



United we stand, divided we fall ...

The times they are a-changing, and women in theatre must change with them, to survive, to continue making work, to tell our stories, to voice our ideas. The Ministry of Culture and Heritage has undertaken a review of CNZ's governing legislation, recommending the creation of a single board responsible for policy, strategy and funding allocation. This would replace the current four committees and councils, reducing staff from 28 to 13 and saving \$200,000. We wonder how this is going to affect our ways of making work and funding opportunities in the future. We need to develop adaptive management and resilience to face the obstacles in our paths to creating work. Unemployment in Aotearoa is 7.3%, and in the USA the official figure is edging 10%. It is more and more difficult to find paid employment, and funding sources are less and less.

Nevertheless, the Magdalena Aotearoa Gathering is taking place at Queens Birthday Weekend, Saturday 5 June, in Wellington, a one day event. The Gathering offers us an opportunity to meet, share stories, performances, and to exchange tacit knowledge – the one on one transmission of the secret art of the performer that cannot be learnt from books. We extend an invitation to all the network and interested women, with high hopes for an inspirational Gathering.

As we plan the Gathering the Trustees have asked ourselves: What is the essence of Magdalena? What is it that Magdalena Aotearoa does? Who are we? Why do we continue?

The Magdalena Project is an international network of women in contemporary theatre, a cross-cultural network facilitating creative discussion, support and training, for and by women who want to ensure

the visibility of women's artistic endeavour. In Aotearoa it offers women a platform to hear each others' voices and be connected in our often solitary work, to know that we are not alone. We can access other practitioners as collaborators, host artists, and seek support in touring our own work nationally and internationally. The network of Magdalena is an invaluable resource.

It gives us strength, permitting generations of women to collaborate – grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters. The Open Page and newsletter provide opportunities for women to write about their work, and reading these stories connects us to the trials, politics, successes and creative work of women worldwide, inspiring us to go forward.

The Magdalena Project was founded by Jill Greenhalgh in Wales in 1986 and now spreads across 50 countries. In 2011 The Magdalena Project celebrates 25 years, with a festival in Wales. We encourage women to start saving for Wales now!

Earlier in the year we were called upon to help the people of Haiti. A concert was held in Wellington, with funds going directly to Pye Poudre Cultural Centre in Port-au-Prince who work with youth at risk, and whose building was destroyed.

In February, Ruby Brunton, Jo Holsted and Melody Nixon presented *Currency*, three short plays by young women writers (see pages 7-8). Ruby was back in Aotearoa for a short stay and is continuing Red Mole's legacy of spontaneous, passionate performance. We encourage her to return with new work in the future.

I am writing this editorial from Warkworth. Easter is upon us, the leaves are falling, daylight saving has ended, the days are shorter, the nights longer – perfect for theatre. Auckland is experiencing

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- * **Creative Trajectory - part 1 of a 2-part article from Meg Torwl, pages 9-10;**
- * **Perth Workshop Festival, page 11.**



The Letter Writer by Juliet O'Brien, at the International Arts Festival.

See article on page 5.

Photographer: Matt Grace.

the driest three months in 50 years – an Indian Summer: families are holidaying down on the beach, boats, windsurfers, picnics. It is not cold – or not in the north of the land. Climate change is upon us.

As we farewell Helen Varley Jamieson from our shores again we wish her every success and happiness for her new life in Europe, where her work is being recognised on the international stage. We will miss you Helen, but we have your virtual presence as The Web Queen, thanks be! Helen is an inveterate traveller, physically and virtually – travelling even when standing still. Theatre women have always travelled, not contained by borders, often exiles by choice or necessity, facing the unknown, the fear and the excitement.

Magdalena is an oasis for us in transit.

*Lilicherie McGregor
Magdalena Aotearoa Trustee*

Trust News

With new year resolutions and celebrations still ringing in our ears, the Trustees got straight to work at a Database Party on January 4th. A new volunteer, Stacey Ruscoe, has come on board to help us with Drupal (the software that runs our web site and online membership database) and she met with several of the trustees for a training session followed by lunch in Janet's sunny garden.



We are still fine-tuning the site (and probably will be forever!) but it's already a great improvement on what we had before, especially the online database. The web site is updated frequently - scroll down on any page of the site to find links to recent blog posts and active forum topics. Please visit www.magdalenaotearoa.org.nz



Continuing with the party theme, a Networking Party was held on 1 February - see page 3 for a report on this successful event. And the next party will be the Gathering, on 5 June - we hope to see you there! See page 3 for the draft programme and registration information.

Meanwhile, everyone is as busy as ever with their own projects. Madeline is collaborating with Jack Trolove on *Whitemess/Whiteness*

(see page 4) as well as working with Bert van Dyk on a new production on Matiu Island. Janet continues to combine her recycled fashion design business with theatre costume work (see page 6 for some of her ruminations). Lilicherie is currently teaching drama at Epsom Girls' Grammar and continuing to tour Shakespeare - *Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* - nationwide to schools with Kore Theatre. Helen has returned to Europe for an indefinite period but continues to behave as if she's just down the road.

In between mothering and teaching yoga, Jessica is in the process of inviting master yoga teacher James Bryan (husband of her yoga teacher Nicky Knoff), to lead a month-long intensive Yoga Teacher Training workshop in November (these intense workshops are famous for lifting fertility of participants - Jessica is only one of many who became pregnant during or shortly after Knoff training); and Jessica and Rhys are preparing Ake Ake's annual autumn 6-week theatre training and investigation block for theatre professionals. (Please email akeake@actrix.co.nz if you are interested in these courses).

Volunteers are hugely important to the Trust. We are especially appreciative of Stacey Ruscoe for supporting the Trustees' learning of the new Drupal web site and CiviCRM membership database. Judith Jones continues to be actively involved, taking on co-ordination of the Patroness scheme, blogging on the web site and investigating how best to manage our ever-growing archives (see page 10). And fundamental to the success of our events is the fabulous catering, most recently at the Networking Party, thanks to Moira Aberdeen and Jack Trolove!

Photos at right from the Database Party: Stacey Ruscoe and Janet Dunn tackle some of the meatier tasks, while Madeline McNamara and Judith Jones

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

Co-founders

Madeline McNamara & Sally Rodwell

Trustees

Madeline McNamara, Lisa Maule, Dale Ferris, Helen Varley Jamieson, Jessica Latton, Lilicherie McGregor, Janet Dunn.

Post Mistress

Janet Dunn

Newsletter & web site

Helen Varley Jamieson

Patroness Scheme Co-ordinator

Judith Jones

Accountant

Julie Lamb & Associates



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Newsletter contributions are welcome, but may be edited.

*Email contributions to:
info@magdalenaotearoa.org.nz*

The deadline for the next issue is 30 June 2010

Correction

In the last newsletter, we incorrectly reported that Judith Dale had died in August 2009; the correct date is 9 September 2009. We sincerely apologise for this error and for any confusion or upset it may have caused to her friends and family.

2010 Gatherings

The 2010 Gathering will take a different form to the last three years, with a change in focus and date.

Instead of one event over several days, there will be three separate one-day events, each with a specific theme. We hope that this format will enable more people to attend, and that by broadening the focus we will create an opportunity to explore the most urgent issues for ourselves as women theatre practitioners.

In planning this year's Gathering, the Trustees felt strongly that 2010 needs to be a time of refocussing and re-visioning – discovering what, after more than a decade of the Trust's existence, is "Magdalena" for us? Lilicherie has posed some of these questions in the editorial, and we invite you all to join us during the year in the discussions.

The first event, "What is Magdalena?" takes place on Saturday 5 June, at the Newtown Community Centre in Wellington. As well as exploring the questions above, we encourage people who are new to the network to join us and discover for themselves, what is Magdalena.

The programme for the day is below (subject to amendment and alteration!).

Two further days are planned, tentatively for the 14th of August and 23rd of October, to be themed "Inter-generational Conversations" and "Performance, Community & Activism". Further details for these two days will be decided after the first Gathering, taking into account how that goes and what the participants are most strongly inspired about.

You must register for each event, as we need to plan catering, and we appreciate prepayment. See the box at right for registration details; the best way is to do it via our web site (note that you do not need to have a Paypal account to pay online - we use Paypal as a payment system but it accepts ordinary credit cards as well as Paypal accounts).

We warmly invite you to join us for inspiration, enrichment, networking and theatre!

The Networking Party!

On Monday 1 February, the Magdalena Aotearoa Trust held a Networking Party at the Newtown Hall in Daniel Street, Wellington. The purpose of this event was to bring local theatre women together to share information and network, and to inform people about the activities of the Magdalena Aotearoa Trust.

As it turned out, so many women came with so many interesting projects to speak about that there wasn't enough time to do everything we'd planned (and in the excitement we all forgot to take photos ...). We cut short our Magdalena presentation, as it seemed more important to let those present introduce themselves to each other through speaking about their own projects.

Several people talked about shows that were to be on during the Fringe

and the early part of the year, while others presented longer-term projects such as the ongoing Southern Corridor project and *Whitemess/Whiteness* (see page 4).

Steph Walker, the programme manager from BATS Theatre, talked about how to approach her for a season at BATS, and highlighted several shows by, and about, women programmed for 2010.

The evening was fuelled by a wonderful supper prepared by Moira Aberdeen and Jak Trolove, with great coffee from the good folks at People's Coffee – thanks! The beautiful voices of Voix Polyphoniques (France) provided pre-party music, via the DVD recording of their performance of *Black Sea Songs* at the Transit Festival last year.

The Gatherings 2010

What is Magdalena?

Saturday 5 June

8.30am-10pm

Newtown Community & Cultural Centre,
Wellington

\$35 waged / \$20 unwaged

(includes lunch & morning/afternoon tea)

To register:

online: www.magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz

email: info@magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz

phone: (04) 973 1618

Inter-generational Conversations

Saturday 14 August

Performance, Community & Activism

Saturday 23 October

8.30am	Registration and coffee
9.00	Opening round Introduction to Magdalena
10.45	Morning tea
11-1pm	Practical theatre training
1-2pm	Lunch (provided)
2-3.30pm	Videos of Magdalena work (<i>Crazy Voyage</i> , <i>Transit IV</i> , etc)
3.30	Afternoon tea
4-5.30pm	Discussion: what is Magdalena, locally and internationally, and how to engage with it
5.30-7pm	Dinner (at a local cafe, paid for separately)
7-10pm	Evening programme - performances, video, open mic.

Everyone found the evening a very inspiring and useful way to start the year; some people made immediate connections to collaborate on others' projects, and some volunteered to assist with the Gathering organisation.

Our only regret was that – as usual! – we didn't have enough time. Let's hope that many of the conversations can be continued at the Gathering in June – come along!

Helen Varley Jamieson

Coming Up

Whiteness/Whitemess: Creative Disorders and Hope

Artists and thinkers who are examining Pakeha relationships to historic and current colonisation, in particular exploring ideas from the slippery field of critical whiteness studies, are invited to a weekend of presentations and conversations in Wellington on 15-16 May. At this time the Toi Poneke Gallery in Wellington will be exhibiting work by visual artist Jack Trolove that explores some of these ideas, and the intention is to bring together people working in this area.

The weekend of 15-16 May is being curated by theatre practitioner Madeline McNamara and Jack Trolove, and will include an excerpt entitled *The Attitudes* from Madeline's current work-in-progress. Jack and Madeline would love to hear from anyone else who would like to present in this forum.

Facilitated conversations will examine how we use various art forms to articulate some of the unspeakable complexities of focusing on whiteness/whitemess while

resisting the tendency for such a focus to reinforce the 'power' of whiteness. How, through our creative work, can we 'see' ourselves and our positionalities so as not to be 'neutral' or 'passive' participants in conversations around identity and power?

The works to be shown during the weekend sit within something of a void of Pakeha artworks on issues of race, power, 'whiteness', privilege and colonisation in Aotearoa. This is a response to decades of work by Maori, Pacific, Asian and other artists, activists and academics who have called pakeha to develop an understanding of our cultural paradigm (including dominant culture).

At the epic end of the dream-spectrum, we hope the works and conversations will contribute to an unsettling of settlement. Contact us on critical.creative.gathering@gmail.com

<http://www.whitemess.blogspot.com/>

Kowhiti Matariki Festival Of Maori Contemporary Dance

Merena Gray is the curator (together with her brother, Tanemahuta Gray), of the inaugural Kowhiti Matariki Festival of Maori Contemporary Dance, which is being held at Te Papa, June 24-27.

Best known for her choreographic skills, particularly for her company Merena Gray Dance Theatre, Merena is an inspirational dancer and teacher who has enjoyed an international career. Recently she established Raising the Barre (www.raisingthebarre.co.nz), a programme of professional-level classes that caters to the freelance dance community in Wellington.

Merena is hugely enthusiastic over the work selected for the Kowhiti Festival. "It is true whanaungatanga that everyone in the Maori contemporary dance sector is embracing our kaupapa", she says.

Merena and her co-producers took the idea to the Aitanga descenDANCE Summit in Auckland last year and received a mandate to proceed with the festival from the Maori dance artists who were present. Since then "it has snowballed" and the work of twelve Maori contemporary dance choreographers will be showcased in the Kowhiti Premiere Programme in Soundings Theatre. There are expected to be over 75 performers participating in the four-day festival, which also includes free performances in Te Marae, film-screenings, lectures, forums and workshops. The full programme can be viewed on www.kowhiti.org.nz.

Merena is presenting two works: her most recent work *Black Rain*, performed by New Zealand School of Dance

students, and a reworking of *Entangled*, performed by Footnote Dance Company.

Merena finds inspiration from many sources. "I create what I'm inspired about at that time in my life – what resonates". *Black Rain* was inspired by Hone Tuwhare's poem *A Fall of Rain at Mitimiti: Hokianga*. Ralph Hotere's *Black Series* of paintings also resonated with Merena. Hotere was born in Mitimiti, and Tuwhare's poem was written as a eulogy to Hotere's mother – so the title is an amalgam of the two inspirational forces.

In contrast, her duet *Entangled*, first performed in 2003, was inspired by the South American poet Octavio Paz's poem, *The Sacred Fig Tree*. The work will be performed to an original composition by cellist Janet Holborow, who will provide live accompaniment at the Festival.

Other Maori women choreographers who have works in the festival include Louise Potiki-Bryant (just returned from a choreographic internship in Toronto), Cathy Livermore, Kasina Campbell and Cat Ruka.

Kowhiti Festival promises a feast of dance at Matariki - a time of new beginnings - and seeks to showcase Maori contemporary dance "in the present", as it sits today, looking towards the future of the art-form. The programme includes excerpts of longer works that will interest spectators in seeing the full programmes at a later date. Discussions are underway with Downstage Theatre for a possible return season of Kowhiti in 2011.

Jenny Stevenson



The Letter Writer

In February/March of this year I embarked on the realisation of a project which had taken two years to put into place; the production of *The Letter Writer*, a play bringing together French and New Zealand actors. It was a project which, from the outset, provided major challenges but which has proven to be one of the most exhilarating and inspiring moments of my life.

Aside from all the obvious logistical challenges, the first major challenge on my arrival to NZ was to cast the three New Zealanders who would perform with the French actors, the second to see how the two teams would fit together and how communication would go in the rehearsal room.

The New Zealand actors – Peter Hambleton, Helen Moulder and Tim Gordon – embraced the work with such generosity and enthusiasm (and need I say enormous patience) as the to-ing and fro-ing between English and French became quite gymnastic at times. They were magnificent hosts to the French actors who they took under their wing and introduced to Wellington and its surroundings.

I can truly say I have never witnessed such a rich exchange, one where the barrier of language was surpassed by the universal language of theatre, one where cultural differences were surpassed by a refreshingly open attitude to all aspects of the process.

If this article seems overloaded with superlatives it



Juliet O'Brien (seated) with the cast and crew of The Letter Writer, from left: Jennifer Lal, Peter Hambleton, Tim Gordon, Helen Moulder, Benoit Blanc, Anne Barbot and Sophie Lindsay. Photographer: Matt Grace.

is simply because it was a superlative experience. The French actors have both said to me that it was a life changing experience for them; that they felt part of a young and dynamic culture, a culture which through the marrying of different cultures is creating a new and vibrant identity.

Having lived in France for the last 20 years, it had been a longtime dream to bring together the two worlds in each of which I have spent nearly half of my life. I was so proud to be a New Zealander, so proud to be able to introduce the French artists to the New Zealand artists and so profoundly moved by the energy, professionalism and creativity of the artists of New Zealand.

Juliet O'Brien

Alphonsina

Alphonsina was performed in the Fringe Festival for 3 nights at the Gryphon Theatre in Wellington, and went on to the Globe Theatre in Dunedin for another brief stint at the end of March.

This hour long piece, led by Pedro Ilgenfritz, is the first outcome of the LAB Research Theatre Company, an initiative of UNITEC Auckland's Department of Performing and Screen Arts. The purpose of the LAB is the development of quality drama by a group of performers and a director committed to ongoing training and investigation.

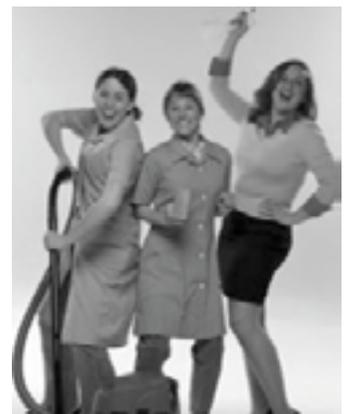
The programme notes stated influences by great theatre masters like Stanislavski and Brecht who prioritised continuity in their endeavours—i.e. they held strongly to the principle that in order for in-depth development to occur there must be a commitment to stay together and work intensively over a long time. The fact that Pedro has recognised and acted on this principle is significant. Many New Zealand productions arrive at opening night as works-in-progress due to being under-resourced and therefore with an inadequate preparation period.

The photo exhibition at the theatre gave an insight into a

training process that looked to be both rigorous and fun, and explored many aspects of the clown tradition.

This thorough exploration gave the 3 young women a solid basis for very assured performances.

The premise for the story is simple: *Alphonsina* (Andrea Ariel) arrives in Auckland from Buenos Aires to get a job and send money home to her family. She is befriended by Hera (Katie Burson) who has just been promoted to supervisor in the Sparkle and Shine Cleaning Company. Hera gets *Alphonsina* a job working beside her, but unfortunately *Alphonsina* doesn't have a work visa. She gets a fake one on the street but the thug who provides it starts blackmailing her, things spiral out of control, and *Alphonsina* ends up being deported back to Argentina. The third player is Tracy the boss (Genevieve Cohen), who appears at first to be ambitious before being likeable, but who reveals that she does,



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What's to be Dunn?

Janet Dunn reports that the last few months have been a time for her to (hopefully!) absorb a few of life's tougher lessons in the realm of work.

I had a very successful 'pop-up' shop in Newtown last winter, helped by it being rent-free because the building was due for demolition. I hosted fun and lucrative salons, and it felt good to have a community hub where I could do business on my own terms. On the strength of that success, I opened another shop in Newtown—but this one was not free. The high overheads sent me scurrying to sell on behalf of others, to the detriment of my own work. The lesson: it's unrealistic to be a designer and producer and run a shop at the same time.

Broke and desperately worried about my debts, in early 2010 I took up the offer of costume work on a festival production. This turned into a difficult experience and reminded me of the potential pitfalls of freelance work. In my Buddhist practice there is a core principle of changing poison into medicine, using difficult situations as opportunities for growth. By looking at my motivations for taking on this job — basically fear of debt — and ruminating over past experiences, I have formulated some philosophical and practical guidelines for myself.

I've worked in mainstream and alternative theatre as both a costume designer and a costume maker for other designers. After a year or so as a designer in mainstream co-op theatre, I realised that there were three essential elements involved: passion, remuneration and collaboration. Sometimes, because I thought I needed the money, I tried to trick myself into believing that I didn't have to feel passionate about the production; that I could be a detached professional. Then when directors allowed actors to design by committee, as often happens in a co-op, I could just smile and say "sure, whatever you want". I concluded eventually that this might work if you were paid a lot, but that's not the case in theatre, as we know!

Sometimes I'd get a script that I did feel passionate about — but the director and set designer had decided months before on the general flavour of the production, and didn't include me in those discussions. So much for collaboration. Still, I liked some scripts and saw layers of possibility in them, so I'd get to work researching and drawing, present the designs — and immediately one of the actresses would tell me that her character wouldn't wear sandals like those and another actor would be pissed off because I wanted him to wear green ...

In addition, co-op actors invariably tried to beat down the designers' percentages and there didn't seem to be anyone to go to for support.

Meatloaf says "Two out of three ain't bad" but often I've felt lucky to have even one of these elements present. Of course there have also been many times when I've had all three — passion, remuneration and collaboration — but it's the negative experiences that give us the most to learn from — the old poison into medicine!

I've often struggled with working for other designers, especially those who are doing both set and costume in the Kiwi context of inadequate time and resources. It's hard to grasp the dynamic of a production when there are no drawings or indepth discussion about the design goals. Trying to understand how other designers work and what they want when I've never worked with them before is also challenging. I have to call on my understanding of design to be able to interpret someone else's ideas, but also subdue my own design sensibilities, especially if the designer makes decisions that I disagree with. An exercise in mistressing the ego! Now I favour design jobs over technician jobs, but I'll consider working alongside costume designers who are skilled in the craft as well as the ideas, in a workroom set-up, where there is enough time and money to do justice to the work (rarely the case it seems). I want evidence of clear design and discussion processes from director to designer down the line to the people realising the designs.

I expect high standards in negotiation and communication from production managers! They should know exactly what is going on in all departments, and be prepared to discuss and solve difficulties. I'm concerned at the short timeframes we give ourselves for projects that have to stand alongside polished overseas works. I'm wary of terminology like 'organic process' and 'playing to our strengths'. The first takes months not weeks, and the second, because we don't have months, goes out the window and we work ten-plus hours days and get stupid with exhaustion, to get the job done.

On a practical level, it's vital for the sustainability of the arts industries that we insist on good contracts that clearly lay out the parameters of the job and remuneration. If the production is stretched for time this is often glossed over and while a verbal contract has legal standing, it can be vague. If the production is not forthcoming with the paperwork, take the initiative. Draw yourself up a contract from a template — you can get such things from the internet — and be clear with yourself about what hours, remuneration and conditions you're happy with.

To conclude, it's best not to compromise on these matters. Taking it back to Buddhist principles, if you don't compromise, nine times out of ten you'll be respected for that. The tenth time, if you're not respected, you probably don't need that job. You need to respect yourself in order for someone else to respect you!



Janet Dunn

Green Shoots of Currency

In February, three young women writers presented three short plays on the topic of money, at Wellington's Happy Bar. The writers – Melody Nixon, Ruby Topo and Jo Holsted – talk about the experience.

Ruby ...

Kia Ora, my name is Ruby Topo. I am the daughter of Magdalena Aotearoa's co-founder, Sally Rodwell. Unfortunately my mother was not there in person to see the first play I wrote, produced and directed, but I felt her there in spirit. I felt her there in spirit throughout the whole process from Melody and I forming the idea of starting our own production company over coffee at Sweet Mother's (apt name for the location I just realised!) right up to Melody, Jo, Jeff and I gathering after the show for a much needed feedback session.

I think she would've been proud to see a new generation of Magdalenas in Aotearoa and she would've dug our DIY attitude. Our project of three plays by three young women was a labour of love from start to finish. We put a lot of time and effort into our production, each taking on different roles as they needed to be filled. It was a major learning experience for us. Having never done anything like this before, we had to feel our way through and we made many mistakes. Also, we had no money, having decided as a spur of the moment thing and missing out on all types of funding within our time frame. With no money, there is not a lot you can do, you rely on favours for a rehearsal space, venue, costumes, printing costs and so on. We were amazed to find how many people were willing to give us their time for free. Jeff Henderson stepped in to direct Melody's play, the six wonderful actors worked so hard and so long, Hermione Johnson and Nell Thomas came along and wrote music for us. Working together was what made this project so enjoyable and made up for the long hours without pay. I guess that's what it means to do theatre in New Zealand. Perhaps that's what it is to do theatre anywhere in the world, especially if you are starting out and want to produce something of your own.

We chose the company name Green Shoots Productions



*Melody Nixon, Ruby Topo and Jo Holsted.
Photographer: Joanne Thomas.*

to hint at new life in the Wellington theatre scene. Green signifies our newness, but it also references our roots, Mother Nature or Papatuanuku. We chose green too as our project was to write about money. The idea was to form a theatre community, young women supporting each other and I don't think we would've got through this project without each other's help. We formed this



company initially as a one-off, however we have had a lot of people ask, "What's next for Green Shoots?" I came away from the project thinking, well, we needed more time, more money, but also that there is a need for young women in theatre to receive and give this kind of support. Not only that, but we also want the support

of experienced women practitioners, some kind of mentorship, perhaps someone to read over the drafts of our scripts, or give feedback on one of our rehearsals.

Right now, Green Shoots has split in different directions. Melody Nixon is heading to New York to pursue her Masters in Creative Writing or Political Science. Jo Holsted is putting her Spanish to good use traversing South America. I am in Melbourne, looking for paid work and hoping to do a Masters degree as well. I'm sure that we all want to work together again, and with any other young women in theatre in New Zealand.

If you would like to get in touch with us, and hear about our future projects or tell us about yours, please email greenshootsproductions@gmail.com

Ruby Topo

This continues with articles by Melody Nixon and Jo Holsted on page 8.

Above: Lyndsey Garner and Liz Kirkman in First June by Melody Nixon. Left: Anna Edgington and Jonny Potts in In the Red by Ruby Topo. Photographer: Raphael Matto.



... continued from page 7

Melody ...

I co-produced *Currency* and contributed a script to it, while Ruby and Jo each wrote and directed their own scripts. We started the project with little more than a feeling; I was confident in Ruby's ability to be resourceful and creative, and her own familiarity with theatrical expression to drive and inspire the work. Jo was a delight to have involved, not only for her sense of humour but also her steady calm which chilled Ruby and I out when we got too caught up on arguing about the details! We three collaborated on the project through many emails and phone calls in stolen minutes during work, and we decided to present a collection of short plays based around a similar theme; women and money. Jo and Ruby worked from the ideas in my full length script which I had written earlier in the year to present their own interpretation of the theme. Amazingly, they both pulled together short scripts in under a week. I was impressed by their cooky humour and wit and the completeness of each of their works from the first draft. It was also fascinating to see how differently we'd each interpreted the subject. Our explorations of what it is to be a woman, and what it is to struggle with money, were strikingly different from one another.

My script, *First June*, was a story about a 30-something woman who decides she has to break out of the money-making mould. I had been working on economic policy at the time I wrote it. I'd got to thinking about how the neo-liberal philosophy that strongly underpins NZ's economic policies could effect human culture and behaviour.

I learned a lot about what did and didn't work in the script from the audience's reaction each night, feedback, and Jeff Henderson's rigorous critiquing as he was directing. A lot of my intended themes didn't come through but the several women who told me after viewing the show that they either a) had to quit their job!, or b) realised



Dominic Da Souza as the Penguin, in First June by Melody Nixon. Photographer: Pedram Pirnia.

how different money pressures are for young people these days, made it worthwhile. In *Currency* I think Ruby, Jo and I managed to produce something that was true to ourselves, and honest. While I imagine we'll each approach our next projects very differently (more time, more mentorship, and some funds!), *Currency* has set us off on the right course to keep working and to keep being honest, and it has reaffirmed that by working together young women really can achieve a lot.

Melody Nixon

Jo ...

It's strange to write about *Currency* as a past event because it doesn't seem long ago that it was a maybe. A thing in the future that would somehow come together but I wasn't sure how. Now I feel like someone in a weight loss infomercial standing, smiling, in one leg of my old pants from the 'before' days. Look! We did it! In just 60 days!

Ruby called me up one sunny afternoon and said she and Mel were wanting to put on three short plays by three woman writers and seeing I more or less fit the woman/writer criteria and seeing we had been talking for some time about 'doing something' would I please write one of the plays by the next week. Kind of my dream come true because I really am rather fond of writing but without deadline or direction I'm a fruitless mess.

The *Stranger Things* script came together quickly and I look back on it with three months to dwell on what I could and should have done with it, but for the project I think it worked and everything I could have changed

will be something I will change in the future. For *Currency* II III and IV. Just kidding, I can move on.

I was quite daunted by the prospect of directing to begin with and I feel so lucky and relieved to have had such a patient and willing team around me. My next project is a one-woman play I had finished writing earlier in the year and I have a wealth of knowledge to pull from thanks to *Currency*.

Jo Holsted

Alphonsina continued ...

... from page 5

after all, have a heart. Genevieve is the only one of the three players with multiple roles and she switches smoothly and cleverly from boss to thug to immigration official.

The set, costumes and props are simple, giving plenty of space to the characters. Without a single red nose or any of the other traditional trappings, this is none-the-less unmistakably a clown piece. The cleaning is a tightly choreographed dance. The tricks are great – not only physically but also mentally. For example, having set up a clear boss-worker dynamic, the worker (Hera) tricks the boss (Tracy) into cleaning the floor herself. The script flows and is believable, and although there is pathos in the situation, it avoids sentimentality. There is effective use of mime and ensemble movement, plenty of exaggeration in vocal and facial expression, and wonderful cat-and-mouse sequences requiring precise timing. Slapstick abounds.

As with all of Pedro's work that I've seen, the direction is both systematic and inspired. His is a fresh view on clowning which is very welcome, combining pertinent social observation with comedy in a unique and often surprising way.

If this group does achieve the continuity they aspire to we can look forward to some very fine work. Of special interest to Magdalena Aotearoa is the intention by Pedro to take this work to Vertice Brasil, the Brazilian Magdalena festival, in Florianopolis in July this year.

Janet Dunn

Creative Trajectory

Meg Torwl, who attended the 1999 Magdalena Aotearoa Festival of Women's Performance, writes about her experiences since that life-changing event. This is part one of a two-part article.

Kia ora koutou! I was very inspired by the December 2009 Magdalena Aotearoa Newsletter! Reflections on the diverse journeys many have taken in the 10 years since the magnificent 1999 Magdalena Aotearoa International Performance Festival, like Miff Moore, Lisa Maule, Jale Karabekir; and the recent work by Madeline McNamara, Natalie Marcet, Jo Randerson, Jan Bolwell, Helen Moulder, Judith Jones; in Aotearoa, Denmark, Norway, Argentina, Turkey; it prompted me to reflect on my own journey.

What sticks in my mind from the 1999 Magdalena Festival in Wellington, was attending the wondrous performances by ALL of the artists there. This fledgling performer was heartened to discover a WHOLE WORLD of women performers. I got so carried along by Peggy Shaw's *Menopausal Gentleman* I answered her rhetorical question out loud from the audience. The potent shadow lamp figures circling the wall remained in my mind's eye – was that in Geddy Aniksdal's moving *Blue is the Smoke of War*?

In 1999 I was involved in theatre, poetry and storytelling, including with Louise Maich who was preparing her show *Drevna Viscera* for the Magdalena Festival. *Drevna Viscera* – ancient flesh, my many mother's tongue, Louise's tender exploration of her ancestry, history and connection to the former Yugoslavia. Together as Pandora's Box we produced performances and an exhibition with women artists at the Silo Theatre and Kamo in Auckland in May 1999. This included performances of our own work - Louise's *Drevna Viscera*, and my *The Bear under the Bed*, as well as powerful performances by poet Tracey Tawhiao and soulful songstress Josephine Costain. *The Bear under the Bed* was about how I dressed up in a bear costume I made out of my grandmother's black coat in an (unsuccessful) effort to win a free trip the country our costumes represented – mine being Canada. I recall drawing the logo for Pandora's Box while keeping my friend Jo company in hospital while she had chemo – it seemed a metaphor for women artists! Like many women, Louise and I produced, performed, directed, advertised, did media interviews for Pandora's Box – and we even broke even! This laid a good foundation for future work.

I left Aotearoa for Canada in June 1999, performing *The Bear under the Bed*, poetry and comedy in a PRIDE and Fringe Festival. When I came to Canada fantastical worlds opened up to me in digital media. Writing

and performing was harder to mediate. People were confounded by the way I used words, my accent. Poetry readings were a nightmare, people were always 3 lines behind trying to decipher what I said, and by the time they got the point, the joke, I was five lines ahead talking about something else.

When I went on TV they asked if I would be offended if they gave me subtitles. I replied: "I w-i-l-l s-p-e-a-k s-l-o-w-l-y f-o-r t-h-e C-a-n-a-d-i-a-n-s". A self-conscious silence came over me. I started to sift out of my speech incomprehensible sayings, "better than a slap in the face with a wet fish". I tried not to speak in public.

Early in 2000 I received an Out On Screen Queer Video Scholarship to learn video and make my own documentary, *Act Your Age!?* – about ageism amongst women. I was, I understand now, also telling stories in the local vernacular, by putting myself behind the camera. It was an opportunity tailor-made for me: along with myself, most of the six students had some kind of disability. We worked at VIVO Media Arts Centre – a media

access studio based around knowledge sharing, with plenty of great women technicians and mentors, including my own fantastic mentor for the course, filmmaker Claudia Medina. By contrast in Aotearoa, in dealing with opportunities offered to people with disabilities to enter employment, various government departments told me my goals were 'unrealistic'.

In 2002 I received a BC Film Producers Internship, to work with filmmaker Anne Frazier Henry; and over the years I received informal mentorship from director of photography and filmmaker Moira Simpson. I took a new media course at VIVO in 2004 – a wordless language of color sound and image. I worked in community outreach and project management for the NFB – National Film Board of Canada, in disability media community; and CBC – documentary community.

I found myself hanging out with First Nations people, refugees, and folks from the Prairies, or all of the above; we seemed to share an understanding and humour. I vowed my next film would be more 'accented', and not necessarily in English, which is partly how I came to make a film with First Nations and refugee women and girls from nine nations, in five languages – *Towards the day...we are all free*; which overtook my life for 5 years and was completed in 2007.

continued on page 10



Safeguarding our Herstory

Magdalena volunteer Judith Jones has taken on the daunting task of managing our ever-increasing pile of archival material. She reports on her findings so far.

What a lot of stuff you can accumulate running a group like the Magdalena Aotearoa Trust for more than a decade. Set-up documents, minutes, notices, newsletters, letters, photos, performance programmes ... As well as needing to keep specific things for official record keeping, think of the stories all this stuff tells! And yet it's all stashed away in a filing cabinet someplace, or in cardboard boxes people move with them from house to house, often untouched because it seems like such a lot of stuff and no one is quite sure what to do with it anyway.

I am in the process of working out how we can care best for this herstory - what is essential to retain from a group record and national heritage perspective, how to keep it all safe and make it accessible to others. I'll let you know through the web site and the next newsletter about some of the ways we can get all this stuff out of boxes, off someone's to do list and into safe-keeping. If anyone has already gone through this process, it'd be great to hear from you (via info@magdalenaotearoa.org.nz).

I've also been looking at some of the resources that are already available (such as www.nzonscreen.com/title/red-mole-on-the-road-1979). When you take a look at this and marvel that it's available, think about someone in 30 years time who'll get excited to find the rich herstory of our group somewhere accessible too.

Are you aware that copies of newsletters should be sent to Legal Deposit? Here's some of the info from the National Library about this, see if it applies to a group you're involved with:

Legal Deposit provisions allow for the collection and preservation of New Zealand's published documentary heritage for the benefit of all New Zealanders. It applies to any person, group or organisation that publishes material and makes it available, for sale or free of charge, to any section of the public. A publisher can be an individual, a club, church, incorporated society or organisation as well as a commercial publisher. All publications are handled with care, and archived for the benefit and use of current and future generations of New Zealanders. A copy of each print and off-line publication deposited is kept in perpetuity in the collections of the Alexander Turnbull Library. The second copy is made available to the public through the Library's General Collections. Everything else you need to know is on the Legal Deposit pages of the National Library web site: www.natlib.govt.nz/services/legal-deposit-donations/legal-deposit-intro

What I find out will be in the next newsletter and I'll do a bit of a 'how to' on the Magdalena web site, for other groups to think about archiving their own material. If anyone has some experiences to share about group resources, you could use either of those channels too.

Judith Jones

Q Theatre Update

Progress with Auckland's new Q Theatre has picked up pace: in November 2009 a ceremony was held to mark Q Theatre formally taking possession of the Queen Street site, and in February this year demolition began. Artist Lisa Reihana has been commissioned to create an artwork that will be an integral part of the new building, and the completion date is scheduled for the second half of 2011.

Keep an eye on www.qtheatre.co.nz to follow the development of this important new venue.

Creative Trajectory

... continued from page 9

True to my 'and now for something completely different' creative trajectory, I returned to Aotearoa in 2007 to work for Radio New Zealand National, which accentuated my interest in sound, as well as my general interest in the arts – 16 of the 50 programs I produced included disability arts related content, including a programme with Madeline McNamara and her boisterous Acting Up Wellington performance troupe of adults with intellectual disability; and programmes on Maori, Pacific Island, Refugee, Deaf, Visually Impaired, Mental Health, and LGBTQI takes on disability.

I returned to performance in Canada in 2009 with a solo interdisciplinary show *That's so gay!*, commissioned by Balancing Acts Festival in Calgary. Whereas in Aotearoa my performance work was all about the speed, the onomatopoeia, the hard sounds at the beginning and ends of words bouncing off each other, in my adopted home country my delivery had to be about savouring the fat succulent juiciness of words, the fullness of pauses. It has taken me these past ten years to understand the variations of New Zealand and Canadian English, humour, accents, slang, spelling. A sojourn to work back in Aotearoa in 2007, and a return to perform in Canada in 2009, has taught me how to negotiate the universality of story, and the nuance of location.

Alas I have lost touch with Louise Maich, if anyone knows how to contact her please ask her to get in touch with me? Thanks!

Meg Torwl

<http://integralmedia.blogspot.com/>

In Part 2 in the next issue of this newsletter, Meg will explore disability arts in Canada; her creative process around That's so gay!; and her comedic invention, the Identity Quotients Calculator – IQC ©, a tool for the multiply marginalized! She analyses where her work in different artistic disciplines has been presented, and finds that she falls broadly into categories of programmes pertaining to women, disabled, queer, human rights, and mainstream. The more she is physically present in the work, such as performance, radio and audio on the web, the more she is defined as queer or disabled. Where she is considered primarily a woman, is in film.

All this and more coming in the next issue!

International News

Perth Workshop Festival

The 2010 Magdalena Perth Theatre Workshop Festival took place in Perth from 9th – 13th February this year.

Perth is the most geographically isolated city in the world and the festival aimed to overcome this tyranny of distance by providing professional development and networking opportunities to women artists in the region. The festival aimed to stimulate local, regional and national collegiality and conversations by inviting five artists of national standing to each run an immersive, 5-day workshop. Invited were Margaret Cameron (VIC), Leisa Shelton (VIC), Helen Sharp (VIC), Nikki Heywood (NSW) and Karen Hethey (WA). The workshops ran from 9.30am – 4.30pm across five days and four venues, with participants and artists coming together every night at Perth's Blue Room Theatre for an evening program of performances and fora. Helen Sharp's workshop was unfortunately cancelled but she accepted our invitation to attend and was an important voice within the event.



Nikki Heywood talks about her writing workshop with a picture of one of her participants in the background.

The festival opened with a virtual greeting from Jill Greenhalgh in Wales and closed with messages of greeting from Magdalena Aotearoa. It has successfully launched the Perth chapter of the project, and those involved in organising the festival have made a further commitment to bring Helen Sharp back to Perth later



Leisa Shelton's movement workshop at Curtin University.

The festival opened with a virtual greeting from Jill Greenhalgh in Wales and closed with messages of greeting from Magdalena Aotearoa. It has successfully launched the Perth chapter of the project, and those involved in organising the festival have made a further commitment to bring Helen Sharp back to Perth later



Three workshop participants having fun with a puppet in Karen Hethey's puppetry poetics workshop.

Festivals coming up

Vertices Brasil

16-24 July, Florianopolis, Brasil

www.verticebrasil.net

includes Alphonsina from New Zealand (see review on page 5)

Magdalena Torino

14-18 September, Torino, Italy

includes new work-in-progress, make-shift, by Helen Varley Jamieson & Paula Crutchlow

A Celebration Festival of Magdalena 1986 - 2011

Wales - August 12th – 21st 2011

www.themagdalenaproject.org

In 2011 The Magdalena Project will be 25 years old. Over those years so many festivals, gatherings and events have happened across the world made possible through the fortitude of some extraordinary women artists defiantly determined to give an equality of voice to women's work in theatre. The very first festival was in Cardiff and it is natural that a celebration of this coming of age again be hosted in Wales.

this year. Local women theatre artists discovered other local women theatre artists, and together they made connections with participants who came from as far as Townsville, Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide. Some of these left the festival with concrete plans to continue to meet and make work together. And the closing round elicited a proposal for a future Magdalena Festival in the Centre (Alice Springs), and with an acknowledgement that such an event will only be possible if due time is spent in developing a relationship with the traditional landowners.

The ripples continue to spread. Special thanks go out to all the women on the organising committee - Katt Osborne, Gita Bezar, Sarah McKellar, Leah Mercer, Teresa Izzard and Julie Robson. And special thanks to our production/tech queen Felicity Organ-Moore who cut her teeth on our 2003 festival in Brisbane! And thanks go out to you, our sisters in New Zealand, for your good wishes and support!

Aroha,
Dawn Albinger



Margaret Cameron and her workshop group To Hold and Behold in front of an audience. All photos on this page by Lisa Businovski.

Notices

Give us your news!

Newsletter contributions are always welcome, particularly from those of you outside the Wellington region: reviews, previews, interviews, opinion pieces and articles about your own work or work by other women theatre-makers. Photos are also great - remember to include caption and credit information. (We may need to edit your material, or we may choose not to publish it if it is outside our readers' interest or if the newsletter is already too full.)

Email contributions to:
info@magdalenaotearoa.org.nz

**The deadline for the next issue
is 30 June 2010**



Above: aerialist Pipi Ayesha Evans performs in *Kakahu*, the latest spectacular stilt performance from Empress Stilt Dance which premiered at the Festival of the Elements in Porirua on Waitangi Day. *Kakahu* is a unique combination of both stilts and aerial performance, along with Emily Buttle's trademark gloriously larger-than-life costumes. Photo by Lynn Buttle.

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Cash: we'll happily accept cash at any of our events.

THANK YOU!

Remember to check out the blogs and forums on www.magdalenaotearoa.org.nz - and sign up to contribute! If you want to keep up with international network news, join the mailing list at www.themagdaleanproject.org



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