acts, it was perhaps inevitable that – to any one individual's taste – there would be some works that were more successful than others. From this reviewer's perspective, perhaps the night could have been improved if there had been more moments like Noel Perkins' magic act – where straightforward performance was presented without accompaniment from video or music – but such disagreement and



questioning is an essential part of *If Only*'s aspiration. (With the focus on diversity, if all the work was to everyone's taste, then the question would have to be asked if the work presented was diverse enough.) So perfect the night was not, though without doubt, as Rachel Sweeney's compere announced at the end of the evening, 'Parole has been granted'. On completion of the review of their performance and literature programme, it will be interesting to see if the Bluecoat agrees...

Tim Jeeves was at the Bluecoat, Liverpool on 1 December 2011 for the first night of the *If Only...*! season. The programme includes three more nights of performance 12 January, 16 February and 15 March 2012, followed by a two-day festival in April 2012.  
[www.thebluecoat.org.uk](http://www.thebluecoat.org.uk)

Images:  
Page 40: Noise Club, *BBQ*. Page 41 top: Noel Perkins; bottom: Genevieve Say, *If Only...! Is it sport or art?*

Honour Bayes sees the new young talent at Chelsea Theatre's SACRED

# Keeping the Faith



As 2011 came to a chilly close Chelsea Theatre was once again a hotbed of fiery performance art as the renowned SACRED festival took over the building. With the intention of moving from a 'season' to a body of more 'seasonal' work, the November instalment of SACRED had a particularly passionate feel and a distinctly Brazilian flavour, the Chelsea this year forging a cross-continental link with Rio de Janeiro's Espaço Cultural Sérgio Porto. Under the auspices of this new collaboration, SACRED perennial Gustavo Ciriaco returned and the renowned dance artist Thelma Bonavita performed her UK premiere of the satirical *Eu Sou Uma Fruta Gogoia* (*I am a Gogoia Fruit*). From a home-grown perspective cultural tourism was examined with a flourish in Dorothy's Shoes' *Flying Down to Rio*, a dance hall themed homage to Brazil.

Elsewhere in the programme David Hoyle was making audiences squirm and giggle in equal measure with his grotesquely witty one-man cabaret and Martin O'Brien, Gillie Kleiman and Joseph Mercier were pushing boundaries of intimacy with the premiere of *Threesome*, a collection of pieces examining the body. Closing this eclectic week were operatic and pop-noir wonders Othon & Tomasini with a performance of *Impermanence*, their haunting new album.

Within this furnace of live art were three pieces from up and coming UK performance artists. Each was an object lesson in heat control. Just as one nearly burnt my eyebrows off, the other gently warmed me and the embers of the last are still smouldering away in my brain to this day.

Action Hero's *Frontman* is a fireball of a

performance posing as a faded comeback gig complete with dry ice, tambourine, lip syncing and earplugs for the audience. Part three of their unintentional trilogy on the icons and iconography of masculinity, Action Hero's piece explodes the idea of one of our modern gods, the frontman, here ferociously invoked by a petite girl in sequins.

To a background of analogue synth and occasional errant tambourine accompaniment, Gemma Paintin begins by embracing us all in sardonic messages of love and flattery as she fights for our attention and expects it at the same time. 'I am the thing' she repeats baldly to her po-faced techie. James Stenhouse looks back sulkily, the animosity crackles and it's clear she's alone.

But that's OK she screams with every shiver and viciously mouthed lyrical repetition.





Paintin's bombast acts as a suit making her seem vast, a leviathan at four feet. She is glorious and terrifying. Bits of her tambourine fly off into the audience and I have to quell the urge to scrabble for a piece like a religious fanatic fighting for a relic.

It can't last forever and her exaltation soon turns to exhaustion. Her techie wearing giant pink rabbit ears sporadically moves around her, unwinding music cords with a comedic slowness. Finally the tension between them explodes into a full on fight which flies out into the crowd before Paintin collapses into a wall of ear splitting sound.

*Frontman* forcefully plays with Action Hero's interest in the absurdity of standing in front of strangers and doing something. The idolisation of such rock deities is both presented to us and questioned, whilst the cost of being such a human god is examined with fearless energy. *Frontman* is a visceral and ear popping exploration into what is asked of those in the spotlight and the epic no man's land that can sometimes lie between them and us in the dark.

If notions of legacy run as an undercurrent in Action Hero's piece, for Francesca Millican-Slater they are at the centre of a much gentler but no less penetrating solo show. *Me, Myself and Miss Gibbs* is part lecture, part detective story and part biography. In 2003 Millican-Slater found a postcard of Lincoln cathedral sent to a Miss Gibbs in 1910. Its rather doom-laden message – 'Be Careful Tomorrow. A.C.' – immediately piqued her interest and she began a quest to find out exactly who Miss Gibbs had been. In 2010 she again picked up the threads, updating the show into what we see now, a story with three layers of history both personal to her subject and to Millican-Slater herself.

As she takes us through each step of her journey, it is clear from the amount of emotion laced through her voice that this quest became a personal obsession for Millican-Slater. Surrounded by a patchwork quilt of photographs, maps, train tickets and postcards, *Me, Myself and Miss Gibbs* has the air of an enthusiast sharing their secret den with us. With each discovery springs a fountain of questions. She visits a medium and speaks to the current inhabitant of Miss Gibbs' old address; she finds out stories of adoption and suffragettes and quietly sets about placing Miss Gibbs firmly within a history we can all share.

If it sounds twee it's actually anything but. Millican-Slater's down to earth, self-deprecating style keeps the whole thing thoroughly grounded. She watches the videos of her earnest 21 year-old self with a wry smile and with a twinkle of genuine concern wonders if she has become a 'historical stalker'.

In an increasingly cynical field where people pay through the nose to find out their genealogy *Me, Myself and Miss Gibbs* feels like a breath of fresh air. It's a haphazard labour of love which unearths and celebrates another human being's story, and it's moving to see how much leg work Millican-Slater puts in for a woman who began as a stranger.

Near the end, as she reveals Miss Gibbs' original marriage certificate and we find out just what she was to take care of that fateful day, a genuine connection feels made, not simply between Millican-Slater and her subject, but between Miss Gibbs and us all.

As paper records begin to merge into online databases and emails replace letters it seems the traces we leave on the world are becoming more and more abstract. I leave wondering who would engage on such a quest for me in 100 years time and would they even be able to?

From postcards to the dead to funeral soundtracks... Brian Lobel's *Or Else Your Friends Will Have To Do It* (a performance for you and your music collection) is the last piece which remains indelibly burnt on my brain. An intimate performance publication this one-on-one piece comes to you through the post. Your package includes a blank CD and small brown envelope which houses a series of neatly typed cards tied with purple string. The fact that it is purple feels right and strangely like it matters very much.

On each card there are comments and instructions which encourage you to make your own memorial mix. **THIS IS NOT MORBID, OR IT IS NOT MEANT TO BE** is quietly repeated throughout and indeed it doesn't feel so. There is a surprising amount of reverence involved however and I'm cradling these cards with immense tenderness.

Unsurprisingly it's a task that takes quite a while, and Lobel advises you not to rush it. This is one of the lovely things about the portable nature of this piece; the disembodied artist is with you every step of the way whether it takes you hours or days. It doesn't have to be finalised, it can always change and grow; possible tracks still echo around my head today. Just which songs will speak of me?

But far from being navel-gazing *Or Else Your Friends Will Have To Do It* feels like a selfless project to undertake; the clue's in the title. Inspired by Lobel's own experience of making a CD for his ex-partner's funeral he imbues each action with a sense of responsibility. Making your own memorial is a hard and reflective thing to do, but in doing so you are removing the burden from someone else. Quietly and in a strangely English fashion, Lobel broaches no hysterics or fearful tears; he simply encourages you to create your own soundtrack to your life. In doing so he communicates that this is a precious task but also a releasing one.

By placing Action Hero, Millican-Slater and Lobel side-by-side with the established names topping the bill of their flagship festival, Chelsea Theatre has once more shown its commitment to the support of young talent. Whilst the eclectic styles of each of these shows highlighted the wealth and breadth of work being made in the UK, each piece was underscored with a drive to make its audience think, and whether the questions were shouted or whispered in all cases they were impossible to ignore. In curating three probing pieces Chelsea Theatre have laid down the gauntlet for 2012: just what will be asked of us next?

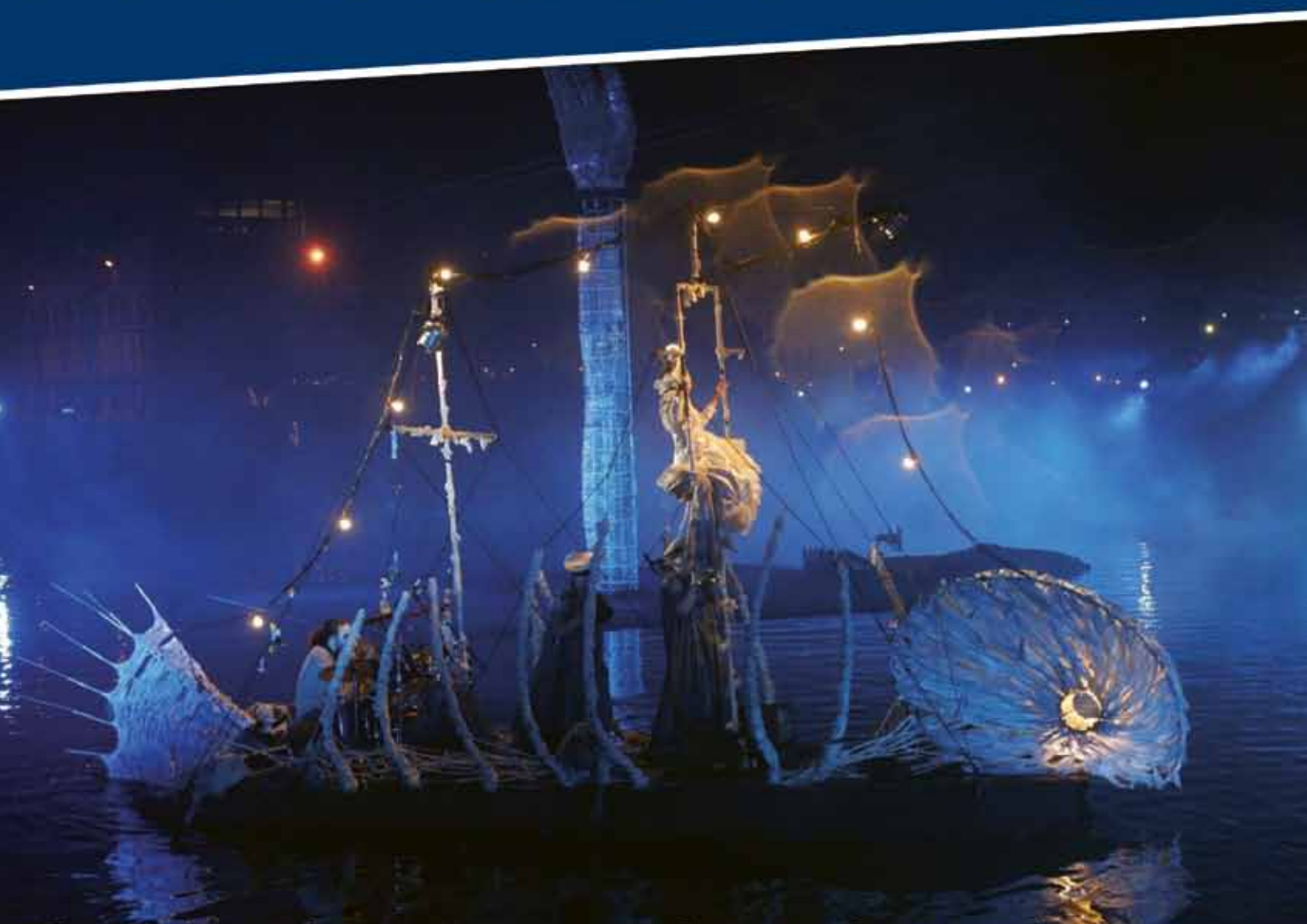
Chelsea Theatre's **SACRED Keeping the Faith** ran 24-28 November 2011, and was the first of what will be a series of exchanges between Brazilian and UK artists, programmed in collaboration with the Espaço Cultural Sérgio Porto in Rio.

Alongside its performance programme **Keeping the Faith** incorporated **Bodily Functions** – the body in performance, a presentation of selected highlights from the Live Art Development Agency's documentary library; the one-day symposium **Being Seen, Being Heard**, discussing the ways performance is seen and experienced; and **Talking With Your Mouth Full**, a sharing of ideas, thoughts and food organised by Artsadmin and aimed at young people and emerging artists.

[www.chelseatheatre.org.uk](http://www.chelseatheatre.org.uk)

Images:  
Page 42: Francesca Millican, *Me, Myself and Miss Gibbs*. Page 43: Action Hero, *Frontman*.

# BA Street Arts



**Do you know that you can now study street dance, parkour, street theatre, large scale puppetry, circus and acrobatics, site specific performance and comedy on the BA Street Arts degree course at the University of Winchester?**

This exciting new degree is the first of its kind in the UK and recently shortlisted for the most innovative degree in the UK.

Are you interested in making contemporary performance that is physical and visual, exciting and adventurous and that explores and develops new ways of creating work.

You will work with creative producers and professional practitioners and also learn how to create and administrate performances, productions and events in a wide variety of locations.

As graduates in this new arena of work you will be among the first University practitioners in this growth sector of the creative and cultural industries. With the explosion of events, festivals and outdoor performances, you will be able to

develop a portfolio of work throughout the degree showcasing it in front of creative producers, agents and event's organisers here and abroad whilst studying on the course.

You will learn how to develop and produce work of high quality for the large European market and you will graduate with a qualification and experience that will place you at the centre of this dynamic and well resourced sector of the performing arts industry.

For details on the full range of courses offered by the Faculty of Arts visit: [www.winchester.ac.uk/arts](http://www.winchester.ac.uk/arts)

Telephone: 01962 827234

Email: [course.enquiries@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:course.enquiries@winchester.ac.uk)





# THE BASEMENT

## HOME OF THE ODD



See what's coming up at:  
**[www.thebasement.uk.com](http://www.thebasement.uk.com)**  
 The Basement, 24 Kensington St. Brighton, BN1 4AJ 01273 699733



## Manchester School of Theatre

### Manchester Metropolitan University (UK)

We are now recruiting students for the following taught MA Programmes

#### MA Movement Practice for Theatre

Skills, principles and research for movement directing and facilitating. A practical vocational one year programme to train movement teachers and movement directors for theatre.

*Tutors: Annabel Arden, Lucia Walker, Struan Leslie, Irina Brown, Teatr Piesn Kozla and Niamh Dowling.*  
*Auditions will be held in USA and Europe*  
*Next intake September 2012*

#### MA Acting

Run in Poland in collaboration with Teatr Piesn Kozla. A practical vocational programme taught in Poland by the international theatre company Teatr Piesn Kozla.

*Tutors: Teatr Piesn Kozla*  
*Auditions will be held in USA, Asia and Europe*  
*Next intake September 2013*



Manchester School of Theatre is a member of the Conference of Drama Schools and also offers BA (Hons) Acting accredited by the NCDT.  
 For further info please contact Niamh Dowling (Head of Manchester School of Theatre) e: [n.dowling@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:n.dowling@mmu.ac.uk) or t: +44 161 247 1308

# Out There



Cirque Mandingue

## A look forward to the coming season

This year, this *Olympic* year, the spring season is characterised by a profusion of cross-commissioned work and festivals within festivals. Community and participatory projects are rife, the coming summer's blockbuster events are easing into motion, and the Cultural Olympiad is manifesting all over the country (often without warning, like a confused ghost). What's out there?

Not exactly a festival, more a season, **World Stages London** is an eight-venue superteam collaboration of Battersea Arts Centre, Bush Theatre, Lyric Hammersmith, Royal Court Theatre, Sadler's Wells, Somerset House, Theatre Royal Stratford East, and Young Vic. The work falling under the WSL umbrella runs the gamut of styles and genres, but of particular interest to TT types will be WildWorks and Battersea Arts Centre's *Babel*, a huge project involving 500 professional and community performers and taking place at a (currently unannounced) major London landmark; Peter Brook and Marie Hélène Estienne's 'musical play', *The Suit*; and a Bollywood musical written by Tanika Gupta and directed by Kneehigh's redoubtable Emma Rice.

Only on its second edition, the biennial **CircusFest** at London's Roundhouse brings international work from Guinean acrobats Cirque Mandingue (expect something colourful and energetic but probably theatre-lite) and Swedish giants Cirkus Cirkör, who present *Undermän*. *Undermän* is very different from the other Cirkör work that's visited the UK: it's an autobiographical piece made by its three performers and directed by Olle Strandberg about (summary:) burly men with broken hearts. This year the CF programme also goes off-site to partner venues, so you can see new work by So & So Circus Theatre and Stumble danceCircus at Jacksons Lane,

and Belgium's Compagnie Rasoterra at artsdepot.

Growing like gangbusters year on year **Norfolk & Norwich Festival's** 2012 programme is still mostly under wraps, but they've announced a return to the UK of Compagnie XY with their coolly brilliant *Le Grand C* (featuring an ensemble of 17 exceptional acrobats building human towers to evoke urban life), and the inclusion of Rimini Protokoll, who'll be performing *100% Norfolk*. Rimini were last in the UK with their bonkers virtual society simulation *Best Before*, and the new work sounds at least as interesting and strange – a travelling piece (which has already been to Berlin, Karlsruhe, Cologne and Vienna) which for each showing gathers 100 local people, non-performers, who co-devise the show. As ever with the company, there's the *chance* of something incredible...

At **Brighton Festival** in May one of the large-scale works will be courtesy of Generik Vapeur, who'll perform the UK premiere of their ZEPA commission *Waterlitz*. The company are known for big, riotous promenade works that sweep through a city or a town, but for *Waterlitz* the action will revolve around the Omni, a giant man built from shipping containers with a flip-open chest and bricky feet; expect music, fire, ice and broad-brush performance. Also getting a UK premiere there's Berlin Theatre Collective's *Land's End*, which tells a true story of love and murder and Flemish pancakes through live performance, filmed interviews and mechanical Sharmanka-style contraptions, and Dreamthinkspeak's *The Rest is Silence*, a textual and visual deconstruction of *Hamlet* that's part of the **World Shakespeare Festival** (which is part of the London 2012 Festival, which is part of

the Cultural Olympiad). At the WSF, which kicks off in April and runs until November, look out as well for The Wooster Group collaborating with the Royal Shakespeare Company on *Troilus and Cressida*, and Oily Cart joining forces with the RSC for *In a Pickle*, a Shakespearean 'wonderland' created for children aged 2-4.

Also coming up across the country there's Bristol's **Mayfest**, an excellent place to get a broad idea of the city's particular DIY aesthetic; another edition of Camden People's Theatre's festival of new work **Sprint** in March; and come May in Winchester the second edition of the **E-merge** festival showcasing early career street arts practitioners.

Sprint, London | 9-31 March  
www.cpttheatre.co.uk

CircusFest, London | 28 March – 29 April  
www.roundhouse.org.uk/circusfest

World Shakespeare Festival, UK | 23 April – November  
www.worldshakespearefestival.org.uk

Brighton Festival | 5-27 May  
www.brightonfestival.org

Norfolk & Norwich Festival | 11-26 May  
www.nnfestival.org.uk

World Stages London | May  
www.worldstageslondon.com

E-merge, Winchester | May  
www.emergefestival.co.uk

Mayfest, Bristol | May  
www.mayfestbristol.co.uk





# Intellect Journals

publishers of original thinking | [www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com)

**NEW 2012  
JOURNALS**



**Have an original idea?**

We are here to support your ideas and get them published. To send us your new book or journal proposals, please download a questionnaire from: [www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com)



To view our catalogue or order our books and journals visit [www.intellectbooks.com](http://www.intellectbooks.com)

Intellect, The Mill, Parnall Road, Fishponds, Bristol, BS16 3JG.

Tel: +44 (0) 117 9589910  
Fax: +44 (0) 117 9589911

**Punk & Post Punk**

ISSN: 20441983  
Online ISSN: 20443706  
3 issues per volume  
Now available

**Editors**

Philip Kiszely  
University of Leeds  
  
Alex Ogg

*Punk & Post-Punk* is a journal for academics, artists, journalists and the wider cultural industries. Placing punk and its progeny at the heart of inter-disciplinary investigation, it is the first forum of its kind to explore this rich and influential topic in both historical and critical theoretical terms.

**Scene**

ISSN: 20443714  
Online ISSN: 20443722  
3 issues per volume  
First published in 2012

**Editors**

Christine White  
Nottingham Trent University  
  
Alison Oddey  
Nottingham Trent University

*Scene* is dedicated to a critical examination of space and scenic production. The journal provides an opportunity for dynamic debate, reflection and criticism. With a strong interdisciplinary focus, we welcome articles, interviews, visual essays, reports from conferences and festivals. We want to explore new critical frameworks for the scholarship of creating a scene.

**Performing Islam**

ISSN: 20431015  
Online ISSN: 20431023  
2 issues per volume  
First published in 2012

**Founder and Editor**

Kamal Salhi  
University of Leeds

Emerging from an international network project funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economics and Social Research Council, and research collaboration between academics and practitioners, *Performing Islam* is the first peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal about Islam and performance and their related aesthetics.



# Norfolk & Norwich Festival 11–26 May

Performance highlights include



**CLOSE ACT** Invasion

**COMPAGNIE XY** Le Grand C

**ERTH** Dinosaur Petting Zoo

**FABULOUS BEAST** Rian

**HANNAH JANE WALKER & CHRIS THORPE**  
Oh F\*\*K Moment

**NATIONAL THEATRE OF SCOTLAND**  
The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart

**QUARANTINE & COMPANY FIERCE** Susan & Darren

**REQUARDT&ROSENBERG** Motorshow

**RIMINI PROTOKOLL** 100% Norfolk

**SCHWEIGMANN&** Mirror

**TIME CIRCUS** Air Hotel

**TPO** Kindur

**ZACHARY OBERZAN** Your brother. Remember?

Full programme available March 2012  
[www.nnfestival.org.uk](http://www.nnfestival.org.uk) 01603 766400

And coming later in the year...

**CIRCA/I FAGIOLINI** How Like An Angel (June/July 2012)

**ROBERT WILSON** Walking (August/September 2012)

Funded and supported by



Supported by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

 **Norfolk** County Council



**NORWICH**  
City Council