

Putting Water on the Table

Making theatre together in a group. Sometimes everything works so beautifully, and you end up with the synergetic creation of something greater than all its parts; at other times the contrary and variegated energies in the room can seem impossible to align.

I've been lucky recently to be working on several different projects which have taken me around this beautiful country – to Lake Hawea with the women of Flat Out Productions making their version of *Macbeth (Witches over Wanaka)*, and currently to Leigh, where I'm working with choreographer Ann Dewey on her new piece *The Knitting Show*. I've also been collaborating with Maria Dabrowska on her new dance/theatre work *Carnival Hound* (inspired by her mother's experiences as a Polish refugee from the Second World War), which premiered in Wellington last month in the fantastic new venue The Print Factory. So I've been thinking a lot about the group devising process.

Working with others is always a great opportunity to learn. To watch yourself in a room and observe your own behaviour, noticing what you do well and also your 'areas for growth'. To learn from the way your fellow artists work creatively with their collaborators. To try to find a balance between speaking clearly in your own voice and listening to others. To find a way to do both with grace and humour.

I've been thinking a lot about generosity, and how it spreads across a group. It's well-articulated in the biblical story of the loaves and fishes; when one child offers his meagre piece of bread, it empowers everybody to follow suit, which eventuates in a feast for all. When we offer what we have to share, and are clear and honest in asking for what

we need, groups and communities can run smoothly.

But when greed, fear and doubt rear their heads – fear that our needs won't be met, greed for things we don't really need, doubt in others' abilities or our own – that's when difficulties set in. That's when a different spirit can settle across a group, one which also spreads like a virus. A mindset of judgement, blame-laying and segregation.

Our society seems quite comfortable operating in this zone – media discussion of 'The Recession' and swine flu focus on fear and blame. It's an easy default setting to which we are well attuned in our Western culture. To point out faults with others' proposals can make us seem knowledgeable and discerning, while in contrast focusing on the positive can appear wishy-washy and indiscriminate.

Artists are often revered for being stubborn and un-bending in their vision. A certain amount of this quality is crucial; Lloyd Newson of DV8 talks of being like a horse with blinkers on: you have to block some things out so you can keep moving forward. But he also speaks of keeping your ears open – listening to the criticism and commentary about your work whilst retaining your creative drive.

Lao Tzu talks about the way of water: it is the highest way because it opposes nothing yet is stopped by nothing. If it comes to a rock it doesn't fight it, nor try to break it down – it simply flows around it. I try to keep this in mind in the construction of a theatre work.

And I try to keep in mind the faith and trust of that little boy who offered his meagre piece of bread to the thousands, believing it would somehow help. Actually, these are some of the most exciting moments

Inside this issue:

* reports and photos from Recharge: The Gathering (pages 3, 4 & 13)



* our new web site and domain name! (page 5)

* Randai, by Megan Collins (page 9-10)

* reviews of recent performances (pages 7 & 8)



Top photo: Kazz Funky Blue MCs the Closing Night Open Stage party at Recharge: The Gathering.

Lower photo: Michelle Scullion in The Rodwell Monologues.

in a devising process: when the way forward is obscured by a bend in the road and you sit together as a group united in unknowing, trusting that there is a way forward and believing it will eventuate, but not knowing how, where or who the answer will come from. Yet it always comes.

Jo Randerson

Autumn in Wellington brings some of the most settled weather we ever get, perfect for nesting and preparing for winter: preserving fruit from the garden, patching leaks, battening down the hatches. It's a time for attending to those domestic tasks that were neglected during the heady excitement of the late summer. And exciting it has been, with the Gathering and the new web site climaxing at the same time.

As you will read in this newsletter and on the web site, the Gathering was once again a great success, and a real recharge for those who participated. Because many people have other commitments at Easter, we are looking at holding the 2010 Gathering at Queen's Birthday weekend (early June next year). This will also make it a slightly smaller event. Funding is tighter than ever (if that's possible!) and everyone has many demands on their time. So pencil in the first weekend of June 2010 and watching this space for further information.

The new web site means that we are managing the membership database and lots more online, with



great efficiency improvements. As might be expected, there are some teething problems, so we thank you for your patience if you encounter any problems with the site. Please do have a look, and contribute!

In August, Madeline and Helen will be at the Odin Teatret in Denmark, attending the 6th Transit Festival with Magdalenas from around the world. Madeline will present *The Vegetable Phoenix* as a work-in-progress, and Helen will collaborate again on *Women with Big Eyes*. Helen will also be working with Antonella Diana at Teatret OM, Denmark, in May-June.

We held the AGM during the Gathering, which guaranteed a good turnout, as you can see in the photo below from the meeting.

Lisa Reflects

Ko Wharangi te maunga, ko Waipahihi te awa, ko Raukawa te moana, ko Tau Iwi te iwi, ko Scottish raua ko Welsh oku hapu. No Whanganui a Tara ahau. Ko Lisa Maule toku ingoa. Ko Giovanni raua ko Kezia aku tamariki. The performing arts are my work, mostly in the areas of lighting and management. I have been a Magdalena Aotearoa Trustee since 1997.

Reflection: being in a demanding theatre related job (teaching) offers opportunities to reflect and exchange ideas of theatre practise on a daily

basis. Sometimes pulling up weeds, mulching branches and planting violas is a good antidote to this.

Planning: to focus a lot of attention onto the *Southern Corridor Project* - a participatory inter-art project between Maori and Somalian communities in Wellington which is now gearing up.

Networks: our friends and colleagues are important to us and I respect deeply those friendships which have big gaps of time in between and yet can still connect and offer to each other again. A generous human spirit is <shirly>

The Magdalena Aotearoa Trust is a charitable trust that aims to encourage and promote the work of women in the performing arts.

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Madeline McNamara & Sally Rodwell

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Newsletter contributions are welcome, but may be edited.

Email contributions to:

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The deadline for the next issue is 31 October 2009

one of the most valued.

Acknowledgement: the ocean is important to me. The boundary between water and land and the sky and land are areas of keen interest. I am interested in definitions of 'edge'.

Question: how come children sometimes do what you say and some time they just really don't?

Blog: I might - on the new website about the *Southern Corridor Project* - have any of you ever blogged?

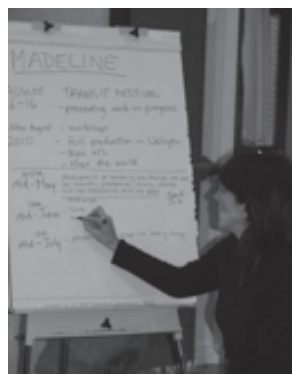
Statement: shadows are great things to be watching.

Lisa Maule

Once again the Gathering has provided a space for sharing, exchange, feedback and recharging: 5 days, 6 presentations, delicious lunches, inspiring discussions . . . feedback feast!

Six works-in-progress were presented: *The Vegetable Phoenix* by Madeline McNamara; *The Hooligan and the Lady* by Pauleen Hayes; *Winter Overture Extracted* by Challen Wilson and Cathy Rexford; *Watch Your Tongue Young Lady* by Judith Jones, *Shadow of a White Rose in a Silver Mirror* by Jade Valour; and *bodies without shadow (?)* by Jak Trolove. The presentations were diverse in terms of stage of development, content and form. Each was followed by a rich discussion - enhanced this year by invited responders, specific people from whom the presenters wanted to hear feedback. This brought a lot of new people into the Gathering, particularly to Challen and Cathy's session - the audience nearly doubled!

As well as discussion, there was room to experiment: Madeline was inspired to direct a short improvisation with Jade on one moment from her presentation; Judith invited everyone to choose a button from a basket as a starting point for our own stories; and Jak's session got everyone playing with



salt, milk, paper and light. A one-hour gap in the programme on Sunday afternoon provided the opportunity to try out a new idea: the four presenters (who had already presented) were given 15 minutes each to quickly brainstorm with the group the key points from their presentation and discussion.

These were written down on a big sheet of paper, which was then rolled up as a scroll and handed to the artist. The key points included dates to work towards, names of people to contact, ideas to develop, and important points to remember.

Now that we have three Gatherings under our belt, we can reflect on the traditions and processes that are evolving. We found ourselves at times critiquing and improving the process, and trying out ideas as they arose,

such as the next steps session. The post-Gathering evaluations speak of a desire to be more critical, affirming that people trust the space that's been created over the last two years.

A writing workshop challenged us to write reviews and feedback. We discussed what makes a good review, how to write one, and where reviews could be published.

The panel discussion on remote

collaboration gave an insight into two very different remote working methodologies - that of Challen Wilson whose writing collaborator lives in Alaska, and myself, who works via the internet with people located anywhere in the world, many of whom I never meet.

It wasn't all brain-work; the mornings began with physical training led by Adèle Chapman

and Jade Valour, and on Saturday morning we had a Randai demonstration and workshop. We all got to wear the special baggy pants, which are whacked to produce a percussion sound. Coordinating everything is harder than it looks - but lots of fun.

The Closing Night Open Stage Concert Party Extravaganza Spectacular was a veritable explosion of spontaneous virtuosity, where those who had been less in the spotlight during the Gathering got to strut their stuff to an audience of screaming (sicko)fan(t)s. Kazz liberated her natural talent for MCing, I finally overcame my hula-hoop handicap, Caz brought out her inner clown, a new character erupted from Madeline's dressing gown and Jade realised her long-held dream to be a rock star - amongst other captivating theatrical feats.

With all this and delicious lunches, we were recharged to capacity - gorged, even; and now we must digest.

Helen Varley Jamieson

Photos: left, Helen writes up Madeline's next steps; centre, Randai demonstration; top, Jessica reads our her review.

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There is a special excitement for the tribe of disparate and committed performers and others who meet in the space offered by the Gathering to discuss and review work in progress. There is compassionate wisdom in the feedback processes developed to be both truthful and encouraging. When you're cooking well, things really happen! (a metaphor for the appreciation of our fine cooks, Moira Aberdeen and Kazz Funky Blue). I was impressed by the spontaneous creation, and allocation of time, to a new step added to the process of support so that practitioners could take away a manuscript scripted with next steps and timeline.

It takes courage to present to such distinguished groups of practitioners. I know this for myself this year, having brought out my clown for his/her second only solo at the Concert night, after three years training. There were more highlights than I can name, so I will just mention a few:

- visual artist Jak Trolove's invitation for us to physically explore the materiality of black and white. We were offered pails of milk, piles of salt and the light cast upon a screen. A focused and anarchic adult play session evolved. Experiments were photographed and filmed. I remain intensely interested in the results.

- Madeline's delivery of a brilliantly written self-reflective exposé on artistic process at the end of her discussion of issues to arise within her next piece. I loved this balance of the deeply serious and the truly hilarious, the comic in our human efforts to grapple with the overwhelming amount of material the world offers.

- crowded like an extended family on a public holiday into a small space covered in cushions to be enchanted by Judith Jone's delightfully various stories.

- Kazz, MC from another time dimension, holding us her audience at the Concert in the rapt attention of 'what will happen next?'

These are but moments that jump to mind right now. Yes I came away feeling recharged (as advertised), more hopeful, more belonging to this curious tribe that shifts and morphs and always seeks depth and joy and sharing.

So, it is a real tribute to Magdalena, and the great organising skills of Helen Varley Jamieson, that this has happened for the third year now, running almost entirely grant-free, year in year out, on the smell of an oily rag, transforming the old Community Centre in Newtown with its lovely dedicated theatre space for that extra long Easter weekend.

Caz Sheldon



Magdalena Recharge – yes! Another inspiring Easter Gathering! Enormous thanks to Helen Varley Jamieson in particular for her tenacity in keeping these lifeline comings together coming. And appreciative acknowledgment and gratitude to the Trustees who willed it to be and the team who wove it together . . .

I chose to launch – preview really – my (almost) finished work *The Bone Keeper's Story* in Wellington in conjunction with Recharge, and while economically the decision to have a season over Easter was foolish, there was no other group of people I would rather have at its birth. Magdalena the midwife, who else? An intelligent insightful community who slapped the show's bottom and held it in its squirming newness with attention and respect, cooed over its wrinkly beauty and still gave sensible advice on its upbringing and nurturing!

I am a rapt devotee of the mentoring function of Magdalena's peer feedback process. I am a theatre artist whose reality is that of a working mother – yet with the ridiculous compulsion to create artistic babies and bring them to birth, then nurture and bring them up on the side – which brings me to treasure the companionship of other theatre artists who must do the same. The collective wisdom, generosity, awesome breadth of talent and will for the work to realise its potential, makes the Gathering a numinous space . . .

The two things that sum up what will stay with me from this Gathering came up in the closing round:

- Adele talking about the importance of *witnessing*: of witnessing work because of its profound importance to the artist, and because its completion requires it to be witnessed; and

- Janet's comment (that for me complements Adele's) that all our work is of the spirit.

Somehow those two pearls crystallise for me the essence of this year's Recharge, help me to redefine my artistic purpose, and propel me with a sense of shared identity and self-respect into the next phase of work – putting it out there!

Helen Moran

Note: see the back page for information about getting involved in Helen's tour of *The Bonekeeper's Story*.

Christchurch Gets a Fringe

Not to be left out, the Christchurch Arts Festival is establishing a Fringe Festival for the city.

Fringe in the Frost (23 July – 9 August 2009) is a programme of short sharp acts in intimate venues located in and around Cathedral Square, which transforms during the Festival period into the magical Winter Garden.

Performances will be scheduled during lunchtime on weekdays and 6:00–8:00pm from Wednesday to Sunday. With tickets priced at a mere \$5–\$10, the Fringe will engage curious audience members traversing the square, heading into or out of another Festival event, or seeking out the next rising talent in a fun and experimental atmosphere.

For more information contact Melanie Burge, phone (03) 365 2223 ext 34 or email melanie@artsfestival.co.nz.

Arts Hub in Wellington

There are plans to establish an Arts Hub within the Toi Poneke Arts Centre in Abel Smith Street. The Hub will be an interactive city-wide focal point for information and resource sharing for arts development and participation – a portal to services, activity, knowledge, practitioners, organisations and communities.

Staffed by existing City Arts team members, possibly other paid workers and volunteers, the Hub aims to strengthen arts information sharing, resource sharing, collaboration and partnership across the arts sector and across the wider community. It will house resources, information, conversations and activities in a self-directed and interactive space.

At this stage, the Hub has been proposed as part of the WCC's draft Long Term Council Community Plan. Watch this space . . .

Raffle Winners

During the recent season of *The Rodwell Monologues* at BATS Theatre, we planned to sell copies of *Gonne Strange Charity*, the monologues by Sally Rodwell



which are the basis of the show. However, when we learned that there were only TWO copies of this fabulous book left to sell, we decided a raffle was the only fair thing to do. Magdalena trustees and volunteers flogged raffle tickets nightly throughout the season, raising \$400 - half of which went to Sally's daughter Ruby Brunton, and the other half towards Recharge: The Gathering.

The lucky winners of these precious books are Debs Rae of BATS Theatre, and Michael Robins of Aro Valley. Congratulations!

www.magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz

The Magdalena Aotearoa Trust has launched its new web site and domain name:
www.magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz.

The new site incorporates blogs and forums, which you can sign up to contribute to, and online payments for your newsletter subscription, donations and event fees. The web site is integrated with an online database which we are now using to administer our membership database and many other aspects of the Trust's activities.

Drupal, a web site content management system, and CiviCRM, a membership database system, are the technologies behind it all. Both are open source applications, which means that they are free and supported by a large international community of users and developers. CiviCRM has been developed specifically for NGOs and community groups to be able to efficiently manage their constituent information online. We are already feeling the benefits!

The Trust would like to thank the Lion Foundation for funding part of the development; Actrix for assistance with the installation and configuration, and site hosting; Miriam Richardson of MyWebWorkshop for doing all the tricky stuff and Helen Varley Jamieson for coordinating the whole project and making it happen.

Check it out, sign up, blog about your latest project and go on, try out the payment processor! And don't forget to update your address book with our new email address: info@magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz



Bipeds Productions

Bipeds Productions ripped into 2009 with two performances. *The Rodwell Monologues* featured Kilda and myself in fully-fledged comedic mode - relishing the incredible writing of Sally Rodwell. This was the first time either of us had delivered a monologue on stage - PHEW!!! Big challenges! But along with the rest of the stellar divas we got a few laughs and in the end had a fantastic time.

Once that show was up we launched full speed in to getting our new show *Lily* up for a season in Dunedin April 1 - 5 on the main stage of the Fortune Theatre. This show about Dunedin dance pioneer Lily Stevens was well received - good reviews, full houses and really great feedback from audiences. We formed partnerships with three



Karetao Journey

You may have been aware that at the Easter Gathering I planned to launch an account of my experiences with Karetao - one name for esteemed Maori ancestral puppets - currently in museums in Aotearoa and overseas. But the process whereby this account sees the light of day requires more time. To begin with after the Gathering Challen Wilson, her daughter Lotus and myself set-off on the first stage of a hikoi to give the document to people - both Maori and Pakeha - who have supported and encouraged this work over the past 30 years

Traditionally Karetao were made and animated for a variety of purposes but the main purpose as identified by Hirini Melbourne is the healing of land and people. The account is imbued with the energy of this kaupapa and our hikoi included visiting and giving the account to Dr Rangimarie Rose Pere (Waikaremoana), Glenys Macdonald (Karangahake Gorge), Brian Potiki and Jill Walker (Roto Ehu), Vivien Johnson (Havelock North), Rapai Te Hau (Mahia) and others.

Performing *The Blue Shoe Show*, solo shadow theatre, has been my passport to this work and puppeteers

local dance schools and incorporated 32 young students into the show. BUT some good food for thought came from my first dance teachers who the show was dedicated to. They and other former students struggled with aspects of the show and felt we hadn't honoured Lily well enough - this was very humbling; it feels rare in Pakeha culture to go back to our elders for permission about our stories. So, we are processing their viewpoint with respect to how we may develop the performance; interesting developments to contemplate.

At this stage *Lily* will tour late 2010/11 and we are currently looking for touring partners. I am taking a big breath and beginning to think about a new work with a working title of *The Continual Pressure of Wonder*. Kilda has two creative projects on the go this year, with Turid Revfiem who is the ballet mistress for the Royal New Zealand Ballet and Malia Johnson who is the artistic director of the World of Wearable Art and director of Rifleman Productions.

Watch this space as the future unfolds with utmost creativity.

Arohanui to all of you.

Lyne Pringle



and puppetry both nationally and internationally. My wanderings resulted in extended periods of time in Japan including organising a group to go to see a 1,500 year old living tradition similar to Karetao, in a Shinto Shrine of southern Japan in 2004. My account includes photos and description of this extraordinary ritual involving a God Sumo wrestling puppet.

This year's hikoi marks the conclusion of my involvement in the work with Karetao. Maori performers, filmmakers, dancers, carvers, artists, storytellers in Te Reo Maori carry on the work. Just as we have come to appreciate the sound dimension of the revived Taonga Puuoro (Maori musical instruments) on radio, television, film and in music of many styles, I hope that one day we will also experience the practice of Karetao in contemporary culture.

If you would like a copy of "Living Treasures - Maori Karetao and Japanese Kugutsu in the context of puppetry practice" please contact me at rosebeauchamp@actrix.co.nz giving your contact details. No information about Karetao is to be placed or distributed on a website.

Rose Beauchamp

The Rodwell Monologues

BATS Theatre, Wellington, 28 Feb 2009 to 7 March 2009

Sally Rodwell, of Red Mole Theatre Company, developed a series of characters through written and performed monologues from the seeds of 'Clown' work first introduced to New Zealand by Francis Batten and Theatre Action in early 1970s.

'Clown as comic fool' was not the notion, but the foibles, fears, frustrations and ironies of life caught in close encounters within the family, or with the next door neighbour or the supermarket check-out girl gave plenty of scope for anti-heroic characters.

Over many years Sally exploited the concept to the max and would have been thrilled by the romping, roaring aplomb with which these six actors revisit her characters in the season at BATS. They enter in a mess of business, then drape themselves, chorus fashion, around the sides of the stage.

First up is Carmel McGlone, whose metamorphosis as the guileless Stella Strange is a consummate triumph of patter of 'Come-on-home-and-meet-Phil-that's-Dad'. Her every gesture, word and blink is played so convincingly that you later look to the printed programme to read about Stella not Carmel.

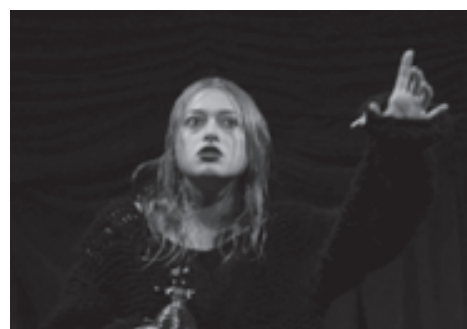
Music slips in on the off-beat and wonderful sound effects are crooned and bopped from the cast, with return refrains guided throughout the show with much spirit by singer/composer Michelle Scullion.

Kilda Northcott playing Rhonda Gonne enters through a wild dance and then settles to profile the determined resident of Berhampore. Her impeccable sense of timing and the nonchalance with which surreal pronouncements



are posed and delivered is mesmerizing.

Chelsie Preston Crayford, in a duo with Chewing Gum, profiles another facet of Stella-on-holiday-with-



the-family-then-oh-dear-leaving-home, and her flawless performance looks as good as it sounds.

Lyne Pringle, always a vibrant stage presence, carries great conviction as Rhonda and would not easily be persuaded to change her ways. Vanessa Stacey brings a



rich voice to the Rhonda character and has the acumen of a seasoned actor in delivering a preposterous scenario.

Janet Dunn has the whacky dress-ups just right, and with Madeline McNamara as 'Outside Eye' there's nothing to wish different in this picaresque hour. It doesn't get much better than this.

Jennifer Shennan

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www.theatreview.org.nz

An Immediate Edge

This is immediate theatre, it's impact is instant. Why? I believe, because it's about what we know, who we know - girls from the Hutt, Berhampore. Our city, our country. These are ordinary, familiar and relateable stories that give us the delicious opportunity to laugh at ourselves.



Drawn from a series of vignettes, they are seamlessly connected within an atmosphere reminiscent of 1970s late night Wellington cafes. The onstage musical arrangement supports with passion, the quirks and depths of the performances.

Out of an almost deceptively simple style like that of stream of consciousness writing, the actors have created fully rounded sometimes larger than life characters; rough diamonds, showing their blunt edges, the complex variables that a human being is made up of.

There is an edge to Sally Rodwell's writing as she weaves her humorous stories. You get a glimpse of the real world behind these characters, their hopes and disappointments.

This is creative theatre. The performers are polished and yet retain an element of improvisation, room to surprise and they did - often.

Adèle Chapman

The Bonekeeper's Story

Written by Helen Moran
and Kathleen Gallagher
Performed by Helen Moran
Wellington Performing Arts
Centre, 10-11 April 2009

As I entered the large deep space of the Wellington Performing Arts theatre I felt hushed by the darkness and the evocative soundtrack of waves crashing loudly on to the sea shore. A stark, round silver/black moon hung almost insubstantially over a bare floor littered with three long heaps of driftwood. I was in a realm I knew well, the beach is a place we grow up with, it can be a place where we go to walk and dream.

Soft, intimate singing rose up from the floor as a woman emerged from a pile of driftwood, her dress suggestive of homelessness, with long unkempt hair. Helen Moran immediately drew me in to her intimate world of movement, song and a monologue of connected and disconnected images of a woman reminiscing on the past, evoking times of plenty and the changes inherent in life bringing her to this extraordinary land/mindscape where simplicity and nature were all that she needed.



constructed from driftwood, Death clung to Helen's body as she talked into the seascape: walking alongside her, merging with her, weighing her down with its fateful promise, becoming a friend.

Using sand, a rusted cake tin and a hand drum that created its own set of exquisite sounds and movements, Helen conveyed for me a female archetype that was timeless and earthy with a touch of Celtic magic. With spare effective lighting, *The Bonekeeper's Story* is intimate theatre and allows us to make our own connections to life and death, our place in the scheme of things.

Adèle Chapman



Serendipity

Written by Sugu Pillay
Directed by Bronwyn Tweddle
BATS Theatre, 17-28 March 2009

I was looking forward to seeing Sugu Pillay's play *Serendipity* at BATS Theatre after she had talked about the script at the 2008 Magdalena Aotearoa Gathering. One scene, that of Tamil Tiger guerilla women as suicide bombers, was extracted and workshopped as an improvisation at that Gathering.

The play is stunningly relevant given its subject matter, Sri Lankan unrest being a current news topic. It was however disconcerting that the director, Bronwyn Tweddle, used a physical theatre methodology that sat uncomfortably with the work. The actors needed much more rehearsal time to be conversant with this jerky movement system which came across as having little connection with the subject matter of the play.

The play has some very interesting material, but would benefit from trimming and from a design that brought out the Sri Lankan culture and spirituality more.

In particular, the use of a projected image of a God figure with a voiceover has great potential for helping to enhance the story of a young New Zealand-born Sri Lankan woman trying to make sense of her family and cultural heritage.

Given the limited number of mature male actors in Wellington who could play a Sri Lankan priest, Tony Hopkins did a credible and sensitive performance. Ban Abul as the central female character was fine until she interacted with her Maori ex-lover, played by Waylon Edwards, at which point she would, without fail, lapse into an unsubtle shouting anger. This Maori-Sri Lankan liaison was one of the most interesting elements of the play and I hope to see this relationship given more depth in future productions. Overall, this is an interesting and topical work which deserves further development.

Janet Dunn



Maria Dabrowska's new dance work *Carnival Hound*, with dramaturgical input from Jo Randerson, premiered at The Print Factory in April. The starting point for the work was Maria's mother's story of fleeing Poland during World War II.

Dr Megan Collins is an ethnomusicologist who works with performers and researchers of West Sumatra music and dance. Her PhD was on the sung story-telling of the rabab Pasisia fiddle, and for the past seven years she has taught ethnomusicology at Massey and Victoria universities (New Zealand School of Music). We were honoured to have her lead a Randai demonstration and workshop at the Gathering, and here she gives a background to this artform.

Randai is a folk theatre tradition from West Sumatra in Indonesia. Developed around the turn of the 20th century it incorporates three ancient elements of West Sumatran music and dance tradition. These are story-telling (kaba), solo singing (dendang) and martial art (silek).

The province of West Sumatra is also known as Minangkabau. The dominant ethnicity who live there are called 'the Minangkabau' and their language is also known by that name. The word frequently gets shortened to Minang, meaning Minang people or 'orang awak' - which basically means 'our people' or 'us'.

Randai is only found in West Sumatra and tells both ancient and contemporary stories of the Minangkabau based on their matrilineal way of life. It is an artistic expression of their regional identity. Such art forms are important in a large country like Indonesia where there are over 300 different ethnic groups speaking more than 500 languages. The dominant ethnicity, the Javanese, number 130 million, while the Minang population is around 4 million - about the same as New Zealand.

For Minangkabau people their matrilineal social system means that married couples live in the bride's childhood home, and that agricultural land, mainly rice fields, is owned and controlled multi-laterally by grandmothers and great aunts. Although these cultural practises have been criticised by some Islamic leaders and even denounced as heretical in the past, West Sumatrans are staunchly protective of their matrilineal institutions and see no contradiction between that and their Islamic faith.

Randai is most popular in the

highland or darek region of West Sumatra. The highland region consists of Luhak nan Tigo or the 'three districts', namely Payokumbuh, Agam and Tanah Datar, which are located in the valleys and plateaus surrounding three large volcanoes, Mount Merapi, Mount Singgalang and Mount Sago. In these areas people generally support themselves through rice farming (both wet and dry), small time animal husbandry, and crops such as cinnamon, coffee and vegetables. Trade and artisan industries such as weaving, carving and precious metal work are also important.



Randai is performed at night, often for a wedding celebration or village party. Each show lasts between 3-4 hours with a meal break for the performers in between. This meal is important because the troupes are generally non-professional village ensembles. The performance fee goes to sustain the troupe, rather than to individual players. Troupes rehearse weekly and perform one or two stories specific to their village. Although randai began as a male pursuit developed from the silek martial arts since the 1970s both men and women have performed randai.

A feature of randai is the slapping

and clapping pants percussion, achieved by hitting the long baggy gusset of the black dance pants worn by the troupe. Booming percussion sounds reverberate across the performance space as dancers clap (tapuak) their hands in interlocking rhythms and slap the galombang pants, with an effect like flicking a large tea towel.

For the Magdalena show I put together a mini-randai consisting of four dendang songs that created a half-hour demonstration show. This mini-randai was the result of collaboration between Minang dance practitioner Kirstin Pauka from Hawaii University and myself.

In a full-length show there would usually be 12-14 different songs. Each song accompanies choreography, danced in a round that forms the boundaries of the 'stage' around which the audience sits. Once the dance is completed a number of dancers become the actors and step into the middle to act out the play. Each scene thus begins and ends with a danced song.

The songs tell what is about to happen in the following acted scenes and also comments on what has just occurred in the previous scene. Such repetition is a feature of the Minang kaba story-telling format and essential at randai performances in West Sumatra, where the atmosphere is noisy and celebratory. Much like a pub performance in New Zealand, people chat to their friends through the show and come and go eating snacks and drinking coffee.

Musically as well as the solo singing, the bamboo saluang and bansi flutes are also played during a randai as are the small hand-held gong pots called talempong. The

continued on page 10

Randai cont.

feature of talempong music is its interlocking nature. A rhythm is performed by player one, on the on-beats (holding 2 gongs) and player two performs a counter rhythm, on the off beats, (holding 2 gongs) - thus a fast paced melody is created.

The kaba we performed for Magdalena, “Upiak and Sutan” is a story I have written based on kaba themes from Minang with local NZ twists. The heroine Upiak is newly married to Sutan but the young couple are denied their matrilineal inheritance because Upiak’s evil uncle is developing the family land for a shrimp farm. Her elderly aunties are distraught because they are unable to provide for their niece. Sutan has troubles of his own because he sold his magic cloth to a mysterious stranger for a parcel of land he has yet to see. The couple go to confront the uncle at a family engagement party but the uncle is too busy gambling to talk. But Sutan recognises the uncle as the man he

sold his magic cloth to and the land he obtained for payment was in fact Upiak’s family land, wrongly sold by the uncle. This story ends happily although not all randai stories do.

Following the performance my randai friends and I held a workshop where twenty participants were able to try on the galombang pants and learn the first song *Simerantang*. The choreography for this song I learnt while studying in West Sumatra with leading Minang choreographer Bapak Zulkifli. He heads the Theatre Department at the Conservatorium of Music and Dance at Padangpanjang,



*Interested in joining the
Kiwi randai troupe?
Please email Megan on
megan.collins71@gmail.com*

Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia (STSI) Padangpanjang, Indonesia. Since its inception it has primarily been concerned with the preservation and development of Sumatran music, in particular the music and dance of the Minanagkabau. Traditional performing arts are taught as topics of study in performance and research at STSI Padangpanjang, as well as forming the basis for the writing of new compositions and choreographies.

One week after the Magdalena Gathering I met up with Bapak Zulkifli while he was on tour with STSI Padangpanjang. He was very pleased to hear that randai had finally made it to New Zealand!

*Megan Collins
Petone, Wellington*

Randai photos by Robert Catto, from The Seven Ages of Man, 2008.

Cooking up a vegetable phoenix

Thanks to another fabulous Gathering, I, as one of the presenting artists, left with a surfeit of feedback, encouragement, promises of assistance from talented colleagues, three new work-in-progress deadlines to meet before I head off for Transit and a commitment from many to attend those three gropings towards the performance that I will eventually present there in August. Well the thrilling and cram-packed Transit programme arrived this week from Holstebro, Denmark and there I am in it, along with Helen and other women artists from around the globe. I feel very honoured to be presenting work. *The Vegetable Phoenix* (work in progress) is scheduled for Friday 14th August at 12 noon. That is a cold, hard fact.

So now to the work of wresting with the ‘unsubmergables’ as Jo Randerson called them at Easter. Those ideas, images, impulses, and feelings that cannot be repressed. The ones that rise again and again

to the surface both day and night. Since the Gathering it is clear that my unsubmergables are many (though fewer than pre-Gathering). All are now fighting for a place at the table of *The Vegetable Phoenix*. They are: ‘the goblin tree’, my first recurring childhood nightmare; the unraveling of the mysteries of critical whiteness theory and its relationship to Aotearoa’s colonial history, the Treaty of Waitangi and anti-racism practice; a palette of words, colour and design possibilities that includes opacity and transparency, shadow and occlusion, partial seeing and blindness, blackouts and white-outs, smoke screens, mirrors, and veils, cloudiness, mist, fog and foam, powdery surfaces, ghost writing, smudging and invisible ink, white-outs, twink, rub-outs, erasure, deletion and palimpsest, cover ups, conjury, and chicanery, sleight of hand, trickery and deceit; the origins of projective technologies as manifest in the

seventeenth century phenomenon of ‘the phantasmagoria’ made famous by Belgian physicist, balloonist and magic lanternist Etienne Gaspar Robert; an exploration of clowning inspired by the photographic series *Pierrot the photographer* by Felix Nadar exhibited at the 1855 Universal Exhibition in Paris and the work of NZ artist Margaret Dawson also inspired by the same exhibition; metatheatre; ‘le philosophique de palingenisie’ by Swiss naturalist Claude Bonnet, and in particular Athanasius Kircher’s description of the ‘vegetable phoenix’ an alchemical procedure for revivifying a decayed or annihilated flower or plant; and the ‘attitudes’ of Lady Hamilton also known as Emma Hart and the tradition of tableaux vivants. These are the ingredients. It’s winter, time for a boil up.

My three Tuesday work-in-progress deadlines 19 May, 23 June, 21 July. Will notify of venues. All welcome.

Madeline McNamara

Costumier and recycled fashion designer Janet Dunn gives us a glimpse of what she's been up to lately.

So far 2009 has been action packed for me and my garment stockpile. I participated in a Valentine day charity fashion show, and did costumes for *The Rodwell Monologues* in the Fringe and for the gorgeous Randerson-LaHood wedding. These overlapping worlds have common themes of community, awakening, and a constant working through of how to live in these times, precariously at the fringes of the orthodox commerce system. As Rhonda Gonne advises, 'make the most out of late capitalism before it makes a late great out of you.'

Then, of course, there was Recharge: The Gathering. For me it was not so much a recharging, as a reminder of how much we can achieve in spite of small resources.

The presence of Philly Caignou, with her wonderful camera eye, and the perseverance of Helen the Duchess to get the website launched, mean that we now have great tools (as long as there isn't an apocalyptic event that wipes out the digital technology world) to enable us to stay true to the aims of Magdalena even if we are scattered around the city, the country and the planet.

Following the Gathering, I was involved in *She Wore a Becoming Dress* at the Film Archive. It was the first in a series of three collaborative arts projects with Maori artists and scholars examining the terrain of intercultural dialogue between individuals of a dominant culture and an indigenous culture on the topics of sex, knowledge and power. These projects are for Miki Seifert's PhD research titled *Seeds of Dialogue*. It struck me that this is terrain shared by Magdalena gathering presenters, in particular Madeline and Jak Trolove who are working, through different media, with themes of whiteness and biculturalism. It was great



to find people with fresh perspectives to enrich these debates. The form of *She Wore a Becoming Dress* was Butoh, a dance-based performance style that originated in Japan post World War II as response to the horrors of nuclear warfare. My brief as costume designer was to dress a bunch of characters each for Miki and her co-



creator and co-performer Anahera Gildea. As Mother, Bride, Dusky Maiden and Ballerina, Anahera's aim was to be invisible and transparent. Miki's layers were dense, tailored and structured, with deformed body parts at chest and thigh that kept the audience guessing as to just how slight she was until the costumeless end.

They gradually divested themselves of their grotesque layers of clothing on a runway against a projected background of strangely distorted fashion models and extreme close-ups of people caressing themselves. The performance is improvised within touch points, and is stunning to watch. My impression is that the costume-fashion crossover, which makes such a strong statement about women's bodies in terms of bondage and freedom, is more to the fore in this performance than the dominant culture/indigenous culture dialogue.

This work as well as our Gatherings, which go from strength to strength in developing a culture of feedback and response, are great starting points for me to explore ideas for my own 'intelligent fashion show' which I aim to present as work in progress at the next Gathering, in June 2010.

Janet Dunn

Left, Anahera Gildea, and above, Miki Seifert, in *She Wore A Becoming Dress*. Photos by Pooria Koleyni. Centre, Phillipa Caignou documenting the Gathering.

STOP PRESS - ReDUNN IN NEWTOWN

162 Riddiford St Newtown

Janet Dunn's collection will be available from this gallery shop in Newtown until mid-June, with weekend Salons and the possibility of other activities such as refashioning classes. She is also looking for anyone else who wants to sell their art and craft there in return for sharing the running of the gallery. Contact Janet on 04 3849896 (studio), 021 0299 2182 or janetdunnfashion@paradise.net.nz

Transit VI

The sixth Transit International Festival of Women's Performance takes place at Odin Teatret, Denmark, 6-16 August 2009. This festival takes place roughly every three years and is organised by Julia Varley, one of the founders of the Magdalena Project, and her capable assistant Luciana Bazzo.

The first Transit I attended was in 2001, and I can honestly say it changed my life. I was immersed for 10 days with women theatre practitioners ranging from young students to senior practitioners with a wealth of experience, who had travelled from all corners of the globe to spend this time together. It was a freezing Danish winter but inside the theatres were warm, and anyway there was barely a moment to sit still and think about the snow outside. This was where I first presented my experimental cyberformance (live performance on the internet) to a theatre audience, and the response was one that still challenges and provokes me to this day - inspiring me to keep exploring, questioning, trying.

This time, Transit is being held during the summer, and it will be interesting to see what a difference this makes - especially after our own Gathering where every morning I walked to the community centre in brilliant sunshine, and felt a pang of regret at going into the building. But the sunny day outside was quickly forgotten in the intensity of the work - I expect it will be the same at Transit.

I'll be working once more on the collaborative project *Women With Big Eyes*, begun at Transit V and developed last year in Cuba. I'll also start work with others on something in memory of Cristina Wistari, who died last year. She had begun working on a solo, and those of us who were collaborating with her on it will meet at Transit to discuss what we might do with her material.

Madeline is coming to Transit this year, bringing her solo *The Vegetable Phoenix* as a work-in-progress. Dawn Albinger from Australia is also taking a work-in-progress, *No Door On Her Mouth*. What else leaps out at me from the programme? *Why the Child is Cooking in the Polenta* is the intriguing title of a performance by Gilla Cremer; Exile Theatre from Afghanistan and Bond Street Theatre from New York will present *Beyond The Mirror* and Teatro Nascoti (Italy/Kurdistan) presents *Imraa, Jin, Xanman, Women*. Deborah Hunt will be there, and Margaret Cameron, and many other friends.

Transit is a total immersion in women's performance. There will be little time for sleeping, meals will be flavoured with rich conversations, and - if I get time - I'll post something to the blogs on the Magdalena Aotearoa web site about what we're doing . . .

Helen Varley Jamieson

Announcing Montgomery Alexander Dailianis Kerr, or Monty to his friends, weighing in at a beautiful 9 pounds.

Born at home, in water, on the 5th of April at 11.01am after 8 and a half hours of wonderfully problem-free labour.

Lots of love,
Stas, Haydn and Montezuma
London.



Below: Nancy Fulford is doing fabulous work in Rarotonga with arts curriculum development in schools. Last November, Sue Morrison, Ines Ferrer-Bergua and Lyne Pringle visited for a cultural exchange; here they are learning a Cook Islands dance.



The Open Page

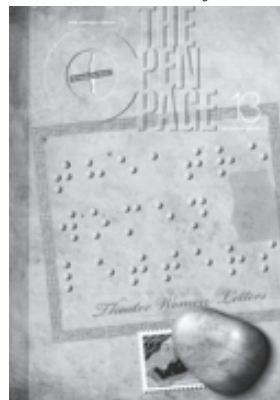
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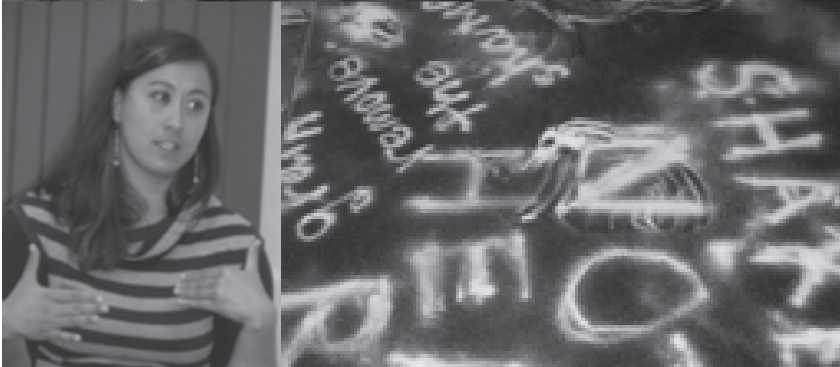
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'Letters are personal and secret forms of communication, characteristics which enable us to hear the voices of some seemingly silent women on the



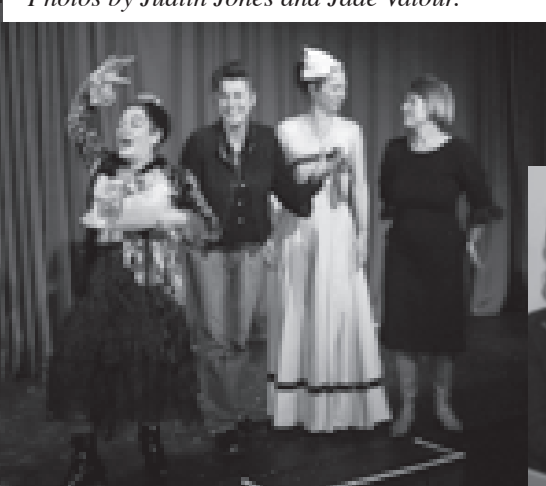
past and present. The design of individual letters and of different alphabets, seen as paintings or graphic design, emerge in this issue as action, inspiration, sound, awareness, availability and rhythm to emphasise the individuality, age, tradition and cultural circumstances of each author.'

Julia Varley



Clockwise from top left: Nik Cox, Jak Trolove and Pipi Ayesha Evans; shadow experiment during Jak's session; Jade Valour rocks!; Judith Jones and Janet Dunn at the web site launch; the Web Queen prepares for blast-off; Jeff Henderson gives feedback to Madeline; Caz Sheldon clowns around with Janet Dunn; Pauleen Hayes and Jane Gordon at the web site launch; Kazz Funky Blue, Madeline, Helen and Janet at the concert; Jak does her thing with the hula hoops; Madeline McNamara; Challen Wilson talks about her work; and words of salt during Jak's presentation.

Photos by Judith Jones and Jade Valour.



The Bone Keeper on the road

The Bone Keeper's Story is touring this year. South around September/October, north in October/November. We have some expressions of interest from community arts councils, and a great touring package!

The Bone Keeper's Story is suitable for:

- a community evening show;
- secondary schools, along with devising workshops and discussion;
- contexts such as women's groups, mental health groups, healing, transformation retreats or conferences.

Helen can also offer to the community story-telling, a wide variety of drama workshops in schools and pre-schools and workshops in communication.

We're looking for arts councils, arts coordinators and anyone else who sees potential for this work resonating with the needs and interests of their communities.

Contact Helen Moran: hellnhighwater@gmail.com

Helen Moran is a theatre performer and storyteller who has toured the South Island with two solo shows, and travelled to Singapore in a Shakespeare troupe. She also works as a storyteller and drama consultant in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, runs professional development workshops for teachers, directs and teaches drama at primary and secondary level and produces original young peoples' shows with IMAGinE Children's Theatre. *The Bone Keepers's Story* grew out of exploration of the Skeleton Woman story and is the distillation of collaborations over several years with a number of inspirational theatre artists.

Recharge with Yoga Nidra

The yoga nidra session at Recharge: The Gathering was so much appreciated that Moira Aberdeen held another session on 21 May. Yoga Nidra is a deep relaxation of brain activity which heightens our ability to be both alert and relaxed at the same time - bringing about profound regeneration of the body and honed receptivity to intuitive spontaneous intelligence (creativity). It is believed 30 minutes of yoga nidra equates to the effect of four and a half hours deep sleep. It is not sleep. It is conscious awareness while the body is completely at rest. Yoga nidra relaxes the mind by relaxing the body, and relaxes the body by relaxing the mind. It is simple to learn, easy to practice and a tool that you can use throughout your lifetime. Moira has studied the history and benefits of yoga nidra, and practised it daily for over a decade. If you are interested in finding out more, email aberdeen@paradise.net.nz

Snap Happy!

Well-known singer-songwriters Hinemoana Baker and Christine White have released a new album, *Snap Happy*, featuring intimate alt.country ballads, hooky pop songs and laid-back Māori language reggae. There's even some folktronica flavours courtesy of their Casio-tone MT-65, and an electric guitar made out of a Black & Decker workbench. Listen to selected tracks on YouTube or order the CD online at www.hinemoana.co



Getting Mentored

Auckland playwright Louise Tu'u is seeking a mentor for her current work-in-progress: a play about a homeless man who returns to his family after a long period of unexplained absence. She is looking for someone with writing, directing and/or dramaturgical skills, who is in Auckland and can start right away. In return for mentoring, Louise is offering to assist on the mentor's projects. Email louise.tuu@clear.net.nz or phone her on 021 633 814 if you can help.

Informal mentoring relationships can arise through personal contacts or encounters at events such as the Gathering. There are also formalised mentoring schemes and opportunities designed for people who are looking for a mentor, or want to be a mentor, such as:

- DANZ Mentoring Scheme: aims to support professional development and strengthen dance groups, collectives or individuals. Applications can be made at any time: www.danz.org.nz.
- The Emerging Artists Trust's (EAT) formal mentoring programme links experienced film and theatre practitioners with emerging artists. For more information, contact Sally@eatwellington.org.nz, or visit www.eatwellington.org.nz
- 'Mentoring in the Arts' workshop, Saturday 11 July, Wellington. This workshop is for mentors and people interested in becoming mentors (rather than wanting a mentor). More info: arts@wcc.govt.nz

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