

# TOTALTHEATRE

## MAGAZINE

VOLUME 20 | ISSUE 03 | AUTUMN 2008 | TOTALTHEATRE.ORG.UK  
TOTALTHEATRE - DEVELOPING CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS AND INTERCULTURAL CHALLENGES  
ENCOUNTER THE ETHNO-TECHNO-CANNIBAL AESTHETIC OF LA POCHA NOSTRA  
GET TO GRIPS WITH ZECORA URA'S MIDNIGHT-TO-DAWN EXTRAVAGANZA HOTEL MEDEA  
HEAR THE VOICE OF BABA ISRAEL - HIP HOP THEATRE VIA LIVING THEATRE  
HAVE DINNER WITH AMERICA SERVED BY RAJINI SHAH  
MEET MISS BEHAVE AND HER VARIETY NIGHTY  
TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE - CROSSING BOUNDARIES, CREATING CONNECTIONS





# Discover

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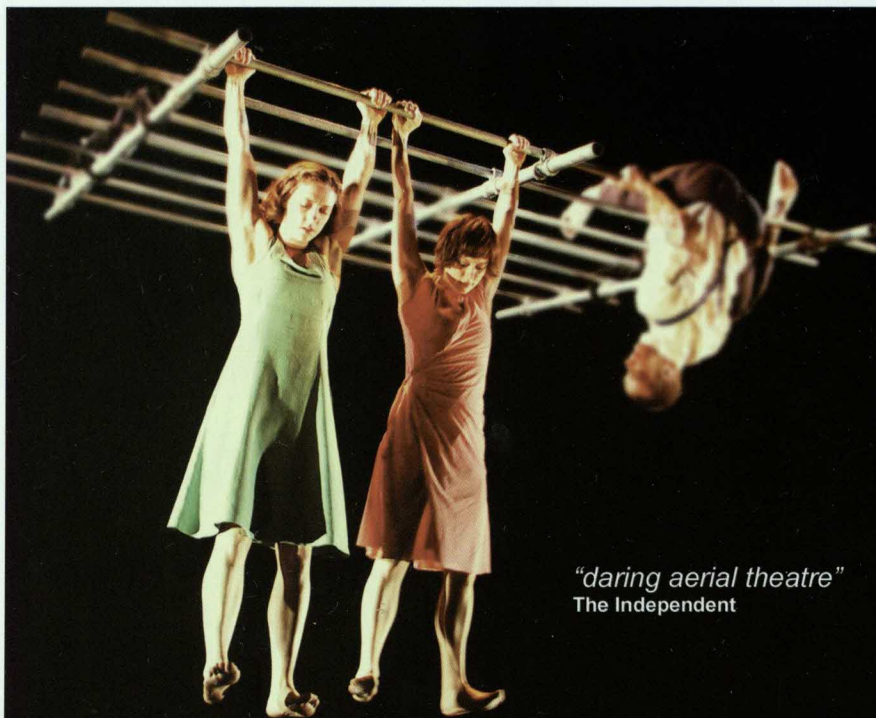
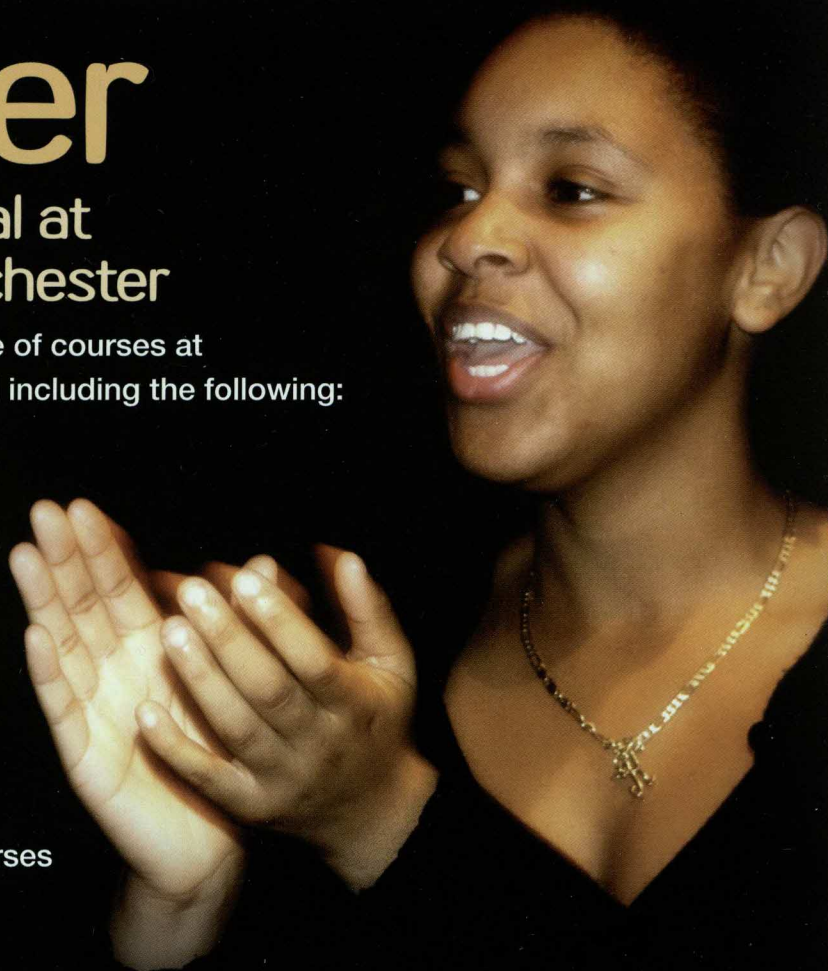
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University of Essex

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## DISCOVER EUROPEAN THEATRE AT THE UK'S EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



**MA EUROPEAN THEATRE: PUTTING EUROPEAN THEATRE ON THE BRITISH MAP**

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School of Drama,  
Film & Visual Arts

[WWW.EUROPEANTHEATRE.ORG.UK](http://WWW.EUROPEANTHEATRE.ORG.UK)



## EDITORIAL

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As this edition of Total Theatre Magazine hits the presses, a new stage version of *West Side Story* opens in London. In her review in the Guardian newspaper, Lyn Gardner comments on the contemporary relevance of Steven Sondheim's lyrics – in particular, the feisty *America* which voices the doubled-edged view of the land of plenty from the perspective of its Puerto Rican immigrants.

Viewpoints of and from the Americas feature strongly in this issue, which highlights work that crosses borders and questions cultural assumptions.

Of course, Total Theatre Magazine always has a strong internationalist element. The work that we champion – physical/devised and visual theatre, live art, circus and street arts – crosses boundaries of language or culture, and many of the companies we feature are ensembles or collectives embracing many nations.

But what we are highlighting here is something more: it is work that takes an investigation of cultural identity as its subject matter; work that challenges perceptions of culture or ethnicity; or work that brings artforms or modes of practice from different cultures together in new ways.

Take, for example the Zecora Ura/Para Active Urban Dolls Project collaboration *Hotel Medea*, featured in this issue. Yes, it is an international initiative, involving creators, producers, and supporters from the UK and Brazil, with a team of performers drawn from around the world. But the reason we are particularly keen to include this project is because of its subject matter (the 'estrangement' of Medea and Jason) and the way that the work has been made (bringing together many disparate practices from different parts of the world).

Zecora Ura's partners Para Active have strong links to another featured company, La Pocha Nostra, a collective that works under the leadership of 'ethno-techno' guru Guillermo Gomez-Pena, with an ongoing mission to use performance to challenge presumptions about cultural heritage, and to re-define 'the brown body' as it is viewed onstage.

La Pocha Nostra have limbs and branches spreading throughout the world. One of their associates is Rajni Shah, a UK artist of Anglo-Asian heritage who in previous work has addressed the resonances of that heritage. In her new work *Dinner With America*, she gets her teeth into her relationship with the US: Who is America and what is she?

Looking in the other direction, from the USA to the UK, is Baba Israel, our Voices subject. He shares his thoughts on a childhood growing up in the legendary Living Theatre, and his current work in hip hop theatre – a form that breaks many of the cultural divides entrenched in American (and UK) society.

Elsewhere in the magazine, we meet the still mis-behaving Amy Saunders; hear from creative lighting designer Katharine Williams; and have a number of reports from festivals and showcases in the UK and elsewhere.

As always, there's news and previews – and our hefty selection of reviews include Mayfest in Bristol, Brighton Festival and the Sacred season at Chelsea Theatre.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Total Theatre Magazine, and welcome your comments and suggestions for future content.

**Dorothy Max Prior**  
magazine@totaltheatre.org.uk

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## EDINBURGH FESTIVALS

Three weeks, thousands of shows, too many people, that guy who juggles an axe and spends a minimum 20 minutes working up to the juggling of the axe, expensive accommodation, shows so weak they literally could not survive in any other environment, amazing shows, Monster Mash, drunken sickness, homesickness, tiredness, exhilaration – the Fringe returns!

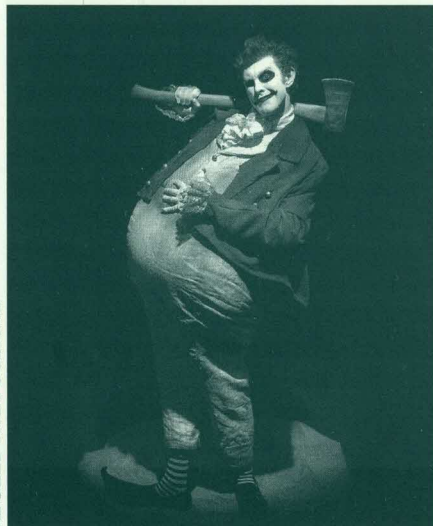
But what to see? Total Theatre Magazine's top tips include *The Fooligan* by Al Seed; Shams Theatre's *Black Stuff*; ChoppedLogic with *By The Way*; Precarious with *The Factory*; Jane Arnfield & Nigel Charnock with *The Gymnast* and Lazzi's *Aurora Borealis*. There's a new show from 2008 Award-winners Ontroerend Goed (Smile Off Your Face) called *Once And For All We're Gonna Tell You Who We Are So Shut Up And Listen*. There are also some old favourites appearing at this year's Fringe: catch Circus Oz, Footsbarn and Nola Rae if you can. Edinburgh Festival Fringe runs 3-25 August. See [www.edfringe.com](http://www.edfringe.com)

Shaking up Edinburgh 2008 is the Forest Fringe, operating outside of the official Fringe (so a sort of fringe-of-the-Fringe, then?) and based at the wonderfully organic and laid-back Forest café. This exciting new venture is supported by BAC and offers artists the chance to perform in Edinburgh for a few days without the extortionate costs incurred with a three-week run. And it gives audiences the chance to take risks and see things they haven't heard of, with all shows presented free or pay-what-you-can. Catch the welcome return of BAC's *One O'Clock Scratch*, and look out for *The Night Flyer* (by Paper Cinema and Kora), amongst other delights. See [www.forestfringe.co.uk](http://www.forestfringe.co.uk)

The Edinburgh International Festival features Polish company TR Warszawa who will be performing their interpretation of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*; the National Theatre of Scotland's 365 will be premiering at the Edinburgh Playhouse; and the Iranian Bazi Theatre Company – founded in 1989 by Attila Pessyani who as a young actor worked with Peter Brook and Tadeusz Kantor – will be giving the European premiere of *Devil's Ship*. See [www.eif.co.uk](http://www.eif.co.uk)

## AURORA NOVA NO-GO

The Edinburgh Fringe 2008 will be bereft of Aurora Nova, the acclaimed festival-within-a-festival of world theatre and dance that, since 2001, has been ensconced throughout August at St Stephen's Church. Artistic director Wolfgang Hoffman has declared that he can no longer carry on without subsidy, stating that the Fringe is comedy-centric because of the low costs of 'one man and a mic' as compared to the costs of bringing in ensembles of physical theatre performers from half-way across the world. He is in negotiation with original partners Komedia, and also continuing dialogue with current collaborators Assembly, about future possibilities for this renowned enterprise that has altered the Edinburgh landscape so significantly.



AL SEED THE FOOLIGAN

## TOTAL THEATRE AWARDS AT EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE 2008

Total Theatre Awards 2008 sees a revised process in place that explores excellence through peer assessment; made practical, accessible and of benefit to theatre-makers. Supported by a prestigious collection of cultural organisations and universities, this year's Awards promise to be better than ever.

Judges for Total Theatre Awards 2008 are: Christie Anthoney, Director, Adelaide Fringe; Cora Bissett, Performer & Director; Matt Burman, Executive Producer, Norfolk & Norwich Festival; Rob Daniels, Course Leader MA Theatre Collectives, University of Chichester; Anthony Dean: Dean of Faculty of Arts, University of Winchester (Total Theatre Board member); Lyn Gardner, Critic, the Guardian; Ben Harrison, Artistic Director, Grid Iron (Total Theatre Board member); Donald Hutera Critic, Time Out, The Times; Charlotte Jones, Chief Executive, Independent Theatre Council; Dorothy Max Prior, Editor, Total Theatre Magazine; Dani Parr, Associate Director, Royal & Derngate; Kayte Potter, Co-director, Great Leap Forward; Nick Wood: Course leader - Advanced Theatre Practice, Central School of Speech and Drama. Pippa Bailey, Creative Director of Total Theatre is Chair of Judges.

For more information see the website [www.totaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk) or contact Pippa Bailey or Awards assistant Frances Bryce.

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Tel: 07912 179197  
[www.totaltheatre.org.uk/awards](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk/awards)



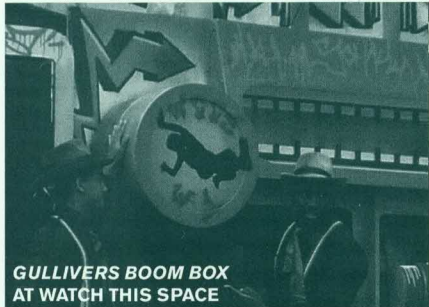
## NEWS FROM VENUES AND FESTIVALS



ROBERT LE PAGE LIPSYNCH

### BARBICANBITE 08

The Bite Festival continues in September with performances of Robert LePage's 9hr mega-show *Lipsynch*, an epic panorama linking nine lives spanning seven decades; Slung Low's show for one person, *Helium*, an installation work combining live and digital performance, and investigating guilt, responsibility and the true meaning of 'release'; and Lone Twin's *Speeches*, a unique site-specific performance inviting members of the public to develop and deliver speeches in locations pertinent to their content. For more info and full listings see [www.barbican.org.uk/theatre](http://www.barbican.org.uk/theatre)



GULLIVERS BOOM BOX AT WATCH THIS SPACE

### WATCH THIS SPACE 2008

Bringing up the tail end of the street arts season, Watch This Space is already in full swing and will run until 28 September. Highlights include performances of Teatr Biuro Podróżny's *Macbeth: Who is that Bloodied Man?* (shortlisted for a Total Theatre Award in Edinburgh last year), the new Walk the Plank/Company Fierce collaboration *Gulliver's Boom Box*, a visit from the Whalley Range All Star's famous Pig, and a showing of Bash Street Theatre's new piece inspired by silent movies, *The Station*. See [www.nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk)

### DUBLIN FRINGE FESTIVAL

This year's Dublin Fringe Festival, again under the direction of Wolfgang Hoffman, runs 6–21 September (various venues). Come to Dublin to see the physical theatre shows that you won't get to see at Aurora Nova this year! Highlights include Junk Ensemble's *Drinking Dust*; Mute Comp.

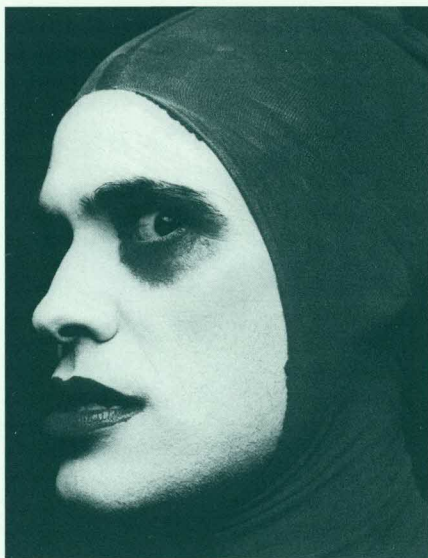
Physical Theatre; Spiegeltent favourites *La Clique* and, also at Spiegeltent, a week's residency for Ragroof Theatre; and Eric Davis' *Red Bastard*, a grotesque anti-clown show. See [www.fringefest.com](http://www.fringefest.com)

### 365 AT THE LYRIC

*365* follows a group of young people taking their first faltering steps towards adulthood and independence. Directed by Vicky Featherstone (artistic director of the National Theatre of Scotland) with choreography from Steven Hoggett (Frantic Assembly), songs from Paul Buchanan (The Blue Nile) and text from David Harrower (one of Britain's leading playwrights whose acclaimed work includes the Olivier award-winning *Blackbird*). Following its premiere at the Edinburgh International Festival, *365* plays the Lyric Hammersmith, 8–27 September. See [www.lyric.co.uk](http://www.lyric.co.uk)

### INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP FESTIVAL - ACTS OF RESISTANCE 25–27 SEPTEMBER

Theatre makers come together from around the globe to explore ways in which theatre can change the world. A rare opportunity to see Monde Wani's acclaimed one-man show *The Rivonia Trial* (South Africa) and take part in workshops and discussions with Syrian writer, actress and director Amal Omran, Artistic Director of Kwoto Cultural Centre, Derik Uya Alfred Ngubangu (The Sudan) and Hollywood director Jim Sheridan. Three days of agitation, propaganda, dissent, politics, argument, debate, revolt and revolution! Performances, workshops, panel discussions. Presented in association with Soho Theatre, where the events are held. For full details see [www.workshopfestival.co.uk](http://www.workshopfestival.co.uk)



ERIC DAVIS RED BASTARD

### SADLER'S WELLS

This year the Lilian Baylis Studio has the cream of the crop for the Sadler's Wells autumn season. On 9 October, the regular *Live Screen* event brings together film artists whose work focuses on dance – the mix this time including Alex Reuben, a dance filmmaker and former DJ who will be showing the first glimpses of his new film project, *Streets of London*. Also at the Studio, 17 & 18 October, Les Ballets C. de la B. present *Aphasiadisiac*, the final instalment of a trilogy of work by Ted Stoffer, currently guest choreographer with the company. And 29 October – 1 November Carrie Cracknell and Anna Williams' *I am Falling* transfers to the Studio after its fantastically successful run at the Gate. See [www.sadlerswells.com](http://www.sadlerswells.com)



MISS BEHAVE'S VARIETY NIGHTY

### ROUNDHOUSE PRESENTS MISS BEHAVE'S VARIETY NIGHTY

International cabaret queen and sword-swallowing sensation Miss Behave hosts an evening of variety with her extraordinary and talented friends from around the globe. For August only the Roundhouse is transformed into an intimate cabaret setting. From above, below and all around you'll experience music, comedy, circus and everything in between. Miss Behave's Variety Nighty is the finest place to be entertained this summer. See [www.roundhouse.org.uk/missbehave](http://www.roundhouse.org.uk/missbehave)

### THE BASEMENT

The Basement, Brighton, an aspiring regional powerhouse in Live Art practice, is launching its autumn programme, including: Supper Club, a monthly Live Art event produced, curated and hosted by The Basement's supported artists, with an emphasis on exploring new ideas and collaborative working.

4most, showcasing work produced by nationally and internationally recognised artists, promoting excellence in Live Art,



site specific or performance theatre. Lunchtime Sessions, lead by Charlie Morrissey, artists will explore the venue and cross discipline practice, whilst you enjoy delicious food in great company. For further details call 01273 699733, email [info@thebasement.uk.com](mailto:info@thebasement.uk.com), or see [www.thebasement.uk.com](http://www.thebasement.uk.com)

### CAMDEN PEOPLE'S THEATRE

This Autumn sees a new raft of in-house developed work at CPT and beyond. Top of The World's *Paperweight*, which has been developed at CPT, is at Assembly@ George St 1-24 August, before returning to CPT 7-25 October. CPT are also supporting the development of Unpacked's new show for children, *Jumping Mouse*, which will have its first showings in September. If that's not enough there's the Camden Fringe in August, and a host of other projects currently under-wraps. For up to date information see [www.cpththeatre.co.uk](http://www.cpththeatre.co.uk)

## TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: NEW INITIATIVES, COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

### TOAST IN THE MACHINE

Green Ginger is delighted to announce the launch of its programme of professional development in puppetry and related disciplines. Five grants worth between £3000 and £5000 have been made possible through generous funding from The Leverhulme Trust. The awards will enable a handful of emerging artists and theatre-makers to gain support from experienced theatre professionals as they take their first steps into a working practice. A placement lasts between 6 and 18 months. Applications are welcomed from artists across all disciplines but priority will be given to those whose work fully embraces puppetry or animated theatre and are yet to establish a presence in the profession. Application deadline: 15 August 2008. Start dates are flexible between November 2008 and July 2009. Enquiries +44 (0)117 9225599 or [mail@greenginger.net](mailto:mail@greenginger.net) See [www.greenginger.net](http://www.greenginger.net)

### INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP FESTIVAL

This autumn the International Workshop Festival presents an intensive weekend workshop with dancer Miranda Tufnell, whose work has followed a passion to listen more deeply to the body's subtleties of movement, and to explore the human need to find a language for what is beneath words. 16-17 August,

Movingartsbase, London; £180 (£120 unwaged).

Also for the autumn, the International Workshop Festival will be presenting Open Space at the Siobhan Davies Studios, London. The Open Space is a season of events which profile short works in dance, movement and physical theatre. The 2008 Open Space season begins 9 August, and continues monthly for a total of five performances.

See [www.workshopfestival.co.uk](http://www.workshopfestival.co.uk)

### EDINBURGH ACROBALANCE

Acrobalance open training session on every Monday night 7-9pm as part of Tollcross Juggling Club, Tollcross Primary School, Fountainbridge, Edinburgh. This session is not taught but is a space for those with some experience to train together and share ideas in this exciting circus skill. Anybody visiting Edinburgh for the Festival is invited to drop by. For more info email [aviatricks.info@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:aviatricks.info@yahoo.co.uk) or see [www.aviatricks.co.uk](http://www.aviatricks.co.uk)

### ADVENTURES IN SPACE

Pants on Fire's Lecoq-based 10-week, part-time course in physical storytelling, Adventures in Space, will run for its eighth successful year in October along with Adventures in Mask, a 10-week course in Mask performance. For more details about these unique training opportunities visit [www.pantsonfiretheatre.com](http://www.pantsonfiretheatre.com)

### TIME NETWORKS

Starting October 2008, artists Augusto Corrieri and Bryony Henderson will be facilitating a series of labs at Chichester University and The Basement (Brighton). These are for experimental, contemporary artists working in performance who are based in the South East; an opportunity for participants to reflect on their practice by connecting with other artists, past and present. Participants will receive time, space, tasks, mentoring support and resources. Time Networks is a New Work Network Activator project in collaboration with The Basement (Brighton) and Chichester University. Artists interested in participating can contact Augusto and Bryony at [networkingacrosstime@gmail.com](mailto:networkingacrosstime@gmail.com) See [www.newworknetwork.org.uk](http://www.newworknetwork.org.uk) and follow the links.

### DELL'ARTE

US-based Dell'Arte are coming to Europe with summer intensives in Denmark, 10-29 August, 2008. They are also offering residential intensive in Bali Feb. 8 - March 24, 2009. T: +1 707 668 5663 Email [info@dellarte.com](mailto:info@dellarte.com) See [www.dellarte.com](http://www.dellarte.com)

### CERTIFICATE IN PHYSICAL THEATRE PRACTICE

Led by Jerwood award winner and physical performer Al Seed, artist in residence at The Byre Theatre, St Andrews, Scotland, this is an intensive, experiential learning opportunity for post-training performance practitioners or facilitators, to learn or develop the skills, vocabulary and techniques underpinning theatre where the performance 'text' is derived from the body rather than the voice. Some free places available. Join Al Seed for teaching, professional development and making work. Contact [simonabbott@adamsmith.ac.uk](mailto:simonabbott@adamsmith.ac.uk) for further details. See [www.adamsmithcollege.ac.uk](http://www.adamsmithcollege.ac.uk)

### NORTHBROOK COLLEGE

Northbrook offers degree courses in Physical Theatre, Contemporary Dance, and their innovative Festival, Site Specific & Street Arts course (currently the only undergraduate course of its kind in the country) is now entering its second year. The College offers state-of-the-art facilities on the south coast. For more information on the above courses, call 0845 155 60 60 or visit [www.northbrook.ac.uk](http://www.northbrook.ac.uk)

### EXPRESSIVE FEAT PRODUCTIONS

Trapeze and rope courses led by Tina Carter & Sarah Walker-Down. For Beginners and Intermediate. Six Sunday Sessions 10am - 12noon, 21 September - 26 October, at QEII Jubilee Centre, Faversham, Kent. Places limited so please email to book. (Nov-Dec dates to be confirmed.) T: 01227 280399 Email: [info@exfeat.com](mailto:info@exfeat.com) See [www.exfeat.com](http://www.exfeat.com)

### INTERNATIONAL PHYSICAL THEATRE LABORATORY

The Lab, with Sergei Ostrenko (Russia), will be held at Bovec, Slovenia, October 19-27, 2008. Open to performers from different countries and backgrounds inspired by physical theatre as a bold, vibrant and multidimensional approach to contemporary theatre performance. Candidates should send a CV (resume) and a brief letter of motivation to [globtheatre@gmail.com](mailto:globtheatre@gmail.com) stating the title, dates and location of the event. During the Lab hotel accommodation and meals are provided for participants.

Fuller listings of degree courses, classes and workshops can be found on [www.totaltheatre.org.uk/news/training.html](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk/news/training.html)





FOURSIGHT THEATRE

## NOLA RAE

Celebrated mime artist Nola Rae will be performing three shows internationally this season. *Exit Napoleon Pursued by Rabbits* is at Footsbarn's Big Top, Carlton Hill, Edinburgh, 2-15 August and the Warsaw International Mime Art Festival on 30 August. *Elizabeth's Last Stand* plays the Green Belt Arts Festival at Centau Theatre, Cheltenham on 22 August, and the Non Stop Festival in Moss, Norway on 20 September. *Mozart Preposterous* will also be showing at the Sofia International Puppet Festival 17 & 18 September.

## BASH STREET THEATRE

Bash Street Theatre will be performing their new show *The Station* at commissioning festivals Waterford Spraoi and the National Theatre's Watch This Space in August before their trip to the Fira de Teatre showcase in Tàrraga, Spain in September. This will be their second visit to Spain in three weeks as they are also performing their silent movie show *Cliffhanger!* at the Manicomicos Festival in La Coruña in August. For full tour details of both shows see [www.bashstreet.co.uk](http://www.bashstreet.co.uk) or email [office@bashstreet.co.uk](mailto:office@bashstreet.co.uk)

## HOFESH SHECHTER COMPANY

This autumn Hofesh Shechter presents his acclaimed works *In your rooms* and *Uprising*. *In your rooms* brims with gritty physicality and is at times provocative, political and deeply personal, presenting a society that is scarily alienating and yet shockingly familiar. Twelve dancers reveal shifting motives, their lack of control and vulnerabilities through intricate, touching encounters. In *Uprising* seven men emerge from the shadows to bombard the stage with furious energy, bonding and sparring, making up and falling out. This highly charged work, set to a throbbing percussive score, leaves audiences buzzing. See [www.hofeshstour.co.uk](http://www.hofeshstour.co.uk) for video, music, audience reviews,

and tour dates for the autumn (including performances at Oxford Playhouse, Northern Stage, Warwick Arts Centre and Sheffield's Lyceum Theatre).

## LEFT LUGGAGE

Left Luggage Theatre's most recent work *Restless Tides* was performed at the Enterprise Arts Festival '08 at the Isle of Dogs venue The Space. Drawing on the vibrant history of this unique area of London, this site-responsive piece transformed the converted Victorian chapel into an environment where the audience travelled through a love story between a ship's figurehead carver and his creation – visiting along the way the mercurial Canton Kitty's Limehouse opium den, the magical curios in the pawnbroker's shop and the song-bird competition in an East End pub. Left Luggage Theatre are supported by the Puppet Centre Trust and The Centre for Excellence in Training for Theatre, Central School of Speech and Drama. See [www.leftluggagetheatre.co.uk](http://www.leftluggagetheatre.co.uk)

## PLATFORM 4

Platform 4 are researching their new piece *The Tempest* in 2008 and will be touring it in Autumn 2009. As part of the research, Platform 4 are working with Chesil Theatre members, Winchester University Students, and voice and movement specialists from the Royal Shakespeare Company, exploring the play and different approaches to it. As part of this process Platform are creating a Living Tempest Archive. If you have memories of being in the play or particular memories of studying it – or love a particular line (or hate it!) – or perhaps have a photograph the company can display then go to [www.platform4.org](http://www.platform4.org) to participate in the project. There will also be a Research Work in Progress event at Chesil Theatre, Winchester, 16 & 17 October. See [www.chesiltheatre.org.uk](http://www.chesiltheatre.org.uk)

## PLATFORM 4

### DNA

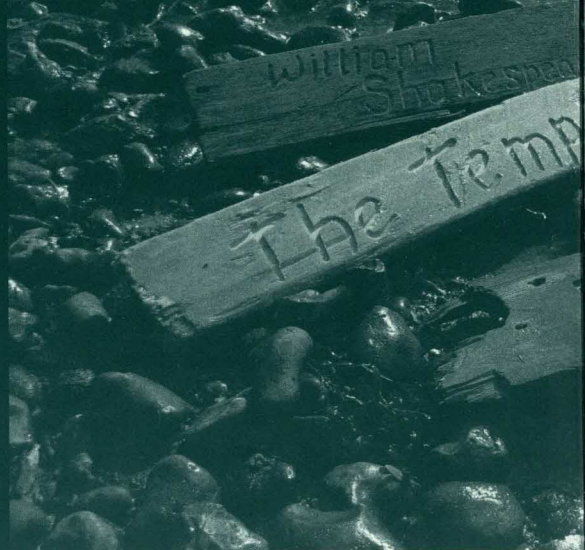
DNA have been busy touring *Dr Nose Travels Through Time* to arts centres and venues all over the UK – as well as giving international performances of *Chicken Licken* at the 2008 UNIMA congress in Australia and *Ball Pond Bobby* at the Children First Festival Singapore. August sees the DNA *Puppets A Go Go!* touring theatre marquee at the Green Man festival in Powys, Wales. DNA are inviting expressions of interest in taking on this unique touring theatre package – contact [adam@dynamicnewanimation.co.uk](mailto:adam@dynamicnewanimation.co.uk) in the first instance. Also this Autumn *Atishoo!*, DNA's tissue-tastic visual theatre performance for young children, will be touring to Singapore and Malaysia. DNA will additionally be touring *Ball Pond Bobby* and *Dr Nose Travels Through Time*. *Chicken Licken* is also available to tour and both it and *Dr Nose* are suitable for events outdoors as well as unsupported spaces. See [www.dynamicnewanimation.co.uk](http://www.dynamicnewanimation.co.uk)

### PANTS ON FIRE

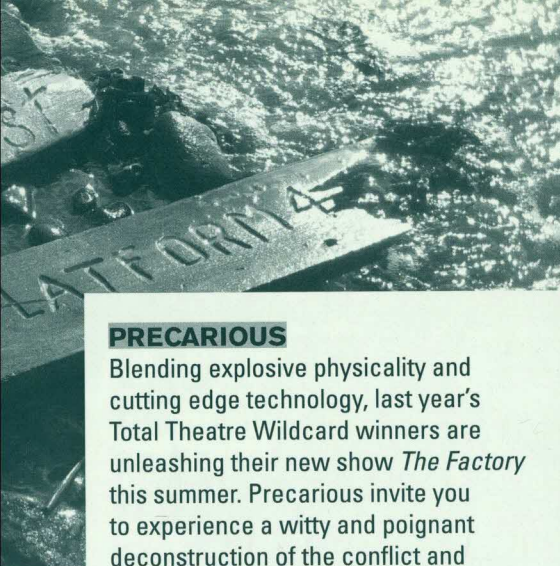
Pants on Fire's dark fairytale *Oink!*, which premiered as the main event at the 2007 Arena Festival in Germany, is currently undergoing further development in collaboration with Acting students from Rose Bruford College. POF are planning to produce the show in the UK later next year. [www.pantsonfiretheatre.com](http://www.pantsonfiretheatre.com)

### THE CHIPOLATAS

The Chipolatas are in the process of creating a theatre show and are interested in developing relationships with venues or promoters who would be up for supporting this project. August-November performances are taking place in Finland, The Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Japan and more. See [www.chipolatas.com](http://www.chipolatas.com) for tour details and dates.







## PRECARIOUS

Blending explosive physicality and cutting edge technology, last year's Total Theatre Wildcard winners are unleashing their new show *The Factory* this summer. Precarious invite you to experience a witty and poignant deconstruction of the conflict and tension between the kitsch demands of modern life and the ephemeral wonder of the human spirit. Exploring themes such as the commercialisation of the female body, the power of advertising and the importance of possessions and fame, this show attempts to awaken the most gluttonous consumer to the true value of life. 1–25 August, Zoo Southside, Edinburgh; touring September–November. See [www.precarious.org.uk](http://www.precarious.org.uk)

## ANALOGUE

Analogue tour their award-winning multimedia show *Mile End* during Autumn 2008. Throughout October and November the show visits Salford, Plymouth, Bristol and numerous venues throughout the South East, with support from Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts. Analogue are also currently making their second show, *Beachy Head*, which looks at the ripple effects of one man taking his own life. Following early work-in-progress performances at New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich and Lyric Hammersmith, the company continue to develop the show at South Hill Park and Farnham Maltings, prior to premiering the work in 2009. See [www.analogueproductions.co.uk](http://www.analogueproductions.co.uk) or email [info@analogueproductions.co.uk](mailto:info@analogueproductions.co.uk)

## PROTEUS THEATRE COMPANY

*The Elephant Man* is Proteus Theatre's highly physical one-man show exploring the journey of this remarkable human – from object of revulsion to celebrity. In our image-obsessed society his life and tragic destiny remain hauntingly relevant. 30 July–25 August (not 11 or 18 August) at C SoCo, Edinburgh. See [www.proteustheatre.com](http://www.proteustheatre.com) and [www.cthefestival.com](http://www.cthefestival.com)

## WALK THE PLANK

For *The Emperor and the Tiger* Walk the Plank and Kinetika will collaborate to bring a traditional Sylheti folk story to life with music, dancers, fire and fireworks – and a mechanical Tiger pacing a giant 100m catwalk (Newsham

## DELIT DE FAÇADE



## PANTS ON FIRE



Park, Liverpool in August). Also touring in the autumn *Gulliver's Boom Box*, a collaboration between Walk the Plank and Company Fierce, is a trip through time showing the development, evolution, skill and sophistication of street dance. Lastly, on 20 September Walk the Plank will present *East Meets West* – featuring sculptural bonfires, lantern palaces, and the Little Red Flowers dance troupe from China – at Weald Country Park, Brentwood, Essex as part of the Essex Jiangsu Festival. For more info and tour dates see [www.walktheplank.co.uk](http://www.walktheplank.co.uk)

## BOTTLEFED

Bottlefed Ensemble's second research phase (exploring improvisation between live music, dance and theatre) has involved the company and collaborators Kobayashi performing a durational improvisation at Southwark Playhouse on 31 July, with a visit to Norway (Bergen) in September, where the company will work and perform with local musicians. These musicians will then be invited back to London in November to run another process week and performance with Bottlefed at The Space (Isle of Dogs). Exact dates tbc. In August, the company will run Larkin' About 08, a site-specific youth performance project commissioned by the Arts Service of London Borough of Richmond. (Performance: Murray Park, 31 August). Email [info@bottlefed.org](mailto:info@bottlefed.org) or see [www.bottlefed.org](http://www.bottlefed.org)

## CHOPPEDLOGIC

This August ChoppedLogic and Escalator East to Edinburgh present *By the Way* at Fringe 2008 (Pleasance). When two friends suffer the loss of their mothers, their instinct is to escape. But when they find that the waitress in the motorway service station has also been bereaved, a trend begins to emerge which will punctuate their journey.

Noëlle Renaude's darkly comic, haunting 'road poem', which has fascinated audiences across France and beyond, is brought to life by a young company with a knack for creating extraordinary performances, a taste for the experimental, and a trail-blazing track record. See [www.choppedlogic.co.uk](http://www.choppedlogic.co.uk) and [www.easttoedinburgh.co.uk](http://www.easttoedinburgh.co.uk)

## FOURSIGHT THEATRE

This autumn the new Foursight team will embark on a site-specific project focusing on the life of the local corner shop. Working with Black Country Touring and English Heritage and inspired by real-life stories, *Corner Shop* will celebrate the changing faces and cultures of the Black Country corner shop. The performances will take place in a disused shop in West Bromwich, and the project will include community participation, student placements and work with local schools. Rehearsals for *Corner Shop* begin in September 2008, with a week of performances from 26 September to 4 October. Email [admin@foursighttheatre.co.uk](mailto:admin@foursighttheatre.co.uk) or see [www.foursighttheatre.co.uk](http://www.foursighttheatre.co.uk)

## DELIT DE FAÇADE

This summer French company Delit de Façade present their new production *Menus Larcins*, a street theatre show for puppets taking place in the windows of ordinary buildings. For the production Delit have asked five European artists to invent and stage five short stories. Offering five different approaches on urban reality, and inviting audiences on a dreamlike journey in the city, the collaborators are: Françoise Pillet (France), Leandre Ribeira (Spain), Pickled Image (England), Sandrine Furrer (France), and Mélanie Devoldère (France). Puppetmaker: Romain Duverne. Playing Stockton International Riverside Festival 2008, 3 August. For European tour dates see [www.delitdefacade.com](http://www.delitdefacade.com)



# OUT AND ABOUT

PIPPA BAILEY

TOTAL THEATRE MAGAZINE | VOL. 20 | ISSUE 03 | AUTUMN 2008

One of the first events of the outdoor performance summer season is Big in Falkirk, which takes place on the first weekend in May. Set in beautiful Callendar Park in a small Scottish town between Edinburgh and Glasgow, Big in Falkirk features large on the street arts map with regular commissions and the chance to test-run outdoor shows for a predominantly local audience. These audiences have developed over eight years since the free festival started to appreciate the outdoor performance programmed alongside musical attractions. *Bollywood Steps* by Nutkhut was launching its third summer tour after two successful years on the road. The Bureau of Silly Ideas (BOSi) remounted *The Hole Job* using a building site as the starting point for some bouncy circus boys playing construction workers. The World Famous working with Slovenian band Terrafolk were premiering their new show *Full Circle* (which as an associate director for the company is the reason I was there).

I have travelled in Europe during the past few months to Berlin, Krakow, and Belfast. I visited Berlin for the first time; a remarkably relaxed city and although not there for work officially, I couldn't help but sample some of the great cultural hotspots. In particular, a groovy venue opened in 2006, radialsystem v in the eastern part of city. This converted pump-station on the river Spree hosts an interesting programme, a sympathetic conversion, and even a guesthouse. If you are ever in Berlin, it's well worth a visit.

In Krakow, the Reminiscence Festival's programme of experimental performance forms part of Mobile Lab. This European writing initiative explores theatre criticism and commentary through ten European festivals called Festivals In Transition (FIT). These festivals joined forces to explore the future role of theatre festivals in 2005 and Mobile Lab is a new project. It started at Speilart in Munich last November and Krakow hosted the second event with theatre work from all over Europe. Days were spent in heated discussion and evenings in the dark of theatres, with Krakow as a moving backdrop, caught only in the rushed journeys from hotel to workshop to theatre and back again. Performing from the UK, Rotozaza's *Rom Com* was a firm favourite. Some of the Mobile Lab team visited Stratford, London for LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre), one of the FIT associate partners. Go to [www.theatre-fit.org](http://www.theatre-fit.org) to see what people thought.



THE WORLD FAMOUS WITH TERRAFOLK  
*Full Circle*. PHOTO GRAEME HIGGS

Just outside Belfast, the Ballyearl Arts and Leisure Centre nestles into picture postcard rolling green hills barely 15 miles from the city. Flown over to teach a site-specific performance course for the Northern Ireland Theatre Association, my day ended in a very interesting group discussion with companies like Kabosh, Big Telly and Prime Cut Productions, about what is happening in Northern Irish theatre, how it reflects cultural identity and where the work is going. As a rather forgotten part of the United Kingdom which has suffered enormous funding cuts to the arts, most companies struggle to tour or find recognition outside of Northern Ireland in the UK.

Should the arts be ethical? What kinds of values should the arts represent? Do artists have a moral responsibility to speak out? These are just some of the questions asked at Culture and Consequence - a conference held in June 2008 on the role of ethics in the arts promoted by the London Centre for Arts and Cultural Enterprise (LCACE) in partnership with the Cultural Leadership Programme. Dame Jude Kelly, artistic director of the South Bank Centre and London 2012's chair of culture and education, made a moving address about having spent years in a long battle for the arts to be recognised as a legitimate profession. Part of this campaign has been to secure a place at the 'top table' with established professions. Ground has been gained and her concern now, about what to do with the power, was heartening. Baroness Susan Greenfield offered some energetic insights into the physiology of the brain. Her interest lies in the amount of time people, particularly children, spend in front of computer/TV/games/movie screens and how that is changing us. Inevitably the day focused on the widening gap between cultural business and other creative concerns. The consequence of all this in the current credit crunch remains to be seen. I left happy in the knowledge that by supporting 'liveness', Total Theatre remains connected to a powerful world.

Pippa Bailey is director of Total Theatre, the national development agency for contemporary theatre based in the UK. For more on the organisation and on the Total Theatre Awards at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2008, see [www.totaltheatre.org.uk](http://www.totaltheatre.org.uk)



# ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

## CURTAINS

### THE CANNY GRANNY SPELLS OUT SOME HOME TRUTHS ABOUT RED VELVET AND SWISH

I've just moved into a new flat and guess what? Not a curtain in sight. It's rollerblind this and frosted glass that. And then I went to the theatre, and there weren't any curtains there either. Not anymore. Curtains for curtains, you might say.

Curtains belong in red plush Victorian theatres with painted cycloramas and revolving stages. In the past they were such an ordinary frame for theatre that we knew we were watching 'a performance' when we saw them. Ernie Wise and Eric Morecambe had curtains on their TV show. Imagine the ten o'clock news with curtains! It would make it look like they were packaging it for our entertainment, which of course they are not doing, are they? Are they?

A disturbing 'safety curtain' used to come down in the interval. Safe for whom? To keep the savage players at arm's length from the riffraff? No, to keep reality and fiction at safe distance, like chalk and cheese. Combine them, and you've got Philadelphia light. Currently, that is the kind of theatre I'd prefer to spread on my toast.

In these days of black boxes and white cubes, curtains can only really be reprised as a historical reference, like in the music hall in Punchdrunk's *Masque of the Red Death* – part of the museum of theatre style, along with mind-readers and moustache-twizzling comperes.

Curtains used to signal beginnings and endings. These days, you mostly see curtains mentioned in their metaphorical sense – as in, 'it was curtains for her'. I hope idiom has caught up with physical theatre by the time I konk out. I'd like them to say: 'It's been a long freeze followed by a blackout for her'.

The anticipated parting of the lush reds used to arouse our desires. Without curtains, performers work hard to whet the audience's appetite in other ways (in Amato Saltone, Shunt leave you to stagger alone through dark passages, then give you a locker key. When you open the locker, it's started).

Curtains opening denote the beginning. But I like to be unsure when something has begun. The scatterbrained preamble to Complicite's *Mnemonic* relaxes us, and for me, the blurring of that line between the show and the prologue is sweeter than a Werther's original in a long queue at the post office.

Curtain calls are something else. As an audience-member you want an opportunity to express something. BAC producer Shelley Hastings recalls *Small Metal Objects* by Australia's Back to Back Theatre, which she saw on Stratford Station. The audience watch the actors far below on the platform, barely distinguishable from the regular commuters, whilst hearing their conversation on a headset. 'At the end, we were applauding the world,' she said. Who needs a proscenium

arch and curtains when the frames can be this mindblowing? Sometimes I think we are just shy of the pride and egotism of curtain-calls. But there's an irony there to be exploited: Derevo's *Once* had a curtain-call involving 80s rock, pyrotechnics, and champagne. If only I could be so sure of a standing ovation, I'd fix up something as spectacular: who'd deny an old girl a party popper and a glass of sherry in her finest hour?

Curtains can be exploited in visual theatre. Dulcinea Llangfelder's *Victoria*, (Aurora Nova at Edinburgh Fringe 2007), made a whole design feature out of hospital curtains on an exciting curving track, allowing her to seal off and reveal sections of space, mirroring the pockets of lucidity amid her dementia.

I've seen curtains used to terrible effect in more traditional shows. *A Year of Magical Thinking* (National Theatre, May 2008) tries to spice up an almost purely verbal solo show with the underwhelming wilting of the cyclorama into the floor every quarter of an hour or so, revealing another cyc behind painted an even subtler wash of grey. But let's draw a veil over that one, shall we?

Laura Lloyd

#### Is it Curtains for Curtains?

##### Mostly curtain-free theatre

Complicite return to the Barbican this autumn as a part of Bite's tenth anniversary season with a revival of their 2007 success, *A Disappearing Number*.  
[www.complicite.org](http://www.complicite.org)

Bite, presenters of Back to Back Theatre's *Small Metal Objects*, create a year-round programme at the Barbican Theatre, and sometimes other places too – the new autumn season includes Lone Twin's *Speeches*, a series of short site-specific performances in and around the Barbican.  
[www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

Shunt can be found at their Lounge, Wednesdays to Saturdays, in the decidedly-not-red-plush vaults under London Bridge station. Each week the Shunt Lounge is curated by a different artist from the Shunt collective.  
[www.shunt.co.uk](http://www.shunt.co.uk)

##### Partial to curtains and/or curtain-calls

Teatro Delusio, by German mask theatre company Familie Floez, is set behind the scenes of a variety show, and curtain-calls play a big part.  
[www.familie-floez.de](http://www.familie-floez.de)

Punchdrunk's *Masque of The Red Death* featured the Palais Royale, a complete music Hall/Variety show-within-the-show. With curtains.  
See [www.punchdrunk.org.uk](http://www.punchdrunk.org.uk)

Duckie, 'purveyors of working-class entertainments' such as the award-winning *C'est Vauxhall* and *Gay Shame*, are fond of curtains.  
[www.duckie.co.uk](http://www.duckie.co.uk)

Forced Entertainment are also fond of curtains, which they use in an ironic way in shows like *First Night*. Or maybe it isn't ironic, maybe they just like curtains. Their new show *Spectacular* tours the UK this autumn.  
[www.forcedentertainment.com](http://www.forcedentertainment.com)



# DISSOLVING BORDERS

**DOROTHY MAX PRIOR MEETS  
GUILLERMO GÓMEZ-PEÑA  
AND ROBERTO SIFUENTES  
OF LA POCHA NOSTRA**

Entering the cavernous main space of Glasgow's Tramway for La Pocha Nostra's new work *Divino Corpo/Corpo Illicito*, there is a sense of excitement and nervous anticipation. We know the main players, and we've got an idea of the map of the territory, but over the next few hours anything could happen. This because a key element in the work of La Pocha Nostra is us – the audience.

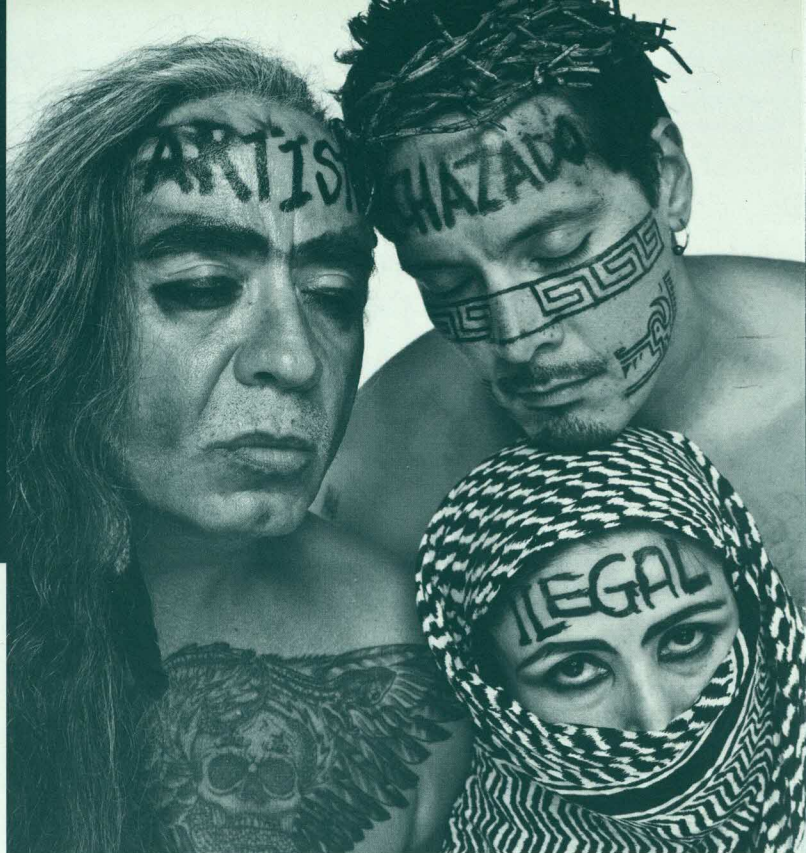
The space feels more like the auditorium of a rock gig than a theatre: there's an ever-changing kaleidoscope of coloured spotlights; pounding beats that switch from nu-punk to opera, then later to kitsch pop (John and Yoko's *Happy Christmas / War is Over*); people milling around, uncertain of the best spot to settle. There are three podiums, or 'stations', placed in a triangular configuration at a fair distance from each other, each station occupied by a performer.

At the top end is Guillermo Gómez-Peña: dressed in what looks to be a traditional Mexican skirt, a boot on one foot, a high-heeled shoe on the other; hairbrush in hand, vigorously brushing his flowing grey locks. On his plinth is a throne. He's a 'neo-Aztec shaman in drag', the 'Holy Patron of Bohemia'.

To his left is Roberto Sifuentes, naked but for a bloodied bandage-cum-loincloth, skin covered in black markings, surrounded by medical accoutrements and the paraphernalia of various healing systems (from oxygen masks to acupuncture). His neo-spiritual persona is the Holy Patron of Dis-Ease (and therefore, applying doublethink, of Healing too).

On the third plinth is Violeta Luna: scary scrunched ponytail swinging wildly, her black burkha-type garment dragged off to reveal a slinky red dress slit to her thighs, teamed with teetering platform shoes. Her mouth is forced open with a metal brace, less dentistry than torture instrument. Later in the evening the red dress comes off to reveal hyper-realistic plastic tits offered to the audience to suckle. A Madonna for the modern age.

Much of the imagery in the piece is familiar from previous work (which is fine by me – Piet Mondrian painted squares, Sean Scully paints stripes, La Pocha Nostra enact quasi-religious tableaux drawn from the postmodern paintbox of twenty-first century culture, exploiting its social, political, and anthropological signs and signifiers); yet there is a relaxed playfulness in *Divino Corpo/Corpo Illicito* that is markedly different from *Mapa Corpa* (performed at the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow in 2007, and toured extensively worldwide). This perhaps due to the freshness of the piece, presented as a work-in-progress.



Although interchanges with the audience feature in *Mapa Corpa*, in this new work the interactions feel of the essence of the piece. At Guillermo's station, audience members are costumed as 'new saints' who then replace him as enactors of the shamanistic rituals. Roberto draws people into his world to create poignant 'dances' of support and dependency, heart-rending pieties, and tableaux vivants that echo every newspaper image ever seen of trauma survivors stumbling from the wreckage in – well, name your country/disaster.

Violeta's station is the one I'm drawn to most this evening: she seems truly possessed as she moves around her contained space, yet always in complete control. The layers of clothing removed with the powerful command of a seasoned striptease artist; the gaping jaw a parody of the relentless smile of the cheerleader or the ever-accommodating orifice of the porn star (two sides of the same coin – the obliging wide-mouthed woman). Throughout the course of the evening, it feels like every image that perpetrates the Madonna-whore dichotomy is displayed then dismembered: she's veiled then unveiled, coy then provocative, terrorising then submissive, active and acted upon.

At each station there are moments of extreme beauty, moments that suggest extreme violence, moments of tension, moments of loving exchange.

These three artists are core members of La Pocha Nostra, which, as we meet over breakfast the next day, Guillermo and Roberto describe to me as 'a loose structure of concentric circles'. Artistic director Guillermo Gómez-Peña (originally from Mexico, now based in San Francisco) is joined in the 'inner circle' by company co-founder Roberto Sifuentes and associate artists such as Violeta Luna (also originally from Mexico), together with another four or five key players.

**1 | HOLY TRINITY: GUILLERMO GÓMEZ-PEÑA, ROBERTO SIFUENTES, AND VIOLETA LUNA OF LA POCHA NOSTRA. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE COMPANY/NRLA.**

**2 | POST-MEXICAN TABLEAUX: GUILLERMO GÓMEZ-PEÑA, VIOLETA LUNA, AND JUAN YBARRA AT GÓMEZ-PEÑA'S MEXICO CITY HOME, 2003. PHOTO BY MIGUEL VELASCO.**

**3 | POSSESSION RITUAL: GUILLERMO GÓMEZ-PEÑA AND HIS POSSESSED PERFORMANCE ASSISTANT IN THE MUSEUM OF FETISHIZED IDENTITIES. PHOTO BY HIEDRUN LOHR.**



Then there are the international associates who come in and out on various projects (one of the distinguishing features of the company is the large family of collaborators). These are dotted throughout the world: in the Americas, Australia, Spain – and in the UK, where collaborators include Persis-Jade Maravala, Ansuman Biswas, and Rachel Rodgers.

Another of the circles is formed by the numerous participants in residencies held throughout the world. And of course the audience form yet another circle, essential to La Pocha Nostra's work: the company see what they are doing as a sort of 'performance karaoke'.

Guillermo speaks of their ongoing mission to take work into the 'zones of silence of performance art', in particular to South American countries where artists find it hard to visit the US or Europe because of visa problems. He talks of their 'Trojan horse' policy, in which one or two invited La Pocha artists from a 'more visible' country visit 'the zones of silence' and encourage a gathering there of associates and like-minded people so that a real sense of a cultural happening occurs.

We talk about the new show, and Roberto admits that he was 'more scared than usual'. Part of the 'feel the fear and do it anyway' vibe comes from the way this particular piece was created, with the three performers working independently... although, as Roberto puts it, 'we've worked together for 15 years so we have a shared bank of images and ideas to draw on' and that 'we were hyper-aware of each other all the time'. He seems a little concerned that there was perhaps sometimes a 'lack of cohesiveness', which wasn't particularly a concern for me from my audience-member perspective, but I respect his awareness of the newness of the piece and its potential evolution – an awareness that I see as grounded in his extensive experience as a theatre practitioner. Guillermo also makes it clear that all of their works 'have many manifestations' and are 'constantly shifting and changing', with changes occurring as different artists participate in different versions of each piece, an example cited being the inclusion of Classical Indian/Kathikali dancer Rakini Devi in the version of Mapa Corpo seen in Glasgow in 2007.

This sort of collaboration, where artists of different cultures and performance traditions are placed together in counterpoint, is intrinsic to the company's work, with Guillermo saying that he is interested in 'remapping the territories of performance dialogue'.

An ongoing vital element of La Pocha Nostra's work is to force a re-evaluation of the attitude to people of colour through performance – or as Guillermo puts it, to challenge 'the demonisation of the brown body' – he feels that 'performance is a form of radical democracy' and that this principle applies



to the breakdown of all borders: those between countries, those between races and cultures, and those between performers and audiences. Although this sounds pretty serious stuff, the most refreshing thing about La Pocha Nostra is that they believe that politics and performance can not only co-exist, but also – most importantly – can be fun.

*La Pocha Nostra were artists-in-residence at the National Review of Live Art 2008 as part of New Territories, held at Tramway, Glasgow, February–March 2008.*

*La Pocha Nostra's International Performance Workshop comes to Évora, Portugal 1–12 August 2008 and returns to Tucson, Arizona 5–17 January 2009. Applicants must have some performance experience, and must be familiar with La Pocha Nostra's work. For details of the application process, contact Emma Tramosch, Special Projects Coordinator: [pocha@pochanostra.com](mailto:pocha@pochanostra.com)*



### **La Pocha Nostra** **In Permanent Progress – Extracts from a Manifesto**

*La Pocha Nostra is an ever-morphing trans-disciplinary arts organisation based in San Francisco with branches and factions in many other cities and countries. We provide a base for a loose network and forum of rebel artists from various disciplines, generations and ethnic backgrounds.*

*La Pocha Nostra is neither an ensemble, nor a troupe. We are more of a conceptual 'laboratory', for the want of a better term... thinking together, exchanging ideas, fears and aspirations and jumping into 'the abyss' together.*

*Pocha was created out of our necessity to survive as Chicano artists in a racist Art World. Pocha is a direct and pragmatic response to the lack of funding to artists of colour in the US.*

*La Pocha is a unique aesthetic. Our 'robo-baroque' and 'ethno-techno-cannibal aesthetic' samples and devours everything we encounter: Border and Chicano pop culture; TV; film; rock and roll; hip-hop; comics; journalism; anthropology; pornography; religious imagery and of course, the history of the visual and performing arts. What we do as performance artists is to cross-reference this information, 'embody' it, and then re-interpret it for a live audience, thus refracting fetishised constructs of otherness through the spectacle of our 'heightened' bodies on display.*

*La Pocha's aesthetic praxis involves ethnic and gender-bending, cultural transvestitism and constant, atypical and surprising power inversions.*

*By the time you read this text, La Pocha may be something else.*

*You are all welcome to pirate any of these ideas.*

*This is a heavily edited extract from La Pocha Nostra's Manifesto. For the full text, and for more on the company, visit the website: [www.pochanostra.com](http://www.pochanostra.com)*



# VOICES

## FROM THE LIVING THEATRE TO HIP HOP THEATRE, BABA ISRAEL IN HIS OWN WORDS



BABA ISRAEL. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

**I grew up in New York's The Living Theatre** [often seen as the first modern, experimental theatre company]; a childhood of theatre, rehearsal spaces, and loft parties. At ten years old I was a member of a youth theatre company, run by Gypsy, a member of The Living Theatre.

**We created anti-consumerism plays and I played 'Ronald Raygun'** performing in public parks around New York City. The work was political and public.

**The Living Theatre's work marked essential developments in street theatre and collective creation.**

**The Living Theatre challenged society and called out its oppressive forces.**

**I continue in that tradition making music and theatre that addresses issues of race, militarisation, and media manipulation.** My father Steve Ben Israel emerged as a solo performer bringing together comedy, jazz, and theatre. My mother Pamela Mayo Israel is a mask masker, theatre artist, and filmmaker.

**My creative voice was encouraged.**

**As a performer my background is in the hip hop and spoken word renaissance of the 90s.** Here my love of rhymes and beats came to life. I moved into the experimental performance scene of New York performing improvisations in clubs, theatres, squats, and raves.

**I collaborated with artists from diverse backgrounds including Balinese dance, jazz, electronic music, hip hop, Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Commedia dell'Arte.**

**I trained in Playback Theatre.** In Playback I have found a community based improvisational theatre form that engages communities at the deepest level. We have worked with groups who have lost family members in 9/11; in schools dealing with racial conflicts; and with union movements. I am proud to be co-founder of Playback NYC with Paul McIsaac, the first Playback company based in New York City, and to integrate hip hop's improvisational forms.

**Enter Hip Hop Theatre, a recipe for my excitement and engagement in the theatrical tradition.** Hip Hop Theatre expands hip hop's storytelling, allowing for greater range of content, emotion, and dynamic outside of the hype of the club/party.

**Theatre can embody human and political conflicts directly.** Instead of a solo rap challenging racism, you can stage a battle between an oblivious white and militant black rapper, as we did in our Hip Hop Commedia piece 'What you say white boy?'. This intersection connects contemporary performance to the global language of hip hop. This creates current work

that invites new audiences to the theatre. At the same time what is lost moving into the theatre? I see this tension as a vital place to examine process, venue, and form.

**Process 08 is at the cutting edge of developing the form.**

Director Benji Reid's genius is in creating a structure where process is emphasised, as opposed to product. In many developmental situations the pressure of creating finished work limits experimentation and true innovation. In the previous Process I was able to push myself and develop new training structures.

**My focus will again mix Hip Hop skills such as freestyle, emceeing, and beatboxing with improvisational forms such as Playback Theatre.** I am interested in challenging the expectations of these skills and push the possibilities of beatboxing and emceeing in relation to character, narrative, and ensemble work.

**New York City is an international city and at the same time very insular.** As an artist I have travelled and worked in Europe, Australia, and Asia. The mix of traditional cultural frameworks, contemporary movements, and the re-imagining and re-interpretation of American forms such as Hip Hop make for fertile collaboration.

**I'm premiering my new solo piece Boom Bap Meditations in New York at the Hip Hop Theater Festival.** In October 2008 Boom Bap Showtime! will tour to Contact Theatre in Manchester and The Albany in London. Presenting a double bill of my show and new work from Australian Hip Hop Theatre artist Morganics and Canadian dancer Jojo Zalina. This marks a truly international collaboration.

*The Living Theatre was established in 1947 by Judith Malina and Julian Beck. Early works such as The Brig confronted the brutality of military prisons and The Connection explored the world of jazz. The Living Theatre left America and toured Europe throughout the 60s and 70s. Works such as Paradise Now moved from traditional theatrical forms to ritualistic and improvisational structures.*

*Process08 is a rich workshop festival, presented by Breaking Cycles and The Martin Harris Centre at The University of Manchester, and delivered by international masters of hip hop theatre, encouraging young artists to focus on the process of new theatre making, using a display of multi-disciplined artforms. Hosted by Benji Reid; featuring Will Power, Ty, Baba Israel, Walid, Kwikstep, and Rokafella. 4-16 August 2008. Includes the Hip Hop Film Festival. See [www.breakingcycles.co.uk](http://www.breakingcycles.co.uk)*



# HOTEL MEDEA

## FROM MIDNIGHT TO DAWN

FEATURES

HOTEL MEDEA

### JORGE LOPES RAMOS, DIRECTOR OF ZECORA URA THEATRE, REFLECTS ON AN ONGOING INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE THEATRE PROCESS

In an era of worldwide mass migration to 'super-cities', Zecora Ura Theatre (Rio de Janeiro/London) are seeking to create exciting and innovative performance propositions that question how we exist and how we communicate within the urban spaces we inhabit. Our intention with *Hotel Medea* – to engage our audiences in an overnight event in a public space – is fuelled by this aim, and also by our drive to continually produce and present unique, timely and artistically dynamic theatrical experiences.

*Hotel Medea* is a theatre trilogy (*Zero Hour Market; Drylands; Feast of Dawn*) inspired by the myth of Medea and technology of communication. Performed from midnight till dawn, the trilogy is still in its making and has had its two latest stages of development at CPC Gargarullo (Brazil) and Salisbury International Arts Festival (UK).

#### A MEETING PLACE

In 2006 when I asked Persis-Jade Maravala from Para Active to lead workshops in Brazil based on her theatre practice, what followed was a rather one-sided conversation where she held forth on her dilemma between surviving as a theatre artist but wishing to decline

any more teaching work. She was reluctant to participate in contributing to a workshop culture that, she felt, was a poor substitute for an ethos of ongoing actor training. I was able to connect to this as it had become a natural request of festivals and universities that I condense my work in capoeira and butoh into two- or three-hour-long, open-to-all workshops. In order to limit the potential for superficiality, I had started to demand longer residencies with specific local groups committed to theatre research as part of my company's touring programme, as I felt it was important that people be included in the creative process of our work. And so it was the meeting of these two backgrounds that gave birth to Drift Project International, which aimed to enable artistic development and the ability to self-determine process and practice, by allowing the participating artist to be responsible for her process. We would provide a daily training through my work with Japanese butoh principles to approach ways to transform the body's inner and outer life in solo performance; and Afro-Brazilian capoeira Angola to provide a deeper understanding of performance potential through acrobatics, voice, movement and rhythm exercises. Persis-Jade's inter-cultural approach focused on physical and vocal exercises

that would reconnect the actor to the inner life and discover it as a source of creativity. And it worked. So far we have had Drifts in France, Italy, Kosovo, Germany, Spain, Norway and Brazil where artists can train and then work on their own ideas and present them in the evening. The process was both thrilling and empowering for everybody and spawned brand new projects, various collaborations and even new companies.

#### HOTEL MEDEA – SOWING THE SEEDS

It was in a Drift that I started to work on the first idea for what was to become *Hotel Medea*. We began with a solo piece entitled *Heart Full of Holes* in which I directed Persis-Jade, starting with a strong memory of fever that she then layered with the emotional turbulence that she was going through at that time. This was to be an important psycho-physical link to the themes of love and betrayal central to the myth of Medea. This initial process was not so easy as Persis-Jade had come from quite a closed laboratory way of working and had very strong ideas and beliefs about the discipline of how a group should work and little interest in using anything other than the performer and the performers energy; whereas I had more fluid beliefs of process and structure being constantly challenged by multiple sources of material, such as butoh inspired investigations,



and capoeira as a tool for theatre; and I was also interested in the role of technology in performance and continuing site-sympathetic practice. Instead of compromising our beliefs regarding process, we would either merge them into a completely new enquiry or add a third possibility. And so the tension between opposing ideas had begun to create new pathways instead of dead-ends. As the Drift was gathering depth and strength, my company's production of *The Tempest* had generated an overwhelming interest for future touring and commissions. Clearly this growing interest necessitated a safe formula of a 'Brazilian' take on Shakespeare, which was an easy trap to fall into but may have spelled the death of my work in the UK. The process of making *The Tempest* definitely enriched me as an artist but I strongly believe that trying to repeat a sellable formula would have been a mistake.

### **ESCAPE FROM A POTENTIAL ARTISTIC DEATH-TRAP**

Whilst questioning myself as to why (having come from Rio de Janeiro) I should continue to work as a director in London, I had the impulse to investigate a theatre piece that would defy London's convenient after-work theatre culture; a desire to create work which would not comply with safe programming requirements or local target groups, but instead would offer something truly challenging that was unlike any other event. *Hotel Medea*, with its premise of being an overnight production invited international interest and it was time to start thinking about forming a strong ensemble. We knew we were not going to run auditions but rather wanted things to evolve quite naturally and we had faith that a group would form through our residency programmes if we were both patient and open.

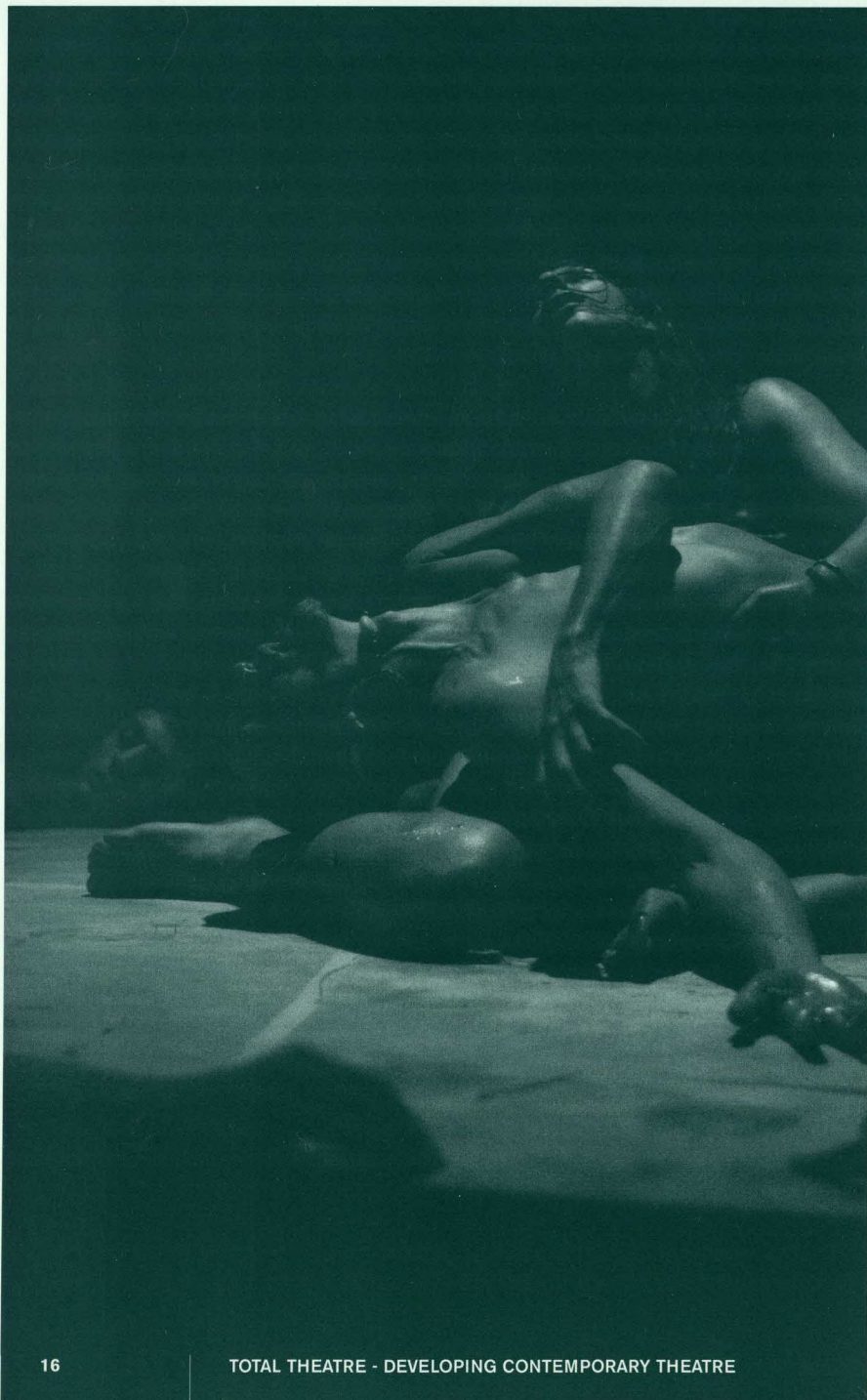
We were spectacularly supported by The Urban Dolls Project, principally by Lisa Lapidge and Nwando Ebizie who are not only fine versatile performers but are also fully integrated in running all aspects of the project. We have thus run projects both in Europe and in Brazil that have collected a wider group of 23 actors and musicians.

### **MASTER URIAS AND THE THEATRE OF SOURCES**

Key to *Hotel Medea* was Master Urias de Oliveira. Urias is a master in theatrical rituals and celebrations still alive in the Brazilian northeast region, especially in the state of Maranhão. We literally stumbled across Urias in Maranhão's capital São Luiz during a research visit and have been working with him ever since. He has fitted into our process with effortless ease, has brought an invaluable knowledge to the project. In particular his knowledge and experience of the Bumba Boi tradition – a ritual based on the myth of a slave who kills his master's prize bull to satisfy his pregnant wife's desire – has fed into our work on *Zero Hour Market*, the first part of the *Hotel Medea* trilogy. He is also an initiate of the Vodum religion of Tambor de Mina. I noticed an excitement and joy in Persis-Jade when we started to work with Urias in work that has strong links with Grotowski's theatre of sources phase.

### **KEY COLLABORATORS ALONG THE ROAD**

So Urias and Persis-Jade were working very well together, and it was also around this time that we started to have very serious preoccupations with how *Hotel Medea* could work as an interface between theatre, ritual and myth. This was the point we asked Marc Von Henning (formerly of Primitive Science) to join the project as a dramaturg who would help us to clarify our theatrical impulses to tell a story whilst also maintaining the 'here and now' aspect of the ritual dances and games and interactions between the performers and audience. The inclusion of DJ Dolores's work in a residency which took place at Gargarullo Centre for Popular Conspiracy allowed us to expand the vocabulary of ritual into a language our audience had direct access to.







*Hotel Medea* was always an ambitious project and has required unconditional dedication from ourselves and our partners. It has sometimes been like walking down a dark and lonely road, but our determination to make this project happen has attracted like-minded partners, both in Brazil and in the UK, who have supported us by being willing to embrace risk as the essential element of the artistic process.

*Due to the company's decision to withdraw from this year's Edinburgh Fringe, the Hotel Medea UK premiere has been rescheduled for 2009. Following the residency and preview performance at LIFT (13–19 June 2008) the company run summer residencies in Spain (1–26 July) and Italy (19–24 August), before returning to Brazil for further research and development in September–October 2008. They are now in dialogue with London venues about the UK premiere of Hotel Medea and welcome invitations for discussion about London-based partnerships.*

*Mestro Urias De Oliveira will be working for the first time in the UK with an intensive course in dance, song and percussion that draws upon the African heritage of Brazil, leading sessions on the Orixás and the Bumba Boi. Buddhist Arts Centre, Bethnal Green, London. 29–31 August, 11am–5pm daily. Bookings through Theatre Training Initiative: [fran@theatrettraining.org.uk](mailto:fran@theatrettraining.org.uk)*

*To contact Jorge Lopes Ramos about any of the above, email [hotelmedea@gmail.com](mailto:hotelmedea@gmail.com)*

*For more on Zecora Ura and Hotel Medea, see [www.medea.tv](http://www.medea.tv) CPC Gargarullo (Centre for Popular Conspiracy), in the mountainous west of Rio de Janeiro, is a centre dedicated to supporting theatre artists, filmmakers and musicians from all corners of Brazil and abroad to engage with a process of artistic encounters.*

*See [www.gargarullo.com](http://www.gargarullo.com) For information on Shunt Lounge, which is in the Shunt Arches under London Bridge, see [www.shunt.co.uk](http://www.shunt.co.uk)*

*For information on the Salisbury International Arts Festival, see [www.salisburyfestival.co.uk](http://www.salisburyfestival.co.uk)*

But if we define a multi-disciplinary collaboration as one that occurs between specialists in differing fields, then we have to expect that these people may have different processes of collaboration, different artistic languages and different working practices – and at times this was tough. These key collaborators stirred up new thoughts and approaches to our way of thinking and working, by constantly questioning the core of that which we do. It is both the saddest and most beautiful role that I have as a director to make final decisions – the moment all other options cease to exist.

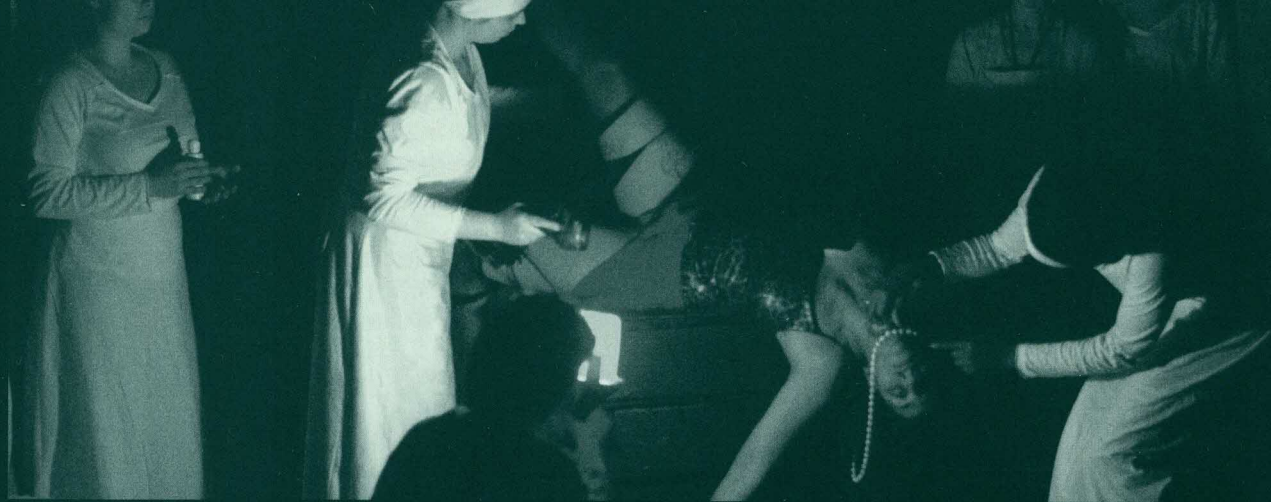
#### **THE ONGOING NEED FOR UK AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS**

And so eventually we have come to the point where we have over 40 collaborators worldwide and the beginnings of a trilogy which runs from midnight to dawn in real time. The work was developed with the support of enterprising venues,

festivals and spaces such as the CPC Gargarullo in Brazil and Shunt Lounge in London. Jo Metcalfe, director of the Salisbury International Arts Festival, has been a strong supporter of our work since *The Tempest* performed at Salisbury in 2007. Jo is one of those rare theatre producers who really understands and embraces risk-taking in order for extraordinary events to happen. Wolfgang Hoffman of Aurora Nova (the world theatre festival-within-a-festival at the Edinburgh Fringe) has supported the project from its conception. Due to Wolfgang's decision to withdraw from this year's Fringe, we decided to support his decision and have declined other invitations to perform in the Fringe 2008. Aurora Nova's ethos is one of the few we truly identify with and we will continue our partnership for August 2009.

**ALL IMAGES FROM ZECORA URA HOTEL MEDEA. PHOTOS ALLAN TITMUSS**





## Hotel Medea – Zero Hour Market

Some time before the 'zero hour', we are gathered in an East London park to witness the preview performance of Zero Hour Market, (the first part of the Hotel Medea trilogy), presented as part of LIFT 2008. The mood is lively, with the uplifting rhythms of the bateria drawing us to the entrance of the Lift building – a cuboid construction erected for the duration of the festival.

As we gather, we are regaled by a Brazilian showman perched astride his (bamboo) donkey Susie, replete with whistle and siren – a big smile on his face and plenty of cocky banter forthcoming in a heavily-accented, teasing patter that is part-entertainer, part-salesman. 'You want to see the show? One at a time, come on in...' It would seem that a wedding party is about to begin.

This is Jorge Lopes Ramos, his showman persona here 'performing his ethnicity' in a way that is simultaneously a genuine tribute to the folklore of his home country and a commentary on racial stereotyping. Much of the rest of the evening similarly plays with the audience's response, constantly asking us to evaluate what we see and feel: are we engaged or ironically detached; laughing at or laughing with; joining in or holding back; accepting the provocation or refusing to play the game?

Once let in (with one shoe taken off each person as a sort of sealing of the contract to be 'audience'), we find ourselves in a constantly shifting environment in which performance space, set, actors, musicians, dancers, audience, costumes, and props are all moveable feasts. We are, for example, entertained by a team of dancing market-traders wearing swirling umbrella-like portable stalls; they circle around us, but then it becomes clear that we need to get under those canopies and be part of the action. Fortunes get told with coffee beans, lost treasures sought, and palms read. The theme of the evening – and the essence of the story of the 'witch' Medea and her warrior lover Jason – is emerging: these are traders in hopes, dreams, secrets, and ambitions, and carriers of portents of irreversible, terrible fates.

The space mutates: the audience are huddled to the back as a motorbike crashes in, bearing a helmet-clad tough guy (Jason) and his bare-chested team of female 'Amazonians'.

Now we have crossed over into another 'Brazil' – Terry Gilliam's dystopian film landscape, perhaps. A battle ensues; Medea (Persis-Jade Maravala) emerges from the crowd. Yet we are all holding up Medea masks, so who is the real Medea?

The pre-Euripides ancient version of the Medea story is merged with motifs from the Bumba Boi festival, inspired by ancient Brazilian myths of a bull-god's death and resurrection. The fire-breathing oxen, dragons, and armies of warrior Argonauts from the Jason and Medea story marry well with the wild batacuda drumming and Orixas-inspired dances.

Battles resolved, Jason and Medea are married – having been ritually bathed and lovingly adorned in a scene that is one of the interactive highlights of the evening. A wedding party 'pagoda' dance ritual is played out with the giving and receiving of rhyming-couplet good wishes and scurrilous jests. The party ends in tears, with the murder of Medea's brother beautifully played out in a crowd disco scene in which we are all participants – and somehow through that (as fellow-partygoers) implicated in the violence.

The evening ends in a processional move out of the space and into the park, the bitter-sweet final song a contrast to the wild revelry of the evening's beginning.

Hotel Medea is more, much more, than a 'theatre show' – a truly shared space.

**Dorothy Max Prior**

*Zero Hour Market, the preview of the first section of the Hotel Medea trilogy, was seen at Lift Festival in Stratford Park, June 2008.*

*Hotel Medea is presented by Zecora Ura Theatre featuring the Urban Dolls project, and is co-commissioned by Salisbury International Arts Festival and C.P.C. Gargarullo (Rio de Janeiro).*



# DINNER WITH AMERICA

**TIM JEEVES MEETS RAJNI SHAH, WHOSE NEW SHOW IS THE SECOND IN A TRILOGY OF WORKS THAT EXPLORE QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

Like its predecessor *Mr Quiver*, Rajni Shah's *Dinner with America* is a durational performance-installation in which loops of action interweave in a partly improvised, yet delicately controlled, manner.

Demarcating the space is an array of soil, mulch and halogen bulbs that are constantly rearranged by designer Lucille Acevedo-Jones and film and video artist Lucy Cash. With the theatrical mechanisms of the piece well on display, such action ebbs and flows towards the formation of a large-scale representation of the American flag before again deconstructing into its component parts.

Shah herself emerges slowly from a cocoon-like 'body bag' in the corner of the space, revealing herself in the guise of a glitzy American – blonde hair, big boobs, spangly dress and knee-high boots.

Talking of the use of stereotypes that she herself acknowledges as 'somewhat trite', she explains that she sees such figures as 'landmarks' – fixed points that the performance anchors on, allowing for an exploration of a less superficial self around them. In *Mr Quiver* she also uses representations of ostensibly very fixed definition, inhabiting roles as an Indian princess and Queen Elizabeth the First. The focus of that work lies in her transformation between the two figures and the cultures that they represent, whilst in *Dinner with America* it is the fluidity of the space around the character which acts as the enabler to understanding.

In both works, text is central. *Mr Quiver* uses a combination of researched speeches and texts that Shah herself wrote, whilst in *Dinner with America* she uses a progressively more vocal repetition of *Amazing Grace*. Developing from a barely audible humming of the melody in the opening minutes of the piece, by the end Shah, visibly exhausted from the singing, is catching her breath and forcing herself to continue.

Asked about her reasons for choosing this particular text, she explains that in part this was because she had got such a specific reaction when mentioning her intention to use the song from people whose roots lay in America, as the song is tied into the fabric of the country's culture. As someone commented to her, 'at any given moment in the US, there are at least ten pageants where children are singing this song'. By repeating the same four lines over the two-and-a-half hours of the performance, assumptions are broken down and audiences are forced to reassess their interpretation of what the song, and its cultural resonances, might mean.

The breaking down of cultural assumption about identity is close to the heart of the two pieces in the trilogy created to date. Shah explains that, in part, America developed its role as the central concern of the performance because of the manner in which it has become 'a static landmark' on the terrain of the world's intellect. Few people are willing to go beyond Hollywood and the general disdain felt for American international relations in their mental image of the nation, but the undefined areas around such cultural landmarks is what interests her. By providing an opportunity for meditation and reflection in these beautifully calming environments, the subtleties that lie behind the often too-quick dismissal of a nation's dynamic, and the identities of its component individuals, can be explored.

Which isn't to say that the piece is pro-American. It is a conversation and, just as with any conversation with anyone over any dinner, you may find yourself disagreeing. Over 30 people who live in the States were interviewed for the piece, and these conversations make up the soundtrack to the bulk of the work. When confronted with this many perspectives, there is bound to be something that grates.

Interestingly, Shah knows that *Mr Quiver*, with its focus on Indian and English heritage, is 'likely to be the performance that is seen to be the more autobiographical of these two works', but she herself feels *Dinner with America* is of much greater relevance to her own life.

It is this re-examining of assumption that Shah is asking of an audience. For, as she does in the performance, by engaging in conversation with a fluid and flexible culture, further understanding of our own and others' identities may ensue.

*Dinner with America* was seen by Tim Jeeves at Queen Mary's University of London in April 2008. It will be touring from November 2008. For details see [www.rajnishah.com](http://www.rajnishah.com)

RAJNI SHAH DINNER WITH AMERICA





# FUNNY GIRL

## HELEN KANE MEETS MISS BEHAVE ON THE EVE OF HER VARIETY NIGHTY SEASON AT THE ROUNDHOUSE

For three weeks in August, Camden's Roundhouse will be host to a variety night billed as having a 'New Era, New Show, Old Time Variety Twist.' This is *Miss Behave's Variety Nighty* – a two-hour medley of eclectic talent hand picked by Miss Behave herself from around the globe.

Publicity for the night displays a delectably clad Miss Behave free-falling from the dizzy heights of the Roundhouse rafters in her trademark second skin of red tailored latex, topped off with a two-tier rubber pillbox hat. It's sophisticated but kitsch, elegant and camp. The night, it has to be said, looks positively delicious.

Miss Behave, or Amy Saunders as she is known off-stage, is a celebrated MC, variety performer, and sword swallower extraordinaire – and holder of the world record for the most swords swallowed by a female. The Guinness record-breaking moment she nonchalantly put away seven of them on live TV in front of a largely bilious audience (there for all to see on YouTube) makes for amusing viewing.

The show was recorded four years ago, but it gives a hint as to how TV producers have since capitalised on audiences' appetite for the thrill factor of live performance. This has since culminated in ITV's curate's egg par excellence, Britain's Got Talent – a travesty or a celebration of human (and animal) potential, depending on your definition of the word 'talent'.

But whilst shows such as BGT are a burgeoning novelty in mainstream terms, it could be argued that through their success the great British public are re-learning the vocabulary of variety – somewhat ironic given how roundly the advent of TV finished off the careers of so many established performers earning a living touring in variety halls up until the 1950s.

Yet the prevalence of TV, cinema and radio has in some sense made live performance more rarefied. More knowing audiences looking for a social occasion with an unpredictable edge have found their appetites whetted by cabaret and 'new variety' stalwarts such as Brighton's Voodoo Vaudeville founded by Chris Cresswell and Ruth Glazier back in 1999, Mike Hancock's *Cabaret Heaven* wowing the crowds up in West Yorkshire since 1998, and Maynard Flip Flap's *Cabaret Boom* down the road in Sheffield which has been selling out for the past four years. Other nights flying the flag for variety include *A Cracking Night Out* in Hackney, *Finger in the Pie* at Madame Jo Jo's and Paul Martin's *Sideshow* at London's Arts Theatre.



AMY SAUNDERS AKA MISS BEHAVE

Past cabarets of note include the *Hoxton Bark*, Chris Green's *Screamers* and of course the huge success of *La Clique* in the Famous Spiegeltent, which took Edinburgh by storm in 2004, and went on to tour festivals the world over.

The beauty of these cabarets – typically containing a melange of character comedy, circus, dance, clowning and physical theatre – is that a 'variety' of genres can come together to form a complementary macrocosm of the beautiful and bizarre. But it is also interesting to note to what extent within this platform the female comic has prevailed.

### IT'S LIKE A BOX OF ROSES - THERE'S SOMETHING THERE FOR EVERYONE

Female variety comics follow an honourable tradition of big name character comediennees such as Joyce Grenfell, Dora Bryan, Beatrice Lillie, and Gertrude Lawrence, who performed mainly in revue alongside names like Noel Coward and Danny La Rue; and earlier characters from music hall such as male impersonators Hetty King and Vesta Tilley, or character singers like 'Happy' Fanny Fields and Marie Lloyd.

Today, free from the formulaic constrictions that characterise so much of the stand-up circuit, the variety bill is home to a rich seam of female comedy, often created out of various performance genres from street art to fetish – a provenance that would explain an imaginative streak in many acts that is rarely seen in the mostly two-dimensional world of stand-up comedy. The short spot format of a variety bill also enables performers to use a gem of an idea that can be honed and polished without the hassle of having to create an entire show to go with it – in my experience, events such as the International Workshop Festival are invaluable for this kind of brainstorming, especially as so many of the workshops complement a female genre of expression.

When I first began to explore clowning (after being blown away by Nola Rae and Sally Owen in *And the Ship Sailed On* at Brighton's Komedia almost ten years ago) the majority of the people at the clown courses I subsequently blitzed over the next few years, were, I noticed, women.





URSULA MARTINEZ



HELEN KANE AS FRANKIE CHALET



RAMSHAKLICIOUS



SWANK

Likewise, when I went on to work in street theatre both as a solo performer and later with dotComedy, it was impressive to note what a substantial amount of laughs were and still are being generated by women.

A by no means exhaustive list of my own personal favourites working a cross-section of genres would include performers such as Ruth Glazier (one half of Lenny & Morris, founder of Voodoo Vaudeville); Paschale Straiton (currently touring The Séance to street arts festivals up and down the country); Emma Lloyd (Stickleback Plasticus, Ramshaklicious and director of numerous physical comedy and street shows); Cathy Peace (director of Swank); Ursula Martinez (whose Hanky Panky striptease brought the house down in La Clique and continues to do so worldwide); Lorraine Bowen (camp queen of the Casio organ and eccentric par excellence); Flick Ferdinando (co-artistic director of Company F.Z and member of The Strangelings, amongst numerous other credits); Petra Massey (of Spymonkey who are also performing in Variety Nighty); and of course, Miss Behave herself.

# **FREE FROM THE FORMULAIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE STAND-UP CIRCUIT, THE VARIETY BILL IS HOME TO A RICH SEAM OF FEMALE COMEDY**

But as well as drawing individual performers into its ranks, the whole experience of variety seems to have particular appeal for a female audience. *Cabaret Boom's* Rick Allan (aka Maynard Flipflap) says that up to 90% of his tickets are booked by women. This, he suggests, is down to the experiential aspect of variety – a package with a personal touch – from being greeted by costumed characters at the door and being entertained by walkabout characters during the interval, to the interactive nature of the cabaret itself. Cabaret gives people, and women in particular, the opportunity to dress up, show off and give rein to abandon. And the audience is, after all, very much part of the show. Many nights have a loyal crowd that adds to the intimacy, and the connection between audiences who get to know a regular cast over a period of time is particularly gratifying when catchphrases or signature skits become part of an established understanding between performer and audience (cue Chris Cresswell's famous Snake Dance where the audience do a drum roll, make a collective of snake hands and wave them en masse to Al Wilson's hit 'The Snake' or his notorious refrain of 'It's a fucking shambles!').

In *Variety Nighty*, Amy has a fully functional crew where all the cast, including riggers and stage-manager, become part of the show – none of the performers or crew are ever anonymous. Stage manager Dougie Dougle – a hallowed veteran of street theatre himself and owner of one of the deftest tongues I've certainly ever heard onstage – will be trading quips whilst carrying out his more 'official' operations, likewise 'Rigger Boy', the rigger who is also one of the main acts. There are no offstage duties – everything will be played out onstage, around the charismatic hub of the MC. This emphasis on the element of play between the acts is one thing Amy is most looking forward to: 'The beauty of it is there's a month to grow organically as a show – whatever grows grows, whatever doesn't doesn't – but the show has the kind of performers that thrive with that kind of opportunity.'

This exciting balance of precision in the form of more fixed routines in combination with the improvised elements of the show – the Spymonkey clowns in particular can be expected to run amok in the way that only they can – guarantees a show with a very special appeal. 'By the first half,' says Amy, 'I'll be like an old friend, likewise the gags will have become old friends.' In describing the mix she says, 'It's like a box of Roses – plain old fashioned entertainment, and that's the beauty of good quality [acts], there's something there for everyone.' Star turns range from fireworks aficionado Lucifire and uber-kitsch crooner Frank Sanazi to the breathtaking aerial of Marjo, Bret Pfister and Lyndall Merry where the incredible height of the Roundhouse adds yet another dimension to the experience.

With the addition of a guest spot every night, the only thing that remains predictable about this show is the sheer calibre of the lineup. And I, for one, can't wait to take my seat and join them.

*Miss Behave's Variety Nighty runs from 31 July to 24 August 2008 at The Roundhouse, London. Box office: 0844 482 8008. For further information, to book a table, and for a link to the YouTube video of the Guinness world record swallowing of seven swords, see [www.roundhouse.org.uk](http://www.roundhouse.org.uk)*

*Helen Kane's alter ego Frankie Chalet will be hosting and performing at Club Dada at London's Thames Festival on 14 September and her Marilyn will be headlining at Cabaret Boom, Ruskin Hall, Walkley as part of Sheffield Comedy Festival, 10–11 October.*



# LET THERE BE LIGHT

## LIGHTING DESIGNER KATHARINE WILLIAMS EXPLAINS HOW SHE USES LIGHT AS A RADICAL TOOL FOR PERFORMANCE, ALTERING PERCEPTIONS OF SPACE AND TIME, AND EXPLORING THE REALM OF MEMORY

Memory has been a recurring theme in many of the shows I have designed lighting for, and exploring the possibilities offered by this theme gives me the opportunity to use light as a dynamic storytelling tool.

Light can support, inform or reinforce the dynamics and power balance between characters, or work as an outside force to affect the performers and change the worlds they inhabit.

Often, but not always, these techniques go hand-in-hand with a cinematic approach to lighting: the same world can look remarkably different when seen through different characters' eyes, or by the same character when informed with a new knowledge; we can cut between events as in a film; we can zoom in on details; or move our 'camera' for a new view by changing the lighting. Playing with perspective onstage can mean literally showing events in a different light.

**WITH A CINEMATIC APPROACH TO LIGHTING, THE SAME WORLD CAN LOOK REMARKABLY DIFFERENT WHEN SEEN THROUGH DIFFERENT CHARACTERS' EYES. PLAYING WITH PERSPECTIVE ONSTAGE CAN MEAN LITERALLY SHOWING EVENTS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT**

Inspector Sands and Stamping Ground Theatre's *Hysteria* (winner of a Total Theatre Award at the Edinburgh Fringe 2006) was a show that really lent itself to using these cinematic techniques. As we devised the production, themes of anxiety and an individual's isolation from the rest of the world became more and more pronounced. The piece is set in a restaurant, and we played with changing atmosphere dramatically to reflect the characters' moods or to put pressure on an already anxious trio. For example, The Man and The Woman were desperate to have a successful first date and The Waiter's pride was at stake if he failed to help them achieve this. The lighting put pressure on this dynamic in different ways: sometimes we would try to conjure up the most romantic restaurant atmosphere that we could using a gentle, warm, light to surround the couple (with the rest of the stage drifting away into darkness), so that any accident at the table would jar even more against the environment; sometimes the whole stage was opened up with a cold, harsh, bright light to expose the couple; sometimes we 'forced' the romance of the situation by adding a neon pink wash which suggests the situation is meant to be romantic, but the actual feeling was cold and clinical.

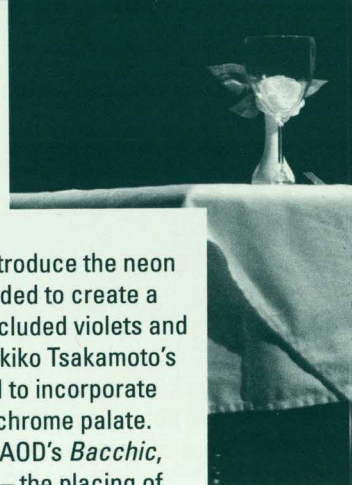
The saturated colours in the *Hysteria* lighting palette helped to give a slightly dated 'period' feel that reflected the very formal first-date situation, and the Waiter's very old-fashioned style. We made a decision to bring some of the restaurant's

outside surroundings inside, and to thus introduce the neon pinks of Soho into the mix. This then expanded to create a very contemporary colour palate, which included violets and fluorescents greens. And slowly, slowly Yukiko Tsakamoto's set, and Sunchana Dulic costumes, started to incorporate hints of those colours into their own monochrome palate. (I used a similarly modern colour palate in AOD's *Bacchic*, an aerial-theatre retelling of *The Bacchae* – the placing of the Bacchanalian orgies in a stadium rock concert gave opportunity for some really dramatic lighting, as Surgaz's memory illuminated the smoky air around him with the textures of his past.)

In *Hysteria* the Waiter's private world was one of worry and despair. In terms of colour it became a world of blues and steels, a harsh place where a tiny shard of warm light could represent hope in this chilled, subdued environment. The separation that the Waiter perceives between himself and the rest of humanity is never more pronounced than in a moment where we split the stage horizontally into two different coloured environments. The couple sit in a warm, rich, red restaurant where Ella Fitzgerald plays in the background, but above their heads the Waiter exists in a lonely place where everything is blue. As the Waiter serves the couple, s/he bends down into their world, and can overhear their conversation. When we worked this section in rehearsals, it became clear that the red restaurant world was a much more comfortable place for the Waiter to exist, and therefore we needed to find a motivation for him to return to the blue environment above. We made a rule that the Waiter couldn't breathe in the couple's world and had to go up into the blue environment to breathe. For me this solution was a little too obvious and easy to come to, and I've always wondered if there was a more interesting way of playing with the two levels of light. But there comes a point when you have to let a show settle, and the 'swimming pool bit' (as it is often called by the audience) works well in terms of narrative, so perhaps I am wrong to ponder...

**THE SEPARATION THAT THE WAITER IN HYSTERIA PERCEIVES BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE REST OF HUMANITY IS NEVER MORE PRONOUNCED THAN IN A MOMENT WHERE WE SPLIT THE STAGE HORIZONTALLY INTO TWO DIFFERENT COLOURED ENVIRONMENTS**

During the process of making *Hysteria*, we did a lot of devising with light in the tiny Nightingale Theatre in Brighton, where much of the show's development took place. But this red/blue effect was an idea that was conceived between rehearsal periods, and which I needed to work on technically to ensure it would be successful.







The opportunity to do this occurred during a week that I spent with Carrie Cracknell (joint artistic director of The Gate Theatre, London) and a group of practitioners at the National Theatre Studio in London, working together to develop a lighting language that we could carry forward into future productions together. It was then that we first played with the split-level lighting, along with many other lighting concepts. Some of those ideas will finally be put to work in *Dolls*, which we are making with the National Theatre of Scotland and Hush Productions next year, and in which we will finally get to use the walls of light we've been excited about since that development!

**SOMETIMES WHEN THE EMOTION OF THE PIECE GREW SO LARGE THAT WORDS WOULD HAVE MADE IT UNNECESSARILY DRAMATIC, THE WORDS TAILED AWAY... AND ALLOWED US TO TELL THE STORY WITH MOVEMENT, WITH LIGHT AND WITH SOUND.**

A great deal of the things we played with in that National Theatre Studio week fed into *I Am Falling*, a piece of dance theatre that we made at The Gate at the beginning of this year. *I Am Falling* was a joyous collaboration to be part of – which is ironic, given that the show dealt with the grief experienced in the aftermath of a suicide pact. Carrie had assembled a great team who were consistently generous in their collaboration with each other – every area of the production overlapped fluidly with the rest and we all relied on each other to critique our own work. In striving to be as truthful as we could to the narrative, we each pushed ourselves as far as we could.

Carrie worked with choreographer Anna Williams to make sections of dance that would specifically interact with some of the lighting concepts that we had played with at the National Theatre Studio. Dramaturg Jenny Worton's words were sparse, spare and poetic. Sometimes when the emotion of the piece grew so large that words would have made it unnecessarily dramatic, the words tailed away... and allowed us to tell the story with movement, with light and with sound. Inside the tiny auditorium, the green velvet seats and the

programme holders were lit by rows of tasselled cream lamps hanging from above. The start of the show was signalled by the whirring and flickering of a film projector. Then, Ed Lewis' sound pulled the audience's focus, and the lighting came through the cinema aperture and onto the stage, where a projector's beam flickered back into the audience, before slowly revealing the tiny rehearsal-room set, where an aged wood floor continued up and across the crumbling brick of the space's rear wall. Garance Marneur had used the darkest of timbers so that we could play with perspective in the deep, narrow space. She had incorporated the rows of tiny lanterns for the dance sidelight into her design, and then added to them by including other domestic lights in this environment; the space changed completely when the dancers switched them on.

Having made a choice that this theatre show is presented as if in a mini-cinema, using the whole space as a set, each of the other production strands began to play with film techniques. The sound underscored the entire piece with only a few moments of silence that were as carefully placed as the biggest crescendos. Both lighting and sound were able to cut from one environment to another. Sometimes the two elements would work together, but often we would choose to make them work against each other – for the lighting to perhaps be sympathetic to the fondness the Son feels for his parents, but the sound to demonstrate his mixed emotions by working harshly against this.

We explored the way memory changes over time and with the benefit of hindsight. To do this we repeated much of the story, but changed words, choreography, soundscape and lighting to allow the audience a different perspective. The performers responded to their new environments, and showed us the same story. The same, but completely transformed.

- 1 | INSPECTOR SANDS AND STAMPING GROUND THEATRE'S *HYSTERIA*. PHOTO ALLAN TITMUSS
- 2 | ARRAY'S *OUTRE* CABARET SEQUENCE
- 3 | AOD'S *BACCHIC*. PHOTO DYLAN BARNES
- 4 | THE GATE THEATRE'S *I AM FALLING*. PHOTO HUGO GLENDINNING

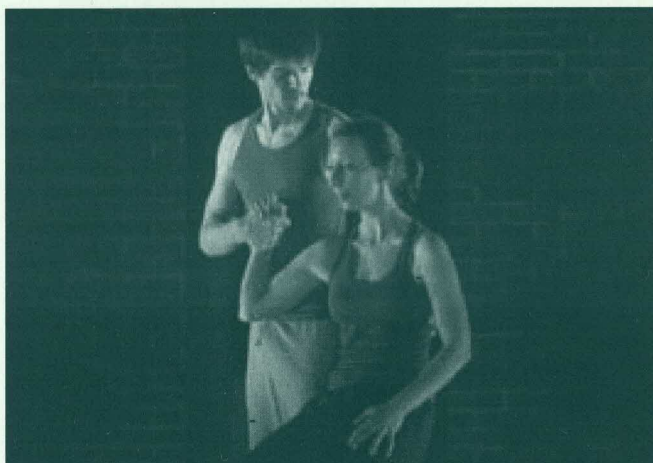




Array's *Outré* shares this idea of showing your audience one perspective, and then showing them what was really going on. Choreographer Darren Johnston created a dark and twisted cabaret with a modern burlesque feel, with an installation of projections comprising most of the set. Working within a projected environment prescribes much for a lighting designer (added to the fact that Darren had a clear idea of exactly how the opening cabaret section would look), so my role on this show became about using light in the same textures and colours as the projection, to make a seamless world where the texture of the gobos (templates cut into a circular plate which are used to create patterns of projected light) and the pixilation of the projection matched so closely that they melded together. The second part of the piece, where we see a world beyond the cabaret, gave me much more freedom to really add to the projections with light.

In Array's next show, *Ousia*, we will once again create a world of burlesque and cabaret, but this time we'll be looking at the physical memory of a location and how a place's past events might resonate in the present. Silent movies and peepshows may shape the environment the show requires. Whereas in another show I am working on, Trestle's *Lola*, it is Lola's own telling of her stories that dictates how they will look – for history is always (re)written by the victor, and Lola (an Irishwoman posing as a Flamenco dancer who convinced the whole world of her authenticity and became a huge celebrity in the 1800s) knew the power her reputation could achieve for her.

This theme of memory occurs repeatedly in so much of the theatre I am involved in making. It makes sense to me that it would do, as every time we choose to tell a story on stage we are recounting someone's story. And the stories we tell are shaped by the way we tell them – the manner in which we remember them. Lighting can be a crucial element in that shaping and telling.



For further information on Katharine Williams many current or forthcoming projects, or to contact her, see the Association of Lighting Designers website page: [www.ald.org.uk/KatharineWilliams/bio.php](http://www.ald.org.uk/KatharineWilliams/bio.php)

Inspector Sands and Stamping Ground Theatre's *Hysteria* will be touring limited dates in the UK in October 2008, and China in November 2008. See [www.inspector-sands.co.uk](http://www.inspector-sands.co.uk)

AOD's *Bacchic* completed a UK tour summer 2008. See [www.actorsofdionysus.com](http://www.actorsofdionysus.com)

The Gate Theatre's *I Am Falling* is transferring to Sadler's Wells for a short run in October 2009. Hush Productions and the National Theatre of Scotland are producing *Dolls* (working title) in January 2009.

Array's *Ousia* will not now be playing the 2008 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, but will premiere late 2008/2009.

Trestle's *Lola* previewed in June–July and will tour in autumn 2008.



# BEING THERE

## THREE VIEWING POINTS FOR PETRA'S PULSE – AEGEAN FATIGUE AT CAMDEN PEOPLE'S THEATRE, SPRINT FESTIVAL 29–30 MAY 2008

We wanted to construct separate scenes which stood on their own, but which, through their placement, created a cumulative sensual narrative for an audience. To create a piece that was absolutely grounded in the here-and-now of urban existence we chose materials, objects and colours from our everyday lives, and used images, bodies, words and sound to build up a layered and textured response to the city, its pressures and possibilities. Recurrent themes were comfort, escape, hope, illness, violation, the interface between the personal and political.

We set ourselves constraints for the structure of the piece. Nine existing song titles became headings for the individual scenes; two musicians were set two different briefs and asked to compose two sixty-minute soundscapes which were then played simultaneously at one level throughout the show, colliding, undermining, melding, destabilising each other's logic.

We introduced physical obstructions to our performances in order to experiment with giving the audience a heightened tension and sense of their own bodies. We built our own landscape in the theatre, intending the audience to feel they were entering our place and interrupting something deeply personal. We were interested in how it would affect the audience if they were unable to settle, and how they would respond as a community when in moments the performers were in such close proximity to them that their physical discomfort became part of the action that the rest of the audience was watching.

### Jamie Wood

Performer and co-director of *Petra's Pulse*

A man in swimming trunks and goggles. A woman being covered in blood whilst audience members try to avoid being splashed. A giant mouse with a hairdryer. A leaf blower focused throwing up rubble dust as the audience splutter. Few words and some projections. A tortoise pulling a tank.

Described as 'Nine visual songs form[ing] a raw and unsettling theatrical album' *Aegean Fatigue* is a quite extraordinary work. It's unsettling, risky, messy, careful, and beautiful. I came out of it full of life, to a bar where everyone was talking at a hundred miles an hour. 'What was your favourite bit?', 'Did the blood get on you?', 'Can you still smell talcum powder?'

Like most of the audience, I didn't know what to expect from *Petra's Pulse*, and I mean that in a good way. We'd talked about the piece but I didn't want to know too much; just trusted. For once I wanted to be a punter (albeit a privileged one), and go into the space and see what happened. Forty people enter, witness, and are affected; and it's great.

From my perspective I was looking for a show to open the Sprint Festival which made a statement of intent, pushing at your/my/our expectations of what theatre is. This work is a piece of visceral beauty which lives long in the memory – the creators (Jamie Wood and Selina Papoutseli) having been brave enough to make exciting choices. I'm glad CPT could play our role: my only regret is that it was only on for two nights. Maybe next time...

### Matt Ball

Artistic director Camden People's Theatre



PETRA'S PULSE *AEGEAN FATIGUE*. PHOTO COURTESY OF CAMDEN PEOPLE'S THEATRE

The interzone between the languages of classic European clowning and live art may seem a curious, even queasy, crossover. What unites these discrepant tendencies in *Aegean Fatigue* is a quite painterly concern for materials and things. *Petra's Pulse* create an experience of volatile, liquid sensuality, in which attention constantly slips between the obscure object of desire and the secret life of the desiring object. Their exceptional ability both to imbue the inanimate with liveness and to yield to the objectification of their own bodies releases moments of alternately outrageous comedy and terrible bleakness, making this critic perhaps the first in history to want to namecheck both Viennese Actionism and Billy Dainty in one review.

The surreal illogic with which this theatre of visions unfurls is dreamlike but far from disengaged. The piece repeatedly grounds itself by exposing connections between romantic conflict and familial dysfunction on one hand, and imperial violence and religious obfuscation on the other. Beneath its oblique daftness, it's ethically astute – and seethingly angry; play is not trivial here, and daydreams are a species of political thought.

This is complex and committed work, enlarged by Mamoru Iriguchi's elliptical projections and Cis O'Boyle's strikingly assured lighting design. As for the performers, while Jamie Wood works with characteristically tender abandon, it's Selina Papoutseli who really astonishes this time out with her confidence and poise. With each new show, *Petra's Pulse* seem to take a huge leap forward; here, they've landed right at the leading edge of British visual performance. Extraordinary.

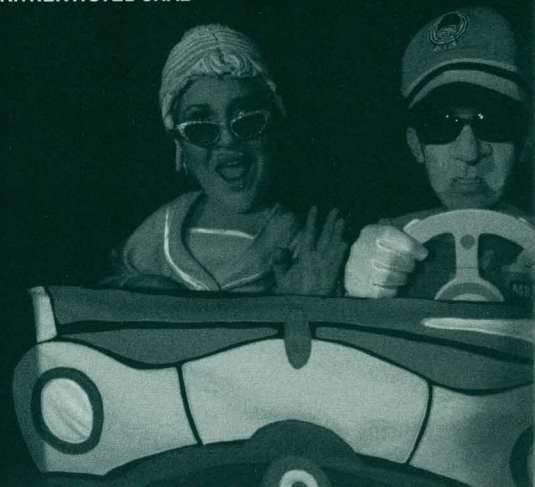
### Chris Goode

Independent theatre-maker and writer



# ASSEMBLAGE

DOROTHY MAX PRIOR REFLECTS ON  
THE CARAVAN ASSEMBLY IN BRIGHTON  
AND THE X.TRAX SHOWCASE IN  
MANCHESTER



What's in a name? Caravan started life as a 'dialogue' and evolved into an 'assembly'—essentially, an opportunity for artists and companies based in South East England to lay out their wares to potential bookers. X.trax has no pretensions towards being anything other than a showcase (and says so loud and proud on its excellent and informative website).

There was something of a conference feel to the caravan assembly, with networking events, drinks receptions and dinners (although artists were excluded from some of these, making—as one artist put it—the notion of a 'dialogue' a little one-sided at times) but the main point of it all was for delegates, both national and international, to see work. Thus, a wide range of companies working in dance, theatre, outdoor performance and live art presented performances or installations, or shared information at the daily 'marketplace', and although there were some concerns about some of the organisational aspects of caravan, the general consensus is that the assembly proved to be a useful showcasing event, and I hear reports back of numerous bookings made as a result.

Live performances were in some cases programmed into Brighton Festival. These included Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke*, which is experienced journeying alone through the city on a bicycle; Prodigal's thrills-and-spills parkour-inspired *Urban Playground* (reviewed elsewhere); Periplum's *The Bell*, with pyrotechnics by The World Famous, which benefited from a well-chosen site in the aptly-named Wild Park; and Gravity & Levity's ambitious new aerial-dance work, *Shift*.

There were also a number of special extras, including Katie Etheridge's *Field Work*, a psychogeographical walk (of the sort pioneered by Wrights and Sites, producers of the 'mis-guides', with whom Katie has previously worked) that 'scratched the tarmac of central Brighton to uncover some of its lost, hidden and imagined histories'. Although this inaugural version was created in the artist's home-town, it's a piece that could be re-created anywhere: a period of research unearths little-known facts and interesting foibles of a particular site, and a guided tour is constructed, led by Katie, in her safari-jacketed Wellington-boot-clad jolly-hockey-sticks guide persona.

Also seen: Billy Cowie's *In the Flesh*, a poignant and poetic 3D moving image piece; and some rather wonderful *Guerrilla Dances*—interventions and reconstructions of archive choreographies (by the likes of Hilde Holger) delivered in her own inimitable fashion by the doyenne of contemporary expressionist dance, Liz Aggiss.

Two interesting new works were performed for delegates at The Nightingale Theatre: a 20-minute extract from *The Last*

Resort, a lovely new mask-theatre piece from Strangeface (reviewed elsewhere in this magazine); and Cartoon de Salvo's ambitious new project *Hard Hearted Hannah*, which is created (almost) from scratch each night. The audience suggest titles, the company decide which of the offerings they go with, and this is the starting point for the hour-long improv, with an additional structural boundary of a 'rule' to include three songs (chosen by the audience from a list of classic pop tunes; performed jug-band style with great aplomb). On this particular night, the company seemed to be struggling a little bit, and I did find myself wondering why they were needlessly putting themselves through this: is the way that a piece of theatre gets made intrinsically of more interest than what is actually there on stage? Maybe it is—and I'm sure there are nights when it all falls seamlessly into place and really hits home.

It certainly seems to be that audiences are currently intrigued by anything that challenges the theatrical status-quo. Looking over the list of companies involved in caravan, it is clear that the South East region has more than its fair share of artists who are making work that breaks the mould.

From a new initiative to an old favourite: the x.trax showcase, held annually in Manchester, has established itself as a must-do date for artists, promoters or indeed anyone else who works in 'outdoor arts' as we must now apparently call this artform or mode of practice—for programmed into the timetable was a session led by Chenine Bhathena and other officers of Arts Council England, presenting the new strategy for what was once called 'street arts', then 'outdoor performance', now 'outdoor arts'—the latest term reflecting changes in practice from artists, as well as changing perspectives of funders and cultural leaders.

Most people present seemed pretty happy with this change: 'embracing' the new terminology was how Frank Wilson (director of Stockton International Riverside Festival and chair of the Independent Street Arts Network) put it in his warm welcome of the ACE initiative. There was some discussion in the break-out groups (addressing the notion of 'excellence' amongst other topics) about whether artists working 'outdoors' had any different needs to those working 'indoors', particularly when it comes to training.

Around my table, there was a hot debate between, on the one side, those who felt that there should be a 'streets' element to all theatre training, and those who felt that there was an advantage in having dedicated courses (like the foundation degree in Festival, Street Arts, and Site Specific at Northbrook College, or the new BA in Street Arts at University of Winchester). Some felt that there was surely room for both





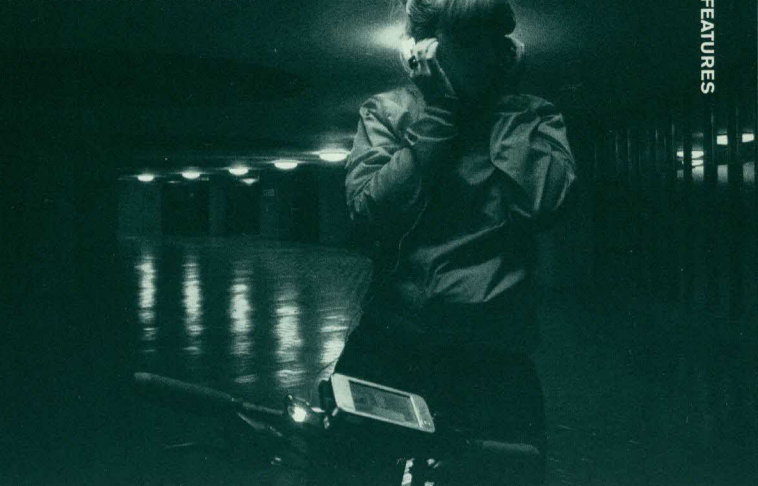
models. And let's face it, there are some things specific to outdoor performance – fireworks, for instance!

Speaking personally (as someone on the steering group that set up the first National Street Arts Meeting in 1996, and the Users Guide to Street Arts symposium in 2001) I experienced a sense of déjà vu. How many times can you discuss 'excellence' and come up with the no-longer-novel idea that ongoing investment of time, money, and resources is what is needed? And we all know that when it comes to training, you have to learn on the job so apprenticeships and mentoring are key, but the way of the world currently is degrees in everything – so why not degrees in outdoor arts? Keeps the kids off the streets.

Meanwhile, outside of the delegates' marquee, in the lovely outdoor environment of Platts Field Park, the festival-cum-showcase (for x.trax co-exists with Feast, a family-friendly picnic-in-the-park) was getting into gear.

A strong element of the programme was the shows promoted under the Without Walls banner. This consortium has expanded to include seven of the UK's 'most strategically significant street arts festivals', and in 2008 they are commissioning and/or supporting ten companies – most of whom were here in Manchester.

These included Periplum and Prodigal (both seen previously at Brighton Festival, another of the Without Walls partners). Prodigal (reviewed elsewhere in this publication) were one of a number of companies presenting a streetwise take on contemporary dance – others being Company Fierce, whose *Gulliver's Boom Box* is a collaboration with Walk the Plank; Motionhouse, who presented *Underground*, a well-executed dance-theatre piece that moves on and around a rocking tubular structure representing a tube train carriage (and although much of the choreography was predictable, there were stunning moments from the four dancers, with a special mention to Junior Cunningham); and Wired Aerial Theatre in association with Brenda Angiel, whose *Ferverosa* is an aerial tango that doesn't thrill quite as it might, but often sparkles, especially when the ground and air are used in opposition.



I suppose the problem ultimately is that tango is very much an earthed dance, and as soon as it heads off into the air, it loses that passionate earthiness, becoming (literally and metaphorically) too flighty.

Another Without Walls show is a delightful walkabout (or perhaps that should be roll-about) – *The Wheel House* by Acrojou, in which two batty characters dressed in Hessian and tweed view the world from the confines of their 'home' – an arty-crafty kooky take on the German Wheel (the hamster-wheel roly-poly thing used in circus) – here wooden, and kitted out with all sorts of homely knick-knacks, stripy cotton 'shirtains', feather dusters, maps, and spyglasses.

There was a strong selection of static street theatre shows, including *Hotel Crab*, a cheeky 'humanette' puppet-theatre show from Barcelona's Trukitrek; *Leak*, the new show from Avanti Display that (surprise, surprise!) has a spurting water finale, but which also has more than a touch of Forkbeard Fantasy in its live-into-screen story of madcap scientists and bumbling experts sorting out the strange goings on; and Bash Street's new show *The Station*, a true-to-form and charming silent-movie-inspired physical comedy piece that was perhaps a little too long (it may be that it needs to settle in).

From new shows to established favourites: I enjoyed seeing Artizani's *Desert Island Discs* again, and I commend x.trax for programming the same show two years running – I wish more festivals would as it takes a couple of years for a street show to settle in, and it is always great to see shows more than once – one of my favourite things about Without Walls is that by doing the street arts festival circuit, I'm getting to see lots of shows many times over, and consider that a real privilege.

*Caravan was a new initiative that aimed to strengthen international networks, and to expand the range of opportunities to work abroad for performing artists and companies. The dialogue programme's 'prepared companies for working internationally'. This was followed by the assembly, 11–13 May 2008. caravan was managed by Farnham Maltings, and supported by Arts Council England South East, SEEDA, Brighton and Hove Council, and Brighton Festival. For a full list of caravan artists and companies, see [www.farnhammaltingscaravan.com](http://www.farnhammaltingscaravan.com)*

*x.trax is an annual showcase for street theatre and outdoor arts with the byline 'contemporary, international, diverse'. Their website is an invaluable year-round resource, with a virtual showcase featuring many major UK street arts companies. See [www.xtrax.org.uk](http://www.xtrax.org.uk)*

*x.trax is presented in tandem with Feast, a project of Manchester International Arts (MIA). See [www.streetsahead.org.uk](http://www.streetsahead.org.uk)*



# COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

TERRY O'DONOVAN REPORTS ON THE KUNSTENFESTIVALDESARTS IN BRUSSELS, WHICH IN 2008 FOCUSED ON LANGUAGE AND CROSS-BORDER DIALOGUE

THOMAS HAUERT/XOO ACCORDS

For the past thirteen years, an arts event in Brussels has been exploring contemporary performance in diverse and exciting ways.

Kunstenfestivaldesarts is dedicated to new work (creations as they call them) by Dutch-and French-speaking artists from Belgium as well as Western and non-Western artists. Artistic Director Christophe Slagmuylder passionately travels the world in search of inspiring performance art to bring back to Brussels for this three-week long festival which takes place in a plethora of venues around the city every May.

Now in his second year of directorship, Slagmuylder is committed to developing the work of innovative practitioners by commissioning many new works from artists with whom he has built relationships with over years and years. Half of this year's thirty productions were new works co-produced by the festival. In 2007, Korean artist Toshiki Okado impressed Slagmuylder so much with his piece *Five Days in March* that he asked the writer and theatre-maker to create a new work for this year which resulted in *Freetime*, a moving and enchanting exploration of character, productivity and narrative form. This is how Slagmuylder hopes to continue the development of his cutting-edge collection of works; by beginning dialogues between artists and audiences, and finding connections which may otherwise never have been found.

'We can have a touring piece by The Wooster Group or ROSAS performing alongside artists' second or third piece,' he explains. 'By watching new and old work side-by-side in a festival, an audience can begin to discuss the relationship between the artists, the forms they use, methods and themes. It opens up new conversations about art.' The same dialogue arises between the participating artists,

oftentimes with the result beginning inspiring collaborations. William Forsythe, who returned to the festival this year as a spectator, having performed his work here on numerous occasions, was so struck by Brazilian choreographer Bruno Beltrao that they are now discussing possible collaborations.

They are two choreographers that you wouldn't necessarily put together on paper. Beltrao has been developing a rigorous and exhilarating body of choreographic work based on the world of street dance, with his contemporary dance and philosophy training helping his to deconstruct the world of hip-hop movement.

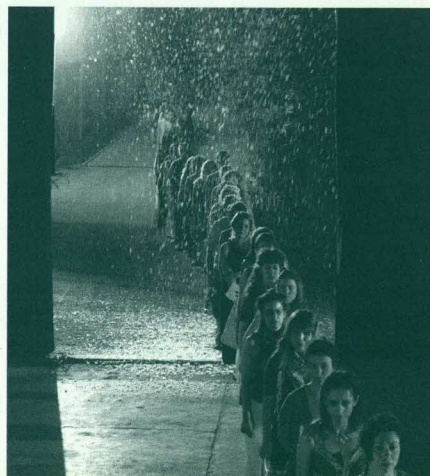
This year's festival was concerned with language and communication across nationalities: a fitting theme in Brussels, the capital city in a country warring with language. Slagmuylder says he never chooses his themes in advance, instead he begins to programme and is led by the work which he chooses to find connections between them. This year's opening came in the form of German composer-director Heiner Goebbels's latest music-theatre production *Stifter's Dinge* in which there was no performers. *Stifter's Dinge* centred on a post-human world, where language no longer mattered.

Elsewhere, Michael Marmarinos' Theseum Ensemble's epic *Dying as a Country* is described as a performance for 999 people and a microphone and calls for 120 volunteer performers per show.

Other performances included William Yang's *China*, choreographer Eszter Salamon with Les Ballets C de la B's Christine de Smedt and Thomas Hauert/Xoo's *Accords*. Central to the festival's ethics is to provide a place for artists and audience to meet, which came this year in the form of the central

venue of Beursshouwborg's cafe. Stylist and costume designer Belgian Valentine Kempynck transformed the cafe into an evolving brainstorming session by covering all the tables in white paper and hanging pencils from the ceiling. As performances opened and closed the opinions and debates which they inspired were hung from the ceilings, with more scribbling of ideas materialising day by day. A similarly inventive way of evaluating and documenting the happenings throughout the three weeks was inviting American writer Tod Wodicka to comment on a weekly basis via a webcam. This culminated in a live debate hosted by the author.

Supported by the performance bases of Brussels (all theatres, including the National Theatre keep the diary free for May and don't charge for the use of their space), Kunstenfestivaldesarts is a truly inspiring event which connects contemporary performance to a varied range of audience in inventive ways. As this year's festival closed, Slagmuylder was revelling in the fact that they sold more than 20,000 more tickets than 2007. He has already confirmed commissions for 2012, is selecting the artists to commission based on this year's events, and will soon start his work of travelling to the corners of the world to find the brave new art which defines his festival. He wants to uncover contemporary art in India and Mexico – head to Brussels next year to see what he's found.



MARMARINOS' THESEUM ENSEMBLE  
DYING AS A COUNTRY



# REVIEWS FROM MAYFEST IN BRISTOL MAY 2008

**AL SEED**  
**THE FOOLIGAN**  
Tobacco Factory

**GRAVITY AND LEVITY**  
**SHIFT**  
Circomedia, St Paul's Church

**RIDICULUSMUS**  
**TOUGH TIME, NICE TIME**  
Tobacco Factory

Coming out of research into the medieval figure of the buffoon and the archetype of the great storyteller, *The Fooligan* is a tight 50 minute solo that surpasses even the precision and wit of its physical choreography with the intense continuous language-pleasures it provided. It's funny and it's enthralling: scatology, sexual references, child abuse, all the good stuff.

The show has two strands. In one Seed is the storyteller, a man of such (rough) magical charisma that he can captivate or kill people with words; in the other we see a mime performing classical routines of clowning/foolery/buffoonery (e.g. the dejected lover rehearsing his seduction tactics; the overextended death scene). I think the structure comes from trying to locate the crossing point between storyteller and buffoon, both lonely and excluded, but one aware and one not that it is their exclusion from normal life that draws attention to them – and that there is a measure of subversive power in

the situation. To switch between the two modes, an alarm went off and a red rotating light flicked over Seed as he shook and spasmed. It was odd, not really in keeping with the tone of the work as a whole (set in a kind of timelessly medieval period); it reminded me mostly, visually, of Seed's last piece, *The Factory*, which was differently pitched but nonetheless another solo about power. I'm left wondering how the two are linked together in his head, and what comes next – hopefully more of the same: work that beguiles its audience to smuggle in the current state of its thinking, advanced but unresolved.

Presented as a unified show, and played out on a sculptural set deconstructed and reassembled throughout, *Shift* comprised three pieces by four choreographers (Charlotte Vincent, Charles Lineham, and Luke Cresswell/Steve McNichols). One section I liked, but others shared a suffusing warmth and communality which often cloyed – especially set within the frame of the short sequences that linked pieces, in which the company went for tolerable-but-wooden flirty banter. The final section (choreographed by Cresswell/McNichols, the people behind *Stomp*) saw the set converted into an immense beat-machine, sandbags and wooden boards lifted and dropped, unfortunately not always quite in rhythm.

The piece that struck me was the one in which Gravity & Levity director Lindsey Butcher spun and danced midair with a plank of wood – both Lindsey and the plank on wires, orbiting each other in simple ellipses, at times joining or coming close to joining. To each the only significant body was the other: there was nothing else they could meet. The movements were necessarily part improvised, and at times aerialist and object would swing too close and have to restart – which felt to me like a closer and truer communication of the danger and beauty of relationships between people than could be found in any of the other, more literal, pieces.

Ridiculusmus' *Tough Time, Nice Time* is merciless. There is no warmth. Sometimes it is funny, or very funny, but there's a terrible sense that by making you laugh the characters have taken something from you. Two men sit in a bath – one is Martin, a lawyer and cocaine dealer; the other is a man



AL SEED *THE FOOLIGAN*

claiming to be a publisher, interested in hearing Martin's 'stories' so that he can ghostwrite them into a book. Both are deeply unpleasant – vain and self-centered and prejudiced and venal.

They connect (or fail to) almost solely through the medium of shared film experiences – in one story, someone is lying bleeding to death in Martin's flat. What scene is it like? From which film? If Martin's life were a film, who would be Martin? The expected purpose of stories in theatre – as structures to generate dramatic catharsis and allow personal revelation – is here never fulfilled: Martin's stories build to a kind of crisis, but when his bathing partner, who has been making notes all along, reads it back to him it has changed into something else entirely. The script is sharp, and intelligent without being extravagantly so; both performances are extremely strong, with special mention to David Woods as the bored, anaesthetised publisher, managing to be a compelling personality even though everything he says and does is a barrier to his inner life and real opinions. The show is a little over an hour – a long time to spend in the company of men like these. It's not pointless, but it is pitiless, and desolate.

John Ellingsworth



GRAVITY & LEVITY *SHIFT*





# REVIEWS FROM BRIGHTON FESTIVAL MAY 2008

## FEVERED SLEEP AN INFINITE LINE: BRIGHTON The Basement/Brighton Festival

### Performance & Installation

'Brighton: bright town. City of brightness. City of light. Sea dazzle. Grey mist. White houses. West wind.' David Harradine's reflection on Brighton and on its special qualities of light has been a long time in the making, and is (perhaps) the culmination of a lengthy research process that has taken in numerous other light-related performances, events and installations along the way – some under the auspices of Fevered Sleep and some in collaboration with other partners. These include *Written With Light*, Fevered Sleep's investigation into photography, memory and loss, which was staged in the undercroft of the (unreconstructed) Roundhouse; a performative lecture on photography and light delivered at University of Brighton (the catalyst for the commissioning of *An Infinite Line*); the beautiful visual theatre/installation piece *The Show's The Thing* set in a disused theatre at Alexandra Palace; and the *Camera Obscura* installation at BAC. And these are just the ones I've witnessed!

*An Infinite Line* is both an installation and a performance piece; separate but complementary works. The choice of The Basement at first seems a perverse decision. In a piece about light, why pick a cavernous, almost-underground space without windows? But of course – where better to evoke the power of light than in the dark? It turns out to be a perfect setting.

The installation is a thing of beauty indeed: 30 or so chalk blocks sit in the space like mini-monoliths, each a providing a surface for a different moving image projection; with each projection running at a different speed. Thus we see shadows, ripples, waves, and seemingly abstract blocks of colour – apparently still, changing slowly, or shifting at enormous speed. There is a smell of chalk, and a gentle mist – the heat from the light projections causing particles of chalk to rise from the surfaces and form a fairy-dust that pervades the space.

In the performance, the deep main space of the venue is used to create a (literally) multi-layered set of engaging images, as frames move towards and away from the audience (who are seated in a small area on the narrower width of the space), the effect rather like a living *Dogugaeshi* Japanese sliding-screen show. What we see is beautiful – and real. This feels important. Light is magical enough without the need for theatrical illusions. There is no need for a conscious recreation of what is outside; what is here is enough. A lit pool of water rippling; a dance with a mirrored rectangle throwing dazzling shafts of light around the space; a giant mirror-ball spinning fractured light; a tentative barefoot walk across a sparkling row of wine glasses (and I suddenly remember that glass is made from sand, which is stone washed by the sea...).

In life, our experience of light comes through its reflection off of surfaces, and that 'light on the surface' experience is thus enacted here, in the object-play and physical actions, and also in the spoken text, taken from Harradine's diary entries from various trips to Brighton which weaves into words his thoughts on the qualities of colour in the light that washes over town, countryside and beach. The text is often delivered using the verbatim theatre technique of an actor voicing words heard only by him on headphones.

FEVERED SLEEP AN INFINITE LINE.  
PHOTO ROGER BAMBER





FRANTIC ASSEMBLY STOCKHOLM

There's a moment when the headphones are left down, allowing us briefly to hear David Harradine's voice in the recording – which made me long to hear more of him and less of the actor's interpretation/mediation. The words are part of a rich aural soundscape with recorded electronic music and live cello and violin working in harmony or counterpoint.

Oh, and there's a horse – a big and beautiful horse who is led in and just stands, sometimes in shadow, sometimes flooded in light, for a great chunk of the show. Why? Because.

Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that's all you need to know.

**Dorothy Max Prior**

### **LES 7 DOIGTS DE LA MAIN TRACES** Theatre Royal/Brighton Festival

*Traces* leaves other circus-theatre shows panting in the wings and looking on in envy. Les Sept Doigts de la Main are all ex-Cirque du Soleil – although none of this lot (four men, one woman) look old enough to be ex- anything – and the skills level is what would be expected of that heritage. Breathtaking no-hands Chinese Pole; exhilarating acrobatics; basketball; skateboarding – it seems they can turn their hands, feet, torsos to anything. Give them an object and they will manipulate it with ease and grace. Give them a floor, a wall, a rope, and they'll go that extra mile.

But what is most wonderful is their rare understanding of circus-as-theatre: that theatre comes from what your body brings to that space and those other bodies in that space; that 'narrative' means far more than just words telling a linear tale. Here, there is an overarching story – of growing up, forging identities, processing memories – that builds in layers, allowing the audience to write the book rather than have the performers read it to them.

There's a lovely, minimal use of screen image (photos and home movies creating flickering traces of childhood selves). There's further a clever little device that I love – a way of acknowledging the dilemma of integrating audience response to circus tricks into the theatrical world created onstage: after each impressive trick or turn, they walk downstage as if to take a bow, then stop and look straight at the audience, then snap back into the stage world. Perfect.

**Dorothy Max Prior**

### **BLAST THEORY RIDER SPOKE** Bill's Bike/Brighton Festival

Blast Theory use a lot of technology but that's not what it's about. Riding around Brighton on a bike, with a small computer screen on your handlebars, with a voice eerily speaking into your headphones, answering questions at locations you choose, and listening to others, if you choose. It's not even about location or exploring a town, although you select the places you stop at and cycle through. This was an invitation to ride off very much on your own in a crowded metropolis, and then meditate, follow instructions, and talk about odd off-kilter questions ('Find a place and leave a message for your father'; 'Who do you feel safe with?').

The lack of contact with anybody except the disembodied questioner and the answers that others had left made it feel like I was completely outside of the city I was in – a curious feeling. At first it was engaging and exciting, using your touch screen to open doors that led to other peoples' revelations, then it began to feel oddly disconnected. The questions felt almost random. Near the end I was asked, after a short confessional from the voice, to tell my experience of seeing something I shouldn't of; then on the final ride back, summonsed by the voice, I was asked to make a promise out loud. But I didn't feel that voice had earned it – a strangely complicated reaction in itself. Great to have been on another Blast Theory experience, but I couldn't make the ends meet up.

**Bill Parslow**

### **FRANTIC ASSEMBLY STOCKHOLM** Corn Exchange/Brighton Festival

The melting together of new writing and physical theatre has been an ongoing mission for Frantic Assembly. The problem with some previous work being that the spoken text and physical expression often seemed illustrative of each other, rather than making their own statements. Why have add-on gestures if the words are doing their job; why have words if the movement is telling the story?

In *Stockholm*, the company's quest to deliver a challenging new play on a serious subject – an integrated 'total theatre' of words, movement, soundtrack, and visual imagery – has hit home. The words 'hit' and 'home' being apt here, as this is a play about domestic violence. It is kitchen sink drama – yet this kitchen is no sink-estate hovel but a gleaming chrome designer job; and the couple whose story we are hearing are young, sexy, go-getting urbanites. To add a further twist to the tale, it is she who starts the hitting. All the action is set inside the couple's flat – the site of pleasure and pain – as we are taken through the erotic highs and abusive lows of a birthday dinner.

A precise and poetic script by Bryony Laver (a mix of storytelling addressed to the audience and dialogue); perfectly-pitched performances from Georgina Lamb and Samuel James; a beautiful set design that gives our co-dependant victim-abusers a glamorous playground in which to dance, fight and fuck. And sensitive and imaginative choreography and direction by Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett that really does the job, allowing the words and movement to organically interweave.

**Dorothy Max Prior**



# REVIEWS FROM BRIGHTON FRINGE FESTIVAL MAY 2008



## STRANGEFACE THE LAST RESORT The UdderPlace/Brighton Fringe

*The Last Resort* begins when the audience arrives and the amiable Chorus – a Hodge-like family delineated to wonderful comic effect through Strangeface's own brand half-masks – indulge us with interactive banter and help us choose the best seats in the house – or in this case, the UdderPlace tent replete with noisy generator.

But no matter – the surroundings are forgotten as the Brothers Grimm-inspired, higgledy-piggledy town depicted in the carved, painted and often animated wooden set becomes host to a handful of characters epitomising the best and worst of human nature, as the 'upstanding' citizens of 'The Last Resort' find their moral fibre fraying in the face of temptation and despair.

The intricate story was finely plotted, and had all the ingredients of a medieval morality play with a Tim Burton-esque touch, including an adorably repulsive puppet Lucifer and a Berkoff-inspired Beelzebub. The potency of the masks was matched by superb physical performances, as the cast of four switched with ease between vastly contrasting characters. The addition of a live musician at the side of the stage helped shift the atmosphere seamlessly from comedy to tragedy at the swap of an instrument, and accompanied some fine singing by the cast: the spurned landlady's song of revenge made the hair on the back of my neck prickle with delight, likewise the ballad between the soldier and the young boy caught the poignancy of war.

Strangeface's production had all the dramatic elements of the best – and darkest – of folk tales, where beautifully grotesque masks and evocative live music helped create a naively powerful world.

**Helen Kane**

## MISS COCO PERU Komedia/Brighton Fringe

It's easy to forget what a sophisticated art drag can be, but LA sensation Coco Peru did a good job of reminding us, what with her coruscating dress, fab pins and chic red wig replete with Emma Peel-flip. Mind you, I didn't quite get the beige shoes, which were modest enough for even my mum to wear. But then again if you are going to chase a handsome Spaniard around – and from what we learnt Coco certainly does her fair share of that – a commonsense heel is just about forgivable.

Still, Choos or no Choos, Coco quickly drew us into a show existing somewhere between an intimate, bitchy confession and a flawless, autobiographical monologue. The journey from her days as a small boy at a Bronx Catholic school to happily married gay icon was a goldmine for comedy, what with her growing up in a pink house, being taught by the not-so-divine 'Sister John Mary' and counting 'Fruma Sarah' amongst her childhood muses.

And then the songs! No true queen worthy of the description could call herself an artiste without belting out a handful of musical numbers, and Coco delivered them all with considerable vocal aplomb – her version of 'Sister' from *The Colour Purple* for one, showed an interpretative skill that transcended the remit expected of high camp.

But for all her theatrical polish, Miss Coco Peru never lost her bite. She may work a dress better than most girls, but I suspect she has balls of steel.

**Helen Kane**

## THE TWO WRONGIES CABINET OF CURIOSITIES Nightingale Theatre/Brighton Fringe

### INTIMATE ENCOUNTERS New Venture Theatre/Brighton Fringe

The Two Wrongies are the wild and wilful Janine Fletcher and Avis Cockbull, aka The Perverved Turkeys (seen with *La Clique* and *Voodoo Vaudeville*). Set as an onstage-offstage cabaret, the spot-on dance routines and cleverly choreographed performance vignettes are interspersed with 'offstage' costume changes and rude chat. As the fluorescent legwarmers and nipple-tassels come and go, we gape at vividly vulgar exchanges on topics ranging from anal hair shaving to what a girl would do if she had her own cock for a day! The Two Wrongies voice the things we think about yet wouldn't want to say. They break with etiquette, but get away with it.

I loved the playfulness, yet wasn't too clear on occasions on the demarcation of the onstage/backstage territory, which seemed a little vague at times. The Two Wrongies made me feel wrong – and I enjoyed that feeling! Rude comedy that made me titter.

In contrast, *Intimate Encounters* explores loving intimacy in a performative setting, using respectful familiarity. Following a shoulder massage and a little chat to ease me into relaxation, a white blindfold is slipped over my eyes, and I'm led away into tender abandonment. On three occasions my blindfold dissolves away from my face: in a womb-like tent a man lies down beside me on satin pillows and sings me a lullaby, then I'm re-blindfolded and led away to two more encounters. In one, a woman is waiting to tell me a secret, and in the last I meet a man who says he's been waiting for me, and 'now everything will be different'. Then the blindfold descends again. There are whisperings and little kisses about my neck. I feel cared for and treasured. Without everyday sight the body takes over with a new sensory vision, a trusting. This is like a wonderful dream, being carried by a cloud of angels. I left feeling nourished and uplifted.

**Miriam King**



# REVIEWS FROM SACRED AT CHELSEA THEATRE MAY 2008

This year's Sacred festival was a unique exploration of what live art-within-theatre can be. Most of the artists in this season put the audience at the heart of performance; rather than just sitting watching, we were directly participating and to varying extents, shaping the shows.

My day started with Gustavo Ciriaco & Andrea Sonnberger's *Here Whilst We Walk*, which took nine people, contained and silent within a large white band of thick 'knicker elastic' out onto the surrounding streets of World's End, Chelsea. As a kind of morphing human sculpture, we became an event. In this highlighted way, I also began to notice more things: gardens blooming, tea bags thrown out at the back of cafe kitchens, birds singing from tree tops. I felt like an infant in safe hands, all-eyes as we wordlessly perambulated along streets and through parks, past shop fronts and houses, halting traffic and crossing roads and bridges. We are finally released from the elastic binding down by the Thames, then given colourful paper kites to fly freely in the riverside breeze, bright against the nearby grey towerblocks.

Hurrying back across the river to the foyer of Chelsea Theatre I happily sat down to a cup of tea at Rajni Shah's *Small Gifts: tea*. Here Rajni sat in silent meditation for one hour whilst in her presence whoever wished to sit with her had a cup of tea. A handwritten letter was passed around explaining her thoughts on the notion of 'gifting'. At a given time, Rajni opened her eyes and engaged with those around her table. We spoke about the idea of the gift and how we usually think of a gift as an object that is given, yet it can be a smile, or an action or some thoughts; a gift is an act of sharing, a means of communication, and somehow a gift helps us feel less lonely. I had thoughts of the idea of a 'present', relating to 'being present' and giving 'presence'. Rajni's work induced in me a welcome quiet contemplation.

I was next off onto Dr Roberts' Magic Bus (set on a London routemaster bus parked outside) and *Miss High Leg Kick's Fashion Bus*. With the central area of the bus as a close-up catwalk, the captive audience were taken on a whirlwind tour of London fashion from the streets – bright, fast moving, and completely engaging.

The hit of the day for me was Chris Dobrowolski's *Landscape Seascape Skyscape Escape* (also on the Magic Bus). Chris gave us a performance-presentation about his early artistic career making fantastical inventions. The vivid description of what was made, when, why and how was then illustrated by seeing it in action on super-8 film. There was the hovercraft made from salvaged plastic bottles and polythene drums, the tank made from Chris's dad's lawnmowers, and finally an aeroplane made to plan from a Flying Flea manual – all of these rickety creations actually worked! When I saw the flickering footage of Chris's Flying Flea actually take off from a grassy runway, it brought tears to my eyes. Fantastic – what a dreamer, what an inventor, what an artist!

Last on my day's schedule was Lois Weaver's *What Tammy Needs To Know...About Getting Old and Having Sex*. This was the first time I had set foot in the actual theatre space all day. Using a TV chat-show format, Lois's country singer alter-ego Tammy Whynot invites a dialogue on sexual fantasies and sexual health in the older woman. I was moved by the participation of an East London older women's group who spoke honestly about what sex (or lack of) meant to them: one, a widow of 36 years, she said she sang when she felt the loneliness, giving us a heartfelt rendition of *Ebony and Ivory*. Another lady who'd lived eight decades told how she enjoyed tea dances for the companionship, ably demonstrating a raunchy jive.

All-in-all, I had an exhilarating and uplifting day. Sacred was a box of delights for the eyes, mind and heart.

**Miriam King**



GUSTAVO CIRIACO & ANDREA SONNBERGER *HERE WHILST WE WALK*



**DRIES VERHOEVEN  
THY KINGDOM COME**  
Sacred Festival, Chelsea Theatre  
London May 2008

Barefoot, I climb into the small white caravan in front of the theatre. The door gently closes behind me. Thus starts Dries Verhoeven's *Thy Kingdom Come*. After my eyes adjust to the semi-darkness, I realize a man is watching me from behind a glass partition which divides the cabin in half. Before I get a chance to note more than a chair, a fan and a kettle on either side of the divide a gentle male voice addresses me through a speaker in the wall. 'Hi. Are you as nervous as I am?'

As the tender audio script evolves, we mostly keep our gazes interlocked, but occasionally our eyes wander, taking in the space surrounding us. The words envelop me in scenarios of intimacy until we are flying high in a balloon over the perishing earth, granting the two of us just a few more minutes to share. The end. The door opens. In the stark light that enters, I missed seeing him leave. Outside, we meet and exchange shoes. It is a strangely exciting sensation to meet again.

Dries Verhoeven's interest lies in exploring performative encounters without performers. Here, two people meet in 'audience', in a shared yet isolated space, unaware of the thoughts that have been laid in each other's mouths and made audible for the counterpart. An automatic response is to try to match the aural and visual impressions to create cohesion, but realising the pointlessness, one soon surrenders to the intriguing journey through a fragile landscape of longing.

Martina von Holn

**SHIFTING SANDS  
THE DEADLINE**

The Space, London  
May 2008

*The Deadline* bills itself as 'Clown Noir' – a theatre-clown celebration of Film Noir. True to the Noir genre, we have a plot riddled with twists and turns – but as far as they can go, with enough red herrings and gasp-shock denouements to confuse and stun even the most die-hard Dashiell Hammett fan.

The plot circles around a cheeky-chappy postman who gets tangled up in the spidery web of dastardly deceit weaved by a double- or maybe even triple-crossing femme fatale he encounters when delivering a Very Important Letter (and yes, the postman always knocks twice). It is claimed that when giving advice to thriller writers, Raymond Chandler once said: if in doubt, send a man through a door with a gun – advice that *The Deadline's* writer/co-deviser Andy Barrett and director Gerry Flanagan seem to have taken to heart, although when it comes to gun play they make it clear that the female is indeed the deadlier of the species.

Of course, we expect spot-on clown/physical theatre work from *Shifting Sands*, and that is indeed what we get. It's great to see Gerry Flanagan himself treading the boards, magnificent as ever (playing a whole raft of foils to our two main characters), but he's well-matched by his co-performers Ellie Harley and Ian Street. The final member of the creative team is designer Julian Hanby, whose minimal but clever set includes a surreal and unsettling freestanding door. Well, as Chandler said: if in doubt...

Dorothy Max Prior

**SIDI LARBI CHERKAOUI  
MYTH**

Sadler's Wells  
May 2008

The creations of the young Belgian-Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui could perhaps be best described not as dance pieces or theatre works but as places in their own right. Notwithstanding the detailed, if ambiguous, library/lobby setting of *Myth*, the sense persists of Cherkaoui conjuring a little city, teeming with all the fluxes of urban living – there are twenty-one people on stage here (plus a skeleton in silver sneakers) – and the effects, momentary and cumulative, of a joyously strenuous plurality.

Though the suitably abundant programme notes locate the topical focus of *Myth* as personal trauma, it is precisely this aesthetic, which values complexity and proliferation and seeks to preserve rather than dispel their challenge to an audience, that fuels Cherkaoui's awesome radiance. Of particular significance is his concern with how individual experience – devising around which is the departure point for his works, using specific overarching questions like *Goat Island* do – meets social contexts and shapes civic meaning. His play with the disjunctive grammars of body and clothing, and the poignant deformations of personal identity which arise from that tension, especially fascinates here.

Coolly received in some quarters, perhaps because Cherkaoui's signatures no longer carry the impact of surprise that *Rien de Rien* did in 2000, *Myth* (created in 2007) nonetheless reconfirms its maker as an exceptional technician of multiplicity, whose depth, even more than his virtuosity, continues to astound and inspire. Like William Forsythe, Cherkaoui's work vastly exceeds his medium, to become of importance to everyone, whether they know it or not.

Chris Goode

**NOFITSTATE CIRCUS  
TABÚ**

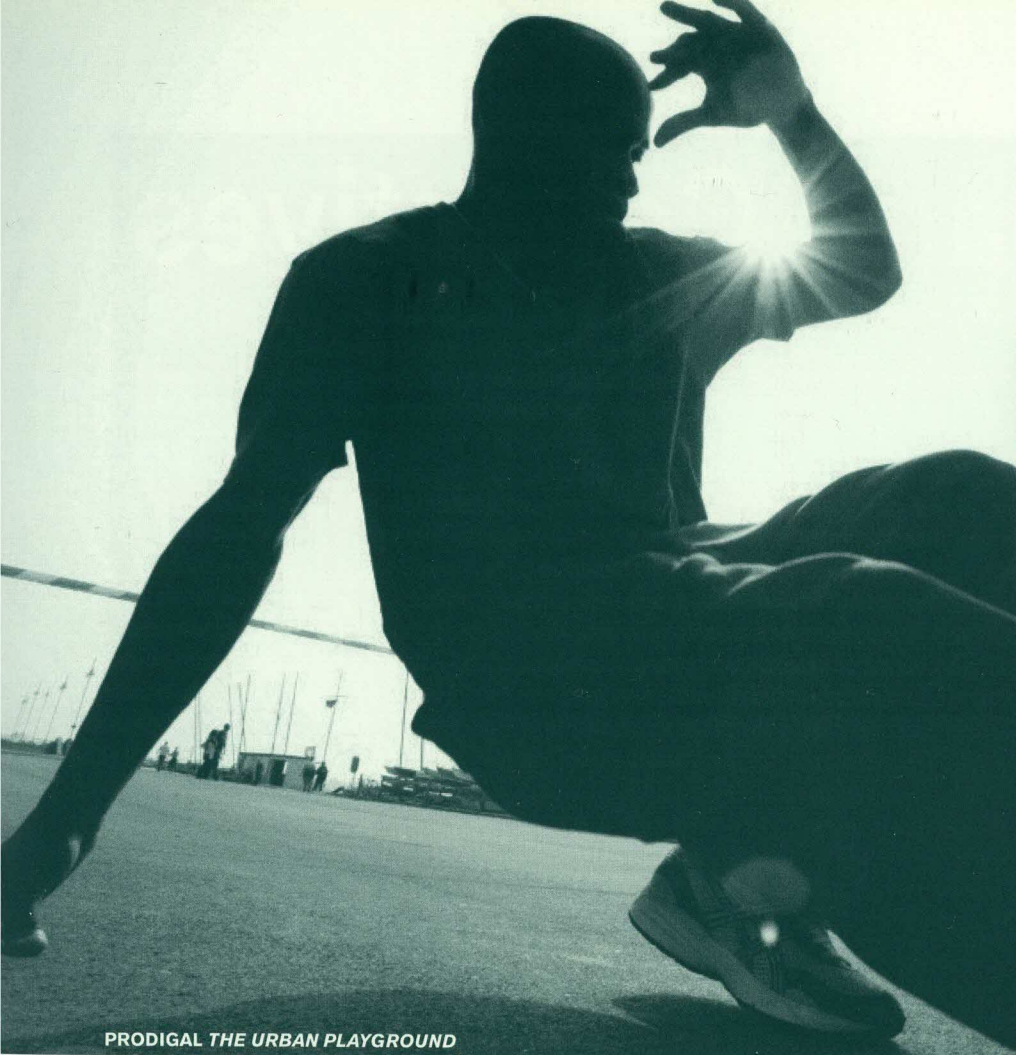
Victoria Park, London  
May 2008

*Tabú* takes its inspiration from Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – although the literary references that I would have inferred from what I saw were Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees* and HG Wells' *The Time Machine*.

The world of the show is one in which humanity has divided into two tribes: the clean, white, shiny, fearful, sexless, rain-soaked dwellers-in-the-clouds and the grubby, colourful, earthy, sexy, feel-the-fear-and-do-it-anyway swamp dwellers below.

This exploration of a binary divide that needs to be broken is of course perfect for a circus-theatre show, giving plenty of opportunities for a play between ground and air. Like previous success *Immortal*, *Tabú* is a promenade piece – although perhaps another word needs to be invented for these large-scale extravaganzas where the audience does little promenading, but is moved in herds around a constantly-evolving space. But it has to be said that Nofitstate are very good at this sort of thing; one of the things I love most about their shows is the way that





PRODIGAL THE URBAN PLAYGROUND

the stewarding, rigging, and counter-weight/spotting work is all done in character and integrated into the show – I'm particularly drawn to head rigger cum performer Barnz Munn, who is Swamp Man personified.

We are treated to a raft of spine-tingling performances – lots of aerial of course: we get the lot – static, swinging, flying, rope, cradle, hoop, including great work from Adie Delaney as Amaranta, 'the girl who knows no fear' and Natalia Fandino as Ursula, 'the originator and eater of earth'; and there's a lovely tightrope act from Vanina Fandino, 'the woman who multiplies animals just by looking at them'. And live music composed by Peter Swaffer which, although veering occasionally too much towards indie rock for my taste, is played with panache by the four-piece ensemble, with a special mention of Annette Loose's sax.

My one gripe is with the use of spoken text which I found illustrative and a little cringy. People, you don't need it! Let the pictures tell the story...

**Dorothy Max Prior**

**PRODIGAL THEATRE &  
GRAVITY STYLE  
THE URBAN PLAYGROUND**  
Platt Fields Park, Manchester/x.trax  
June 2008

As one of the Without Walls commissions, *The Urban Playground* has been making its way around the major UK outdoor performance festivals this summer.

So far, I've seen it from a balcony in Brighton; in front of a town hall in Winchester; and twice in one day in a park in Manchester. I've greatly enjoyed all the shows – although the occasion that shone most brightly was the second slot at Manchester, where, in the blazing sunshine, with an audience giving its all in response to the MC's calls for appreciation, the ante got upped to a breathtaking high of physical expression.

The combination of parkour (urban freerunning) and contemporary dance techniques is well realised in Miranda Henderson's choreography and in the performance by a superb six-strong Anglo-French ensemble. The set is an adult-size version of those playground climbing frames with little platforms and bars to jump onto and swing from – and jump and swing they do, around and through and over with grace and ease. But equally important is the ground, which gives opportunities not only for the crowd-pleasing b-boy breakdancing solos, but also for lyrical and dramatic duets and trios that highlight the very different physical attributes and artistic qualities of each performer. Shifts in pace and mood make the piece far more than a demonstration of physical skills (excellent though these are) – it has an ebb and a flow of rhythms and resonances that tell a myriad of stories. All this greatly enhanced by Chris Umney's stunning 'city symphony' soundtrack. A powerful piece of streetwise dance-theatre.

**Dorothy Max Prior**

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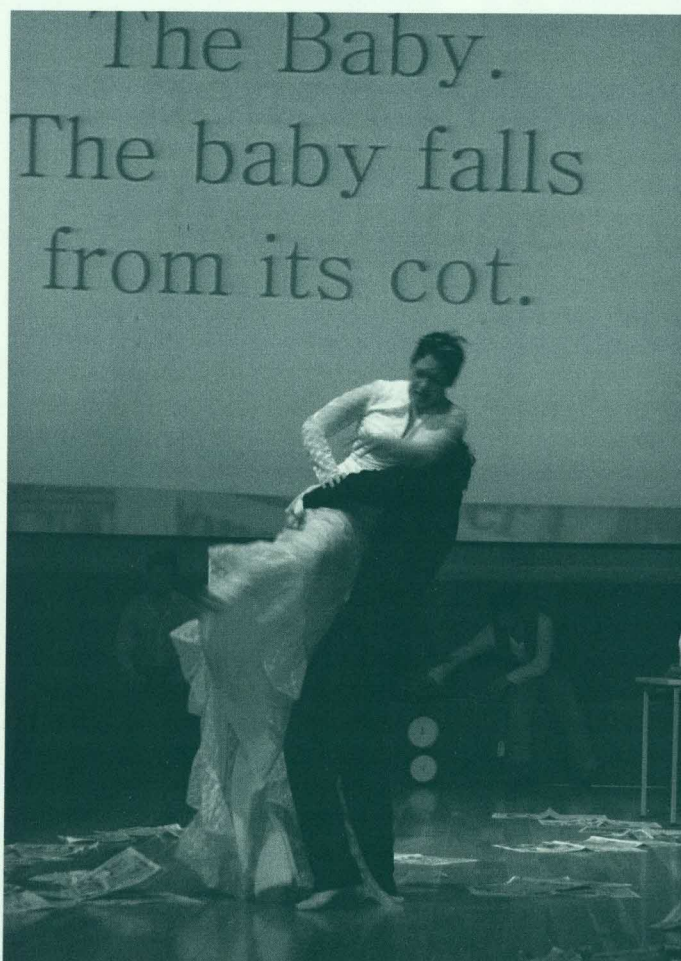
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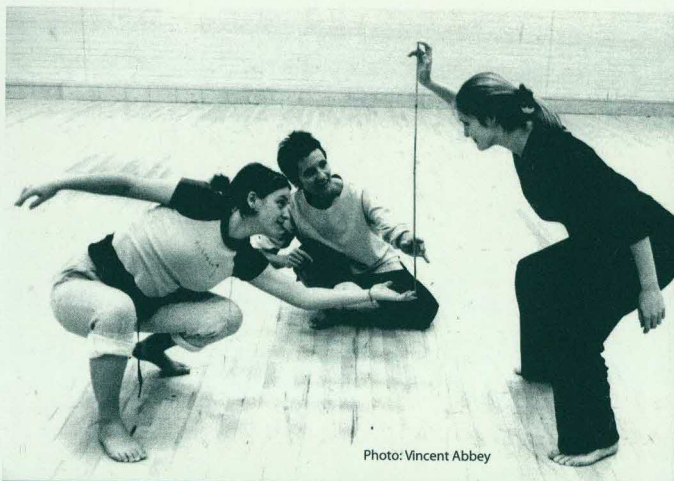


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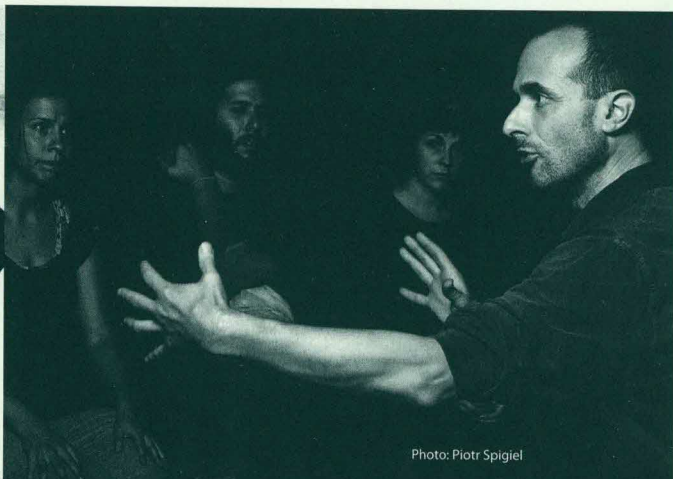


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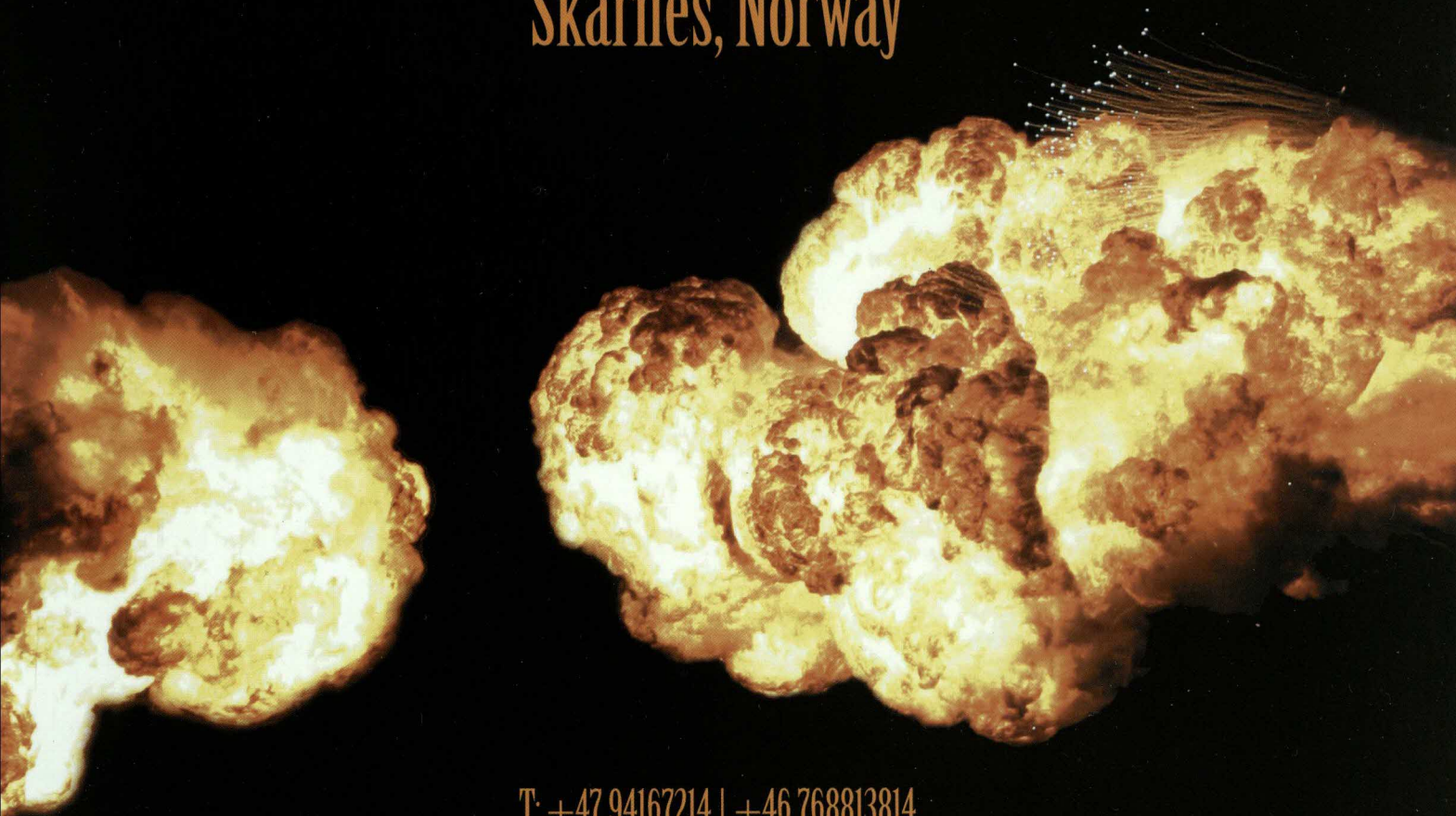
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