



# The Paper Birds

## The 5 Key Ingredients

Although it varies from show to show, we at The Paper Birds have recognised that there are usually 5 key ingredients that are prominent within each of our productions. Here is an introduction to these ingredients and a bit about how and why we use them.

### 1. Verbatim

We first began to utilise verbatim techniques in our production *In A Thousand Pieces* (2008), when we felt there was a layer missing: the opinions of real people. So we set out with a Dictaphone and recorded some real peoples' opinions on the topic of the show. Having placed these soundbites into the script, the impact the show had on audiences was one of honesty, integrity, shock and deep emotional connection. When it came to our next production, we were hooked; as a technique, collecting and using other people's words verbatim in our productions was of deep interest.

With each production we make, we adapt and change the way we structure the collection methods; sometimes we conduct one-one interviews, often we host workshops or seminars and speak to people in a group, we distribute questionnaires, or ask people to respond to a task such as writing a letter or leaving a voicemail. Depending on what the topic of the show is, we try to find a creative way to collate material for us to work with. Although it is important to us to do this sensitively, and to adopt a process that is suitable for the participants and audiences we are trying to reach.



We constantly strive to find new and interesting ways of staging verbatim material. With each new show we produce there are different techniques or conventions that we explore and often they are derived directly from the theatrical ideas within the show; eg in *Thirsty* (2011) verbatim material is scribbled onto the toilet walls as graffiti, and in *Ask Me Anything* (2020) it scrolls on an autocue screen as in a TV studio.



## 2. Movement

We want to tell stories in breath-taking theatricality. That's why for us, we try to use movement as a mode of conveying parts of the story to heighten or accentuate the spoken word. We have always used physicality in this way, for example in *Thirsty*, repetitious movement depicts the characters becoming more drunk; or in *Broke* (2014), the performers fast forward and rewind through scenes to depict the verbatim editing process.



## 3. Character and Narrative

Sometimes both the characters and narratives that feature in our productions are real – they might be people we've met throughout the research phase, or they might be stories that we've collected. In this instance, we try to play them verbatim and use a convention so that the audience know they are real. But we often need to fill in the gaps or use our artistic licence to create interesting and relevant characters that will feature in the story. This sees us play a lot at the start of a process and use improvisation.



## 4. Exposing the Method

There is always an element or layer to our productions that we call 'exposing the method.' This means that we try to incorporate ways of heightening the action on stage with some insight into the background of how we made the show, or the choices or editing we've conducted throughout the process. Many of these techniques hark back to Brechtian traits such as alienation effects; reminding the





audience that they are here in the theatre and that the issues they see on stage are real issues currently happening in our society.

Examples of some of these techniques we might include are; performer interruptions or disagreements; breaking the action, breaking the fourth wall, commenting on the scene staging or costume, non-acting, multi-rolling/swapping character, asides...

Using techniques such as these are by no means original to the work of The Paper Birds – in fact they are present in many contemporary artists' work, but nonetheless, they are always present in some essence in our work.

## 5.Motif

Motif is commonplace throughout all of art, and within The Paper Birds' productions, it features heavily. The motifs we incorporate can take the form of textual or language references, physical or movement, sound or musical, or symbolic or visual recurring motifs.

In each production we choose a selection of motifs that suit the content and the style of the piece. In our production *Broke*, we incorporated several styles of motif;

*Textual – found text from Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory which depicted a fairytale take on poverty.*

*Visual – imagery of 'golden tickets'.*

*Movement – fast forwarding and rewinding through scenes.*

*Sound and music – childlike music created on toy xylophone and rubber piano.*

So for us, motif can be one of many different conventions.

