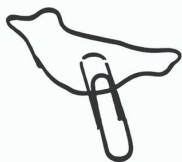


10 years of The Paper Birds



Edited by Kylie Walsh & Ben Francombe
Designed by Graham Roy Donaldson

When we were performing at the National Student Drama Festival with A Smile Fell in the Grass, (2003), we attended a workshop run by Vicki Middleton (Frantic Assembly) and Amanda Joseph (Stephen Joseph Theatre); the workshop was called How To Set Up a Theatre Company. This is where it all started for me: the penny suddenly dropped that we could continue working together outside of university and actually make a living out of it. Following advice, we wrote a business plan which forced us to articulate how we would operate as well as create. I remember writing this plan without actually believing a word of what was said; it was a three-year plan, which sounded far too ambitious and included salaries, which seemed a laughable concept. Ten years on we know that it wasn't unrealistic at all, and it provided a basis upon which we would grow, driving us ambitiously forward as businesswomen as well as artists.

Elle Moreton. Founding member, Performer and Creative Producer 2003 - 2012.

Theatre managers and technicians across the country were always in shock when six 22-year old girls rocked up in a ten-metre van, with a plastic bag full of lighting gels, and a roll of gaffa. We knew these (predominantly) men were thinking WHO is in charge of this lot, and WHERE is the responsible adult?

Michelle Folliot. Founding member and Performer 2003 - 2005.

This extract is taken from the 10-Year Anniversary Booklet published by Chichester University Press in 2013. The Booklet served as a commemorative retrospective of The Paper Birds' first productions, as well as the programme for new show 'On the One Hand'.

Buy a copy of the Booklet and 'On the One Hand' Script in our online shop!



10 Years of The Paper Birds

By Ben Francombe

Longstanding dramaturg for The Paper Birds, Ben Francombe, invites reflections on ten years of making theatre from Jemma McDonnell and Kylie Walsh.

Ben: Does 10 years seem like a long time?

Jemma: Well, it sounds like a long time! In some ways it's gone really quickly, but in other ways, when you remember the early days when we had to make everything ourselves and do everything ourselves and it was all such a struggle, you realise that... yeah, 10 years has been a long, long time...

Ben: So when did The Paper Birds start being The Paper Birds and why and when did you choose to do what you do?

Jemma: We began being The Paper Birds as undergraduates [at Bretton Hall] and in our 3rd Year, as part of the course. Five of us decided we wanted to work together and we made our first show called *A Smile Fell in the Grass* [2003]: it was a devised piece about the life and work of Sylvia Plath. We heard about the National Student Drama Festival and we decided to enter the show into that festival. We liked the idea of taking the work outside of the College and sharing it with others and seeing where that might lead. The application form for the NSDF asked us for a name and we found the phrase in an old notebook, a kind of a scrapbook of different ideas and quotes we had written down. The show got into the NSDF

and we took it to the festival in the Easter holidays when we should have been writing our dissertations! Some people at the festival loved it and some people hated it, but some important people did see the show and gave us support including [playwright] Willie Russell and his wife, Annie. Willie gave us a small sum of money and so we decided we'd take the show to the Edinburgh Fringe. So the ball was rolling before we'd even graduated. As part of the preparations for Edinburgh we started to have conversations about being a company, all living in Leeds together, and we all committed to that: we'd give it a go. In those first few years we did everything together: we didn't have any defined roles, we devised and wrote the shows together, we'd run workshops together, if there was a meeting we'd all go to the meeting... which was a bit overwhelming, for the people that encountered us in the early days, I'm sure!

Ben: What was it about being at a place like Bretton Hall that made you come together?

Jemma: I think that the course at Bretton was really open to different peoples' ideas. By the end of the second year we had, as a group of friends, developed a shared interest in devising and creating our own work and Bretton Hall gave us the resources and the support to do that. It gave us time and space but it also gave us deadlines and feedback and it challenged us. One of the most important things was that it wasn't just a practical

course: from the first year you had to write about the work you were producing and that was really valuable because when we started to create our own work we were able to really articulate and explain our ideas. We were thinking about what we were creating and how we were creating it and what the audiences were getting from it, so Bretton was a wonderful training ground.

Ben: So those early days were very, very different to the set up you have now... there's been huge changes that have shaped your work: methods that have changed, climates that have changed, genres that have changed, politics that have changed. Can you think of one change - one event or issue or decision or crisis or falling out - that does a lot to explain the way a company or community of artists can shift?

Kylie: I think there are two main shifts, for me: both about people leaving. One is when half the company left [after *In a Month of Fallen Sundays*, Michelle Folliot, Helen Lindley and Jenny Robinson left to pursue different careers] and it went from 6 to 3 very suddenly... We became far more organised and systematic. Jemma started to focus on the artistic direction, I worked on education and workshops and Elle [Moreton] looked after finance and administration. So we had a whole new learning curve where we all learnt to adjust to those roles and made shows together in a very different way. The second shifting point for the company was when Elle left: this was really significant. Elle had run

all the administrative side of the company: so much so that Jemma and I hadn't really even looked at budgets... we just knew that Elle was taking care of it. So this past year, without her, has been another revaluation: it's enabled us to really look at our company in the context of how the arts is funded now and how small companies work in such a context. We've opened things up a bit and use a more flexible method of creative producing and, with the appointment of Becki [Haines, as producer] we have a new lease of life. Of course we miss all the old Paper Birds but, if you are to survive as a company, you have to accept that people are going to leave and job descriptions can be written and people can move on.

Ben: In terms of genre, style, form and the content of your work, what has been the biggest shift in terms of the identity and purpose of your work?

Kylie: Well, there's one absolute answer to this, *In a Thousand Pieces* (2008).

Jemma: We spent our first 5 years as a company finding our feet, learning to work together and trying to set up a business. We were experimenting and playing and defining who we were and how we work and what our craft was and what our style was. After 5 years of that - I felt that we knew, now, how to make work, but that the substance wasn't there. The style and the aesthetic was strong, but, with *In a Thousand Pieces*, about sex trafficking, we shifted towards a political agenda.

And we've never looked back: we're really interested, now, in making political work.

Kylie: But we've shifted stylistically as well, we've broken the barrier in our work between performer and audience. The work still had moments of choreography and physical theatre, but the importance of verbatim sources in relation to the physicality has become important. The debate on ownership became important to us: no longer could we retire to a rehearsal room and cook up opinions and scenes for ourselves... there has been far more task-based devising, using real materials and documentation.

Jemma: After we'd made *In a Thousand Pieces* we rewrote our artistic policy because we realised that we had all these tools: we had movement, we had music, we had a choric aesthetic, but from this point we became interested in deconstructing work with, and for, the audience. Of course, this was the time we came back to School and did the MA Theatre Collectives together at Chichester. I think the whole design and philosophy of the programme - allowing us to study together as a collective - was particularly valuable for us at that point: the programme gave us time to re-evaluate who we were and what we were trying to do. As an emerging company we hadn't had the luxury of taking lots of time: we simply didn't have the money to take a year to make a show, and we had to keep re-appearing, so we were in this cycle of activity with no time to step back and think about

what we were doing. The MA gave us time to do that: we actually stopped and looked at the business plan as a document that was important, not just as a document in place to please funding bodies. We also made *Others* (2010) as part of the MA. I think that was a really complex, but really important, piece of theatre and the MA gave us the opportunity and the support and the time to make it. If we hadn't been doing the MA I think we would have felt that we had to create another show that was a little bit more, you know, sellable.

Ben: I think it's interesting that you talk about this period in relation to rewriting – readdressing – your mission: I think your mission is really careful in the way it places the company, as a company of women. Is there something distinctly female about your process? Are there aspects of the way that you work that emerge from the fact that it is a woman's company?

Jemma: I think that's hard to say because we've never seen any other... it's very rare for artists to see other artists' processes, so I struggle to know what a 'woman's process' might be. Certainly, some of our processes have involved a lot of time with other women: interviewing and corresponding. The verbatim approach to, not only gathering material, but, using it on stage has a strong political purpose for me, in terms of allowing the female voice to emerge....

Kylie: I think it's important to stress, though, how our processes are reinvented with each show and, with it, the politics of the work... For me, the female nature of the work comes and goes... so with the current show *On the One Hand*, it is clear that this would be a show about women ageing and so the research and development periods were with women of different ages and contexts and this has allowed different stories to emerge that would not have emerged if there had been a gender split. But, with *Thirsty*, the starting point was 'booze and Britain', rather than the specific issue of women and drink... So the stories we collected were from both men and women...

Ben: But what emerged was a very distinctive central story about young women and drink...

Jemma: But it became the focus of the work after it emerged from an open process. We didn't make that story happen, we didn't manipulate it or impose it on a pre-defined politic for the work. And of course we found it incredibly problematic and challenging and confusing in terms of what it said about women. But, once you invite stories openly, it is very difficult to ignore things that might not be saying things that you are comfortable with. We told that story because we felt we had to...

Kylie: The personal element in the work always comes in as well, of course... We weren't trying to be objective. It spoke to us because this person could have been Jemma or I...

Ben: There's something about the personal that is feminist as well, isn't there? It relates to what you've been saying about how the company emerged... You are inherently democratic about the way you started to work as a collective: the fluid rhythms of your process and the way you insist on re-inventing your methodology every time you work... this is something that I think is anti-patriarchal, anti-authoritative...

Jemma: Certainly... Of course, as we have developed, we have inevitably defined 'roles', but, for example, my having the title 'Artistic Director' can be quite misleading to people who have defined notions of the way that theatre is structured. We have these titles so that people can direct enquiries to specific people, but when we are working together – particularly when it's just Kylie and I around, the idea that we have formalised roles is absurd.

Ben: Okay... Music is an integral part of the work you do: it's almost instinctive, in that you never really talk about it.... Can you articulate why you have always worked with music?

Jemma: We met Shane [Durrant, Composer] at university and he has been integral to our processes throughout the development of the company. In that first show we just found the music incredibly fulfilling and beautiful and it provided a dimension of the whole live experience that felt very real to us. As consumers of music,

we have always been very committed to the 'live' and, as Shane has become more and more part of the process, we have adopted tones, moods and methods that are stimulated by his work, particularly by his brilliance as an improviser. He is a constant presence, so much so, that we've moved him more and more on the stage and this has allowed and encouraged a certain amount of questioning and challenging of the whole balance and control and potential manipulation of the music thing... There was a really interesting point in *Others* when I refer directly to the emotional nature of music in conversation with Shane.



Shane Durrant,
Composer.

Ben: I think that moment in *Others* was really important – a defining moment for me. It was deeply moving and sharply unsentimental: you're trying to talk, to tell the story; Shane accompanies the story; you tell him to stop - you tell him it's too much – you tell him three times, finally getting upset – but he still continues until he is ready to stop... There was something powerful in the difference in music's demands and structures in this context that drew attention to the essential otherness of form that was troubling and problematic – and, therefore, powerful.

Jemma: It also served as a climax in a particular approach to making work that was central to *In a Thousand Pieces* and *Others*, where we are really debating with ourselves about form within the content of the works. And at the heart of that debate is music... We've moved on with *On the One Hand*: for the first time, Shane isn't going to be live, partly because the nature of the material and the sheer number of women on stage has defined our focus and design. But it also allows Shane to develop his composition ideas, bringing in a range of collaborators that will be different in terms of depth of sound: that's important for his progression and, as a company, we feel good to make radical decisions like this...

Kylie: I think it's a natural progression, which, of course, can be reversed for the next show, but, crucially, it increases our flexibility as a company – not having everyone on tour... there're lots of

other projects we're intending to kick off this year: some smaller-scale projects and another larger scale project and Shane will be performing in those...

Jemma: It's the same as me directing and not performing: you get into a position, after 10 years, where you're starting to look at the bigger picture... There's something really exciting about doing more things, more flexibly...

Ben: Of course, all these changes, shifts in direction, sound so careful and calculated! Let's talk about disasters! Talk about the moments when you realised that you have created something that wasn't working... And, of course, how you dealt with these moments...

Jemma: Well, as you would know, more than anyone, Ben, such moments occur all the time! I remember one instance, during *Thirsty* when we were struggling under the weight of all these stories... we had set up the hotline and the blog and had accrued so many stories... some very funny, some moving, or endearing, or beautiful and unexpected. And, again, the issue of ownership and responsibility comes in... I just wanted to tell them all, as they were... Very late on in the process, we realised the show had no shape or focused purpose and we cut so much. But then we just had a gaping hole... With just days to go, we had just cut forty minutes from the show and had not replaced it with anything... So Paper Birds boot camp kicked in!

We worked through several nights and we turned it around, but it was scary and frustrating: Luckily we were working with Kirsty [Housley] as co-director and she gave us confidence in these final days...

Kylie: Some of the things we've put before audiences in scratch [work-in-progress] performances have been terrible! Once, with *In a Thousand Pieces*, we did a scratch with us dressed as stereotypical Eastern-European women... we learnt Albanian and everything: that wasn't cool at all! But sometimes you just have to try something: if you are to address complex political ideas, sometimes your enquiries are going to throw up these problematic images... The point is that you have to allow yourself to show material that is raw during a scratch performance otherwise the really interesting stuff will never emerge.

Jemma: Yeah, I feel that in all our projects, we have done work-in-progress performances, which have been terrible and they serve as crucial punctuation points: a point where the early crazy freedom is exposed as being... well, a bit crazy! But, without the crazy stuff, the possibilities of the pieces would not emerge...

Kylie: *Others* was a bit exposing in this respect. It was the first time we had so many partner venues. It was a real boost to have such enthusiasm from four different organisations and we never thought, when we were planning six months ahead, that it would be a problem to show work publicly at each

stage: we just thought it was appropriate to give something back to the organisations in this way. Of course, we've learnt from this and we don't do so many public work-in-progress presentations now. So each time we embark on a process, we learn from the last...

Jemma: It is really important to stress that this has been our journey: other companies and artists do it differently... No one can ever be certain what's going to work until you do it... We've copied processes from others that simply haven't worked for us and I am sure than many people would not find our processes helpful...

Ben: Okay... A more positive question: can you name one moment, one little nugget of theatrical magic, from one of the pieces? Your personal favourite...

Kylie: Well there are moments that I enjoyed performing... For all of us, the final, climatic, moment in *In a Month of Fallen Sundays* was extraordinary: six women on stage, shaking out sheets; a very simple act, but the accumulative effect of this recurring image, again and again and again was amazing. The impact on the audience was highly charged and the fact we achieved this through such a simple action, but, crucially, with all six of us – all six of The Paper Birds – is something we will always share. This kind of moment, when a distinctive Paper Birds style is used to realise a crucial point, is very satisfying.

Jemma: There was a scene in *Others* when we are 'interviewing' Heather Mills. She is on the TV but the sound is turned down and we're trying to make up what she is saying. I love the essential danger of this scene: the fact that it was always off the cuff and improvised and, therefore, edgy to perform. But I loved the meaning of the scene, the questioning of ourselves in relation to celebrity: the judgement and imposition of words and opinions – literally putting words into the mouth of this woman – which made a really effective statement. My second moment was in *In a Thousand Pieces*: I am talking to the audience explaining about the Eastern European girl who has come to the country and half-way through the speech I become the girl – as do the other two – and I am thrown to the floor and raped. The audience just have no idea that this is coming and the sudden violent lurch from non-performance to performance is confusing and startling and deeply upsetting. At that moment the whole show turns a corner and the audience are drawn into this horrible reality. For me, it is a moment of huge impact that could only be manifest in the live context.

Kylie: Oh...and singing '*Total Eclipse of the Heart*' at the end of *Thirsty*...

Ben: How did you arrive at the topic of ageing? Has it come to mind because of the 10-year anniversary – the sense of progression and

development and actual ageing that we have talked about today?

Jemma: Surprisingly I feel *On the One Hand* is more detached and less personal than previous work. In *Thirsty*, Kylie and I were exploring our own experiences during the last decade, but with the new play we wanted it to be about women of different ages, about the women before us and after us... So ageing felt completely right. We've had the luxury to work first at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, then at Northern Stage and Live Theatre, with a whole range of women from all ages and, through these interactions, we discovered, very early on, the sense of being bound by expectations that run throughout life for all women... This was a really important idea that has made us very excited by the process and desperate to make the show.

Ben: And the future? The Paper Birds have changed again, not only in terms of topic or content or working methodology, but in terms of the whole structure and make-up of the company... You are employing a more defined structure: the subject matter demands a wide range of ages in the cast and there have been differences – perhaps generational – in professional expectations of the people you have employed... Is this another positive shift for the company? Are there any clues to what the future might hold?

Kylie: For the first eight years it was all a bit hand-to-mouth, but for the last period we have been on-salary and this has given us more freedom and security which becomes crucial in terms of development. We have real time to invest in the company, and while we can never presume that that salary will always be there, I can't see us breaking up...

Jemma: And I'm excited of not knowing what's around the corner, because the unpredictable nature of the arts is horrible in one sense – certainly scary, and that's a lot to do with money – but there is also this buzz you feel about simply not knowing what work we will be doing and what shows we will be making. We just don't know what will seem important to us and how we will have to change to remain fresh and culturally urgent... We already have one project planned, which is going to be a solo performance without either myself or Kylie in it; we are also thinking of a site-specific piece about class. These projects are going to take up a huge amount of time and have been planned for the next year or so, so I get really excited by the fact that I can't think too far ahead: I certainly can't think ten years ahead and I think that's a good thing...

Ben: You make it sound very exciting. And you make it sound very scary: both of you!

Jemma: It's both of those things – in equal measure!

Ben: Of course we're in the business of encouraging people down the same route as you: we all feel that the future of theatre should be predicated on a performer-maker methodology... So, to be encouraging, what is the one piece of advice you would give to any aspiring undergraduate theatre collective?

Kylie: To keep going... Ten years ago, I honestly didn't think we would be here now, and, frankly, it's carried on by building it up, brick-by-brick, and, in the process, accepting that there will be moments of gloom and terrible cash-flow problems. But, even during the lean times, there have been exciting bits of news and things to look forward to and so being prepared for a see-saw existence and embracing the highs and forgetting the lows.

Jemma: I think people have to be brave. It's not that we haven't felt confident in the work that we've made, but it has been hard and that's something to do with the business we're in: there are so many times that you're made to feel small and unimportant. But you've got to be brave and make the work you want to make and ask the questions that you want to ask and hopefully people will reward you for that bravery.

"We were given the time and space at Bretton to figure out what we were into, what style we liked, what came naturally, and what we were good at. We had this inspiration of Plath's poetry and life, but it became more personal, it became a brilliant, exploratory process, which weaved together Beethoven, turf, Lucozade and synchronised swimming. The absolute and utter chaos of this show set the precedent, that we could do anything on stage that we wanted. Where there was a will, there was a way. As long as it all fitted into the back of a Luton van." Michelle Folliot (Founding member)



guarantee to provide you with any equipment.

Contact Information

Show Title A SMILE FELL IN THE GRASS

Cast Size 7

College/Company Name THE PA
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A Smile Fell in the Grass

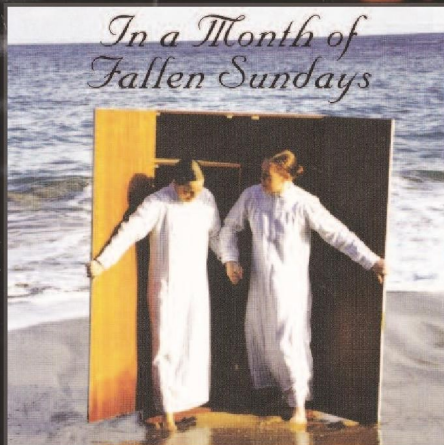
Devised as part of undergraduate course BA Hons Theatre Acting at Bretton Hall, this piece based on the life and work of Sylvia Plath was created as part of a module entitled 'Small Cast'. Opting to work together to devise a play, the cast worked collaboratively and premiered the show in Experimental Theatre in October 2002.

After entering the show into the National Student Drama Festival, it was selected and transferred to the Ocean Room, Scarborough, as part of NSDF 2003. Following support from the Willy Russell Foundation, A Smile Fell in the Grass then went on to be programmed in the Attic, Pleasance Courtyard as part of Edinburgh Fringe 2003.

Devised and Performed:

Michelle Folliot
Helen Lindley
Jemma McDonnell
Elle Moreton
Jenny Robinson

Composed: **Shane Durrant**



In a Month of Fallen Sundays

Based on the hidden tragedy of the Magdalen Asylums in Ireland, this devised piece was created by the cast and presented as work in progress at the Bretton Hall Performance Centre in 2004. It premiered at Edinburgh Fringe in the Dining Room, Gilded Balloon.

It was awarded a regional touring grant from Arts Council and visited venues across Yorkshire throughout Autumn 2004 and Spring 2005.

In May 2005, the set was packed up and shipped off to Northern Ireland for a tour of 7 venues including Belfast Waterfront and the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival.

Devised and Performed:

Michelle Folliot
Helen Lindley
Jemma McDonnell
Elle Moreton
Jenny Robinson
Kylie Walsh

Composed: **Shane Durrant**

Dramaturgical support:
Ben Francombe



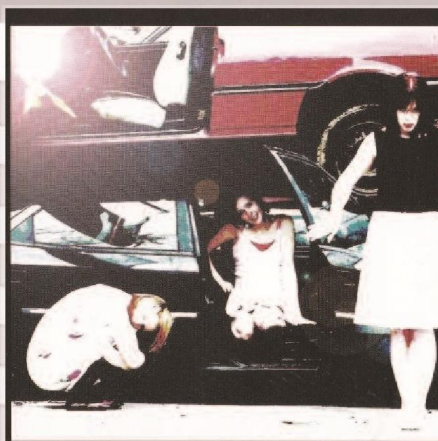
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The Square Chapel
The Yvonne Arnaud
The Grove Theatre
The Rondo Theatre
Redbridge Arts Centre
Winchester University
Leeds Met Studio Theatre
The Robert Powell Theatre



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Accidentally Waiting to Happen

Based on the premise that 'accidents happen', this was the first show devised after the departure of three company members: Michelle Folliot, Jenny Robinson and Helen Lindley. Created with support from Theatre in the Mill, Bradford; University of Chichester; and Ralph Thoresby School, Leeds, this show was devised in 2005. A work in progress was presented at Leeds Met Studio Theatre and at Bristol Old Vic (as part of Mayfest 2005).

Devised and Performed:

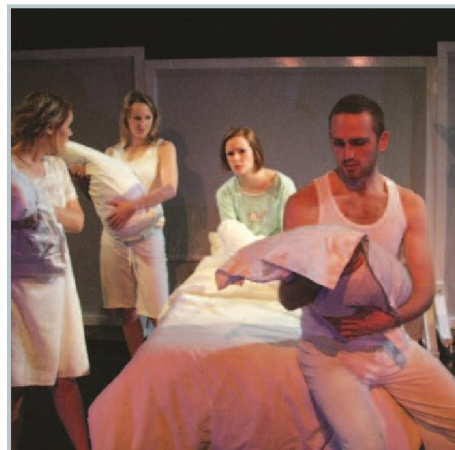
Elle Moreton
Jemma McDonnell
Kylie Walsh

Composed: **Shane Durrant**

It toured across the UK throughout Spring 2006 and was programmed in the Cavern, Pleasance Courtyard as part of Edinburgh Fringe 2006.



"Working with The Paper Birds was a fantastic mix of fear and joy. You had to meet their standard, because they pushed themselves: hard! A performance day was all about speed. Quick: rig the lights! Quick: programme the lights! Quick rehearsal... Install the set in 3 minutes; dismantle it in 2! The payoff was watching the show. 40 Feathered Winks was a graceful, poignant and collective delight!" Brendan Gage, Lighting Designer, 40 Feathered Winks



40 Feathered Winks

This show saw The Paper Birds inviting male actors into the devising process. Lawrence Speck and Jonathan Scratchley joined the team in early 2007 for an Arts Council funded process held at West Park Centre, Leeds. A work in progress was shared at Halifax Square Chapel Theatre in March 2007.

The show premiered at Edinburgh Fringe 2007 where it was programmed in the Dining Room, Gilded Balloon. In early 2008, it embarked on a national UK tour. In May 2008 it appeared at the Prague Fringe Festival where it won 'Best of Prague Fringe' Award and subsequently transferred to the curated Amsterdam Fringe in September 2008 opening at the Frascati Theater.

Devised and Performed:

Elle Moreton
Jemma McDonnell
Jonathan Scratchley
Lawrence Speck
Kylie Walsh

Directed: **Jemma McDonnell**

Composed: **Shane Durrant**

Set and Costume: **Alison Staples**

Lighting: **Brendan Gage**



In a Thousand Pieces

Devised at West Park Centre, Leeds; this process saw the collective revert to an all-female cast. The process was kick started with a short residency with Piezn Kozla in Wroclaw, Poland. Based on the growing epidemic of human trafficking in the UK, this show marked a definite shift in the political and social intentions of the company. The show was presented as a scratch at Leeds Met Studio Theatre in March 2008, and then premiered at Edinburgh Fringe 2008 in the Dining Room, Gilded Balloon. The piece received a Fringe First Award from the Scotsman, and Fringe Review Award for Excellence in Theatre. It was also shortlisted for awards from Amnesty International, The Stage and Total Theatre.

In 2009, The Paper Birds embarked on their biggest UK national tour with the show. It also played at Ruhrfestspiele, Germany and the Prague Fringe Festival. For the second year running, The Paper Birds scooped 'Best of the Prague Fringe' award, ensuring a transfer to the Amsterdam Fringe in September 2009. The show also returned to Edinburgh Fringe in August 2009 where it was programmed in Pleasance 2, Pleasance Courtyard. In 2013, the show was revived upon the request of Bismarck State College and re-built for a run at the Belle Mehus Auditorium, Bismarck, North Dakota USA.

Written and Performed:

Jemma McDonnell
Elle Moreton
Kylie Walsh

Directed: **Jemma McDonnell**

Additional cast: **Elizabeth Carter**

Composed: **Shane Durrant**

Set and Costume: **Ellen Dowell**

Lighting: **Vince Field**

Dramaturgical support:
Ben Francombe



"I enjoyed a creative process that pushed all of us to investigate further and further into verbatim, real people, real feelings as well as the philosophy of otherness: the philosophy of strangers, goddesses and monsters - or whatever categories you want to fit your notions of otherness into. The process was a brave one, even if the end result was a complex show that was as alienating as it was inviting. Ultimately I was inspired by The Paper Birds, whose work together continues to challenge and excite their audiences and themselves. My experience with them has massively influenced my own devising practice. I was privileged to get to work with these dudes, as we all are privileged to see them continue to evolve and innovate. I'll keep looking forward to seeing what they'll do next." Maryam Hamidi

Others

Others marked a shift in methodology for the company. The process featured partner venues that supported the development of the show by providing seed commissions and space as supporting kind; namely Sheffield Theatres, Bath Theatre Royal, The Junction, Camden Peoples' Theatre, Stage@Leeds and University of Chichester. It was devised and toured with support from Arts Council. Scratch work in progress nights were held throughout the process at Sheffield, Cambridge, Camden and Bath.

Others premiered at Edinburgh Fringe 2010 in Above, Pleasance Courtyard with original cast member Maryam Hamidi. An autumn tour saw the piece playing exclusively at the partner venues with a new cast member, Shani Erez. Shane Durrant was also absent from this tour (as he was teaching in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia); and so Jonathan Doherty was recruited in his absence. The 2011 National tour had Shane back in place and across the Spring Season, Others played 20 dates.

Written and Performed:

Shani Erez
Maryam Hamidi
Jemma McDonnell
Kylie Walsh

Directed: **Jemma McDonnell**

Composed: **Shane Durrant**

Additional musician:

Jonathan Doherty

Set design: **Ellen Dowell**

Lighting: **Marec Joyce**
 and **Vince Field**

Dramaturgical Support:

Ben Francombe

Collaborator: **Wendy Houstoun**

Others: Shani Erez and then, it happens...

We are sitting in a rehearsal room in Leeds. Jemma, Kylie and I are trying to devise new elements in *Others* towards its nationwide tour. The tour starts in three days so naturally, we are all doom, gloom and endless tea breaks. Originally, the role I play was created and performed by Maryam Hamidi, and since the piece is very personal, there are changes to be made in order for it to reflect my life and background. We are sort of unstitching a suit and turning it into a dress, using the same cloth. Just in case, we put the kettle on.

The segment we are working on is fairly early on at the show, where the company members write to the three 'other' women. It is a small transition, but there is a feeling that something is missing - it needs to have more movement, more energy. We try different movement options in the space, add a few lines, take away a few more - but something is still missing. At some point Kylie stands up and says 'I sort of imagine this huge flurry of letters that just comes out of nowhere and takes over the room! Wouldn't that be lovely if the letters, the actual letters, moved us?'

Yes, I think, it would be lovely, but I also think I am stressing out about so many other elements towards the opening that the last thing we need to do now is to imagine pyrotechnics that will never happen. Not when we are running so low on milk and clean teaspoons anyway. We all agree that this could be a lovely image, and I assume that we will now move on to more reality based ideas.

But then Jemma gets up and rushes next door. After a few loud bangs she re-emerges holding a semi-broken desk fan. 'Come on! Let's put on some paper and see if it creates a flurry!' Really!? We are going to waste time on something that will never work? OK. Here. I hand out my copy of the script, thinking that at least that is one way to make sure I will know it by heart.

The first attempt crashes and burns. One piece of paper barely flies up before landing solemnly onto the floor. This is not the cloud of letters Kylie or any of us had in mind. But this is also not the end. Soon, the rehearsal room turns into a lab with Jemma cutting, folding & reshuffling papers and Kylie analysing wind angles from the ventilator. I stumble around, holding papers or adjusting the fan's setting but mostly waiting for this doomed-to-fail experiment to end.

And then, it happens.

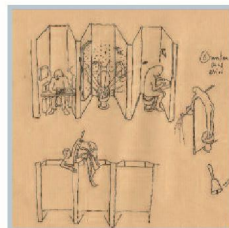
Out of no where, a flurry of paper fills the air and moves into the space. And it is so beautiful. It is so simple, and yet so effective. Shane, with his magical talent, will now have to play the show's tune with only one hand while the other is holding a pile of papers at the right angle. There might even be a standing fan that Kylie can borrow tonight from a neighbour. We have a solution.

It is what I loved so much in working with *The Paper Birds* - that joy in wishing for magic to happen on stage, and the hard work in turning it into reality. I think it's time for a cuppa.





Thirsty



Thirsty saw the integration of a co-director with Kirsty Housley joining the project. As a cast of two, this was crucial for performer/director Jemma McDonnell to have a permanent outside eye to the process. The show was devised with funding from Arts Council and support from the National Theatre Studio, The Junction, Stage@Leeds, Harrogate Theatre, Lincolnshire One Venues, and Lawrence Batley Theatre. A work in progress was shared at Cambridge early in the process and again at the end as an Edinburgh preview in Huddersfield.

The show opened in August 2011 in Pleasance Two, Pleasance Courtyard as part of Edinburgh Fringe Festival. In 2012 it embarked on a gruelling 40 date tour with many subsequent bookings thereafter. Still in repertoire, Thirsty is still hitting the road throughout 2013 and 2014.

Devised and Performed:

Jemma McDonnell
Kylie Walsh

Directed: **Kirsty Housley**
and **Jemma McDonnell**

Composed: **Shane Durrant**

Set and Costume:
Fiammetta Horvat

Lighting: **Vince Field**

Sound: **Benji Fox**

Rehearsal Stage Manager:
Carolyn Eden

Tour Stage Manager:
Steve Watling

Collaborator: **Wendy Houstoun**

Thirsty: Kirsty Housley

That's not the story we want to tell...

It's June, 2011, and we are in the late stages of making a show about drinking. Well, actually we're in the late stages and the early stages at the same time. Because despite having only two weeks of rehearsals left before we open, we are extremely uncertain. In fact, we don't actually have a show yet.

We're in a rehearsal room in Leeds, surrounded by the words of women and men who have kindly written to us to share their experiences with good old booze. Their words tell tales of spilt beer, hazy memories and embarrassing photographs. People have been extraordinarily frank and generous. One story in particular, sent in by a friend, made us laugh for pretty much a whole day. And some stories made us cry, too.

We're not sure we want to tell those.

And so here we are. Uncertain. The problem is this – we're really alarmed by the message we might send if we make a piece centred around the (all too familiar) story of a drunk woman becoming a victim: those stories are out there already, dominating in our papers, our TV programmes and films, often with such regularity as to suggest that, for a woman, merely going near a glass of wine will result in tragedy. And if you do choose to drink or get drunk, then whatever happens afterwards will be your own fault. No, we certainly do not need to fuel that fire.

Plus, we really like drinking and we don't want to be hypocrites.

But still, those stories are sat there, staring out at us from the pile.

And so the debate continues. For days. For a week. We leave Leeds and move to Huddersfield, where we preview. We now have one week left before we open. And we can't solve the problem, we can't answer the question.

This is going to be a disaster.

But then we realise something. An argument that fuels us for a week might not be a problem after all. It might be a solution. It might even be a show. Because it might not be the story we wanted to tell, but it's not one we can ignore, either.

