

Finding wabi-sabi

The original title of Kathy Dudding's last film was *The Wabi-Sabi of the Asylum*. Wabi-sabi is a Japanese aesthetic centred on transience and impermanence; it embraces and accepts the cycles of life and death, finds contentment in humility and imperfection, and sees beauty in natural degradation such as rust, weathering and wrinkles.

When Kathy first talked to me about her film, I didn't know what wabi-sabi meant. I imagined that "the wabi-sabi" was a person, a character in the asylum. But the more I learn about it, the more I discover that wabi-sabi resonates with my own artistic practice and life philosophy. Characteristics of wabi-sabi include the suggestion of natural processes; irregularity; intimacy; unpretentiousness; earthiness; and simplicity. From a wabi-sabi perspective, all things are impermanent, imperfect and incomplete. This relates to my understanding of theatre as always unfinished, to my interest in process over product, and to my way of being in this world.

I don't know why Kathy changed the title, but she did. Her film premiered as *Asylum Pieces* at the NZ International Film Festival in July, achieving glowing reviews in *Lumiere* and *On Film*. Sadly, Kathy died only a few weeks later, having been diagnosed with cancer in May. She is one of three wonderful women whom we farewell and celebrate in this newsletter (page 10). Kathy, Sue Dunlop and Peta Rutter all made significant contributions to the arts community during their too-brief lives. It helps to be mindful of wabi-sabi at times like this — to recognise

and accept the fleeting transience of life and the simple process of death.

We also acknowledge the recent passings of Te Miringa Hohaia, organiser of the Parihaka Peace Festival, and Torgier Werthal, one of the founding members of Odin Teatret. Torgier was only seventeen years old when he joined Eugenio Barba in Oslo to found Odin Teatret. Our thoughts are with our Odin friends at this time of significant change.



Andrea Knox performs as the monarch butterfly in Kahuku (see story on page 8); photo by Colyn Huber

Meanwhile, the earth continues to turn; the sun rises again; the seasons change; and there is always much to be joyful about in the living world.

Next year, the Magdalena Project celebrates its 25th anniversary with a festival in Cardiff, Wales — the same location as the first festival in 1986 which kicked off this incredible global network that has connected and inspired us for all these years. As part of the anniversary, a book entitled *Legacy and Challenge* is to be published, featuring articles that reflect on individuals' connection, experience, achievement, curiosity, history or vision of and for The Magdalena Project.

Our own, local, vision of Magdalena was the subject of the first of three one-day Gatherings held this

year — see the reports on pages 3-6. There have been good turn-outs at the two events held so far, bringing new women into contact with the network and generating rich and stimulating discussion. The third event, a feast, will be held on 27 November — put it in your diary now!

Personally, I am in the exciting early stages of a new networked performance called *make-shift*, in collaboration with Paula Crutchlow. Some of you may remember Paula as the director of the award-winning company All & Sundry in Wellington

in the late 1990s; she is now based in Exeter, UK, and has been teaching theatre at Dartington College of the Arts as well as working with her company Blind Ditch and directing numerous theatre and storytelling productions (AND raising two children).

Between *make-shift* and the 101010 UpStage Festival (see page 8) I am managing to prioritise work and minimise administrative chores — for a brief moment at least! My life is busy and productive,

but not without time to reflect and appreciate this strange and wonderful life, with all its flaws and sorrows and unexpected deaths.

I farewell Kathy from my current home in Munich, wearing the black velvet evening gown she gave me a few years ago, and will be ever grateful to her for the wabi-sabi.

Helen Varley Jamieson

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Trust News

The trustees are a bit thin on the ground in Wellington at the moment with Lilicherie in Auckland teaching drama at Epsom Girls Grammar, Helen in Germany and Jessica and her family making the decision to move back to Dunedin and the support of their extended family. We wish the Lattons well and look forward to more news from the South. Meanwhile Madeline, Lisa and Janet continue to hold the fort in Wellington, with the unflagging accounting

support of Julie Lamb and Associates. However thanks to the internet, skype and email, our Trust communication channels are still flowing!

Next year is the 25th anniversary of the Magdalena Project, and founder Jill Greenhalgh will host a celebratory event in Wales in August

2011. Another anniversary project is a book, for which we have been asked to contribute an article, so we are busy contemplating its theme, *Legacy and Challenge*.

Having held two of the three one-day Gatherings planned for this year, we are now organising the third and final event for 2010, which will take place on 27 November at the Newtown Community and Cultural Centre in Wellington. As there won't be another newsletter before then, we will keep you informed about this event

via the email list. If you're not on the email list yet, please email us, info@magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz with your details so that we can connect you to this vital information source!

And please remember, if you have changed your email address or any other details, to let us know so that we can keep in touch.



Madeline in conversation with Sascha Perfect at the June Gathering.



Trustee Helen Varley Jamieson and Paula Crutchlow began work on their networked performance make-shift, London, July 2010.

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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Post Mistress

Janet Dunn

Newsletter & web site

Helen Varley Jamieson

Accountant

Julie Lamb & Associates



PO Box 27-300
Marion Square
Wellington

info@magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz
www.magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz

Newsletter contributions are welcome. Email contributions to: info@magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz

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THANK YOU!

2010 Gatherings

For the last three years, the Magdalena Aotearoa Gathering has been held over 5 days at Easter, with the focus on presenting works-in-progress for constructive criticism. This year we decided to vary the format, holding three one-day events each with a different theme. On the next pages are reports about the first event, "What is Magdalena?" and the second, "Art and Practice". The third – a networking feast – will be held on 27 November. But first, founding trustee Madeline McNamara articulates some of the questions that underpin Magdalena Aotearoa and the Gatherings.

Often it seems that we generate more questions than we answer at our gatherings. Here are those that seem most pressing to me, after the two events held so far this year.

How do we evoke the spirit of the Magdalena Project within a regional context when it is almost entirely characterised by the context of international exchange? How do we invoke the excitement, "the intricate beautiful web, with thousands of threads", that New Zealand-based Argentinian Andrea Ariel speaks of in attending her first Magdalena *Vértice* in Florianopolis, Brazil (see her article on page 9), that "collaborative network full of talent, generosity, heart, humility and wisdom"?

How do those of us in Aotearoa whom the Magdalena has inspired for the past 16 years impart the profound pleasure and excitement of belonging to such a powerful international community of women theatre makers to those who have not experienced it? What are the essential ingredients that must be present each time we meet to invoke such a spirit? What kind of aesthetic, politic and discipline does a Magdalena gathering demand? What do those of us who know of the Magdalena have to share about its importance for us and what questions do those who attend our events and are curious have to ask? What do we ask and expect of each other?

What distinguishes a Magdalena gathering from any other kind of gathering of local women theatre practitioners? What cornerstones of the Magdalena spirit do the women of Magdalena 2a. Generación (Argentina), Magdalena Australia, Magdalena Singapore insist upon when creating their local events? Do they create local events? Can a local Magdalena event actually exist if there is not an international or cross cultural exchange of some kind?

Madeline McNamara



Trustees Lisa Maule, Janet Dunn and Madeline McNamara and volunteer Jack Trolove take a break after the second Gathering.

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Final Gathering for 2010

Networking Feast

Saturday 27 November, 5pm til late

Newtown Community & Cultural Centre, Wellington

\$15 plus a small contribution to the shared meal.

An opportunity to meet informally with women theatre practitioners in true Magdalena style; to continue conversations begun during the last two Gatherings and share a delicious meal. Further details on the web site.

To register:

online: www.magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz

email: info@magdalenaaotearoa.org.nz

phone: (04) 973 1618

What is Magdalena? Saturday 5 June

The first gathering for the year, *What is Magdalena*, was held at Queen's Birthday weekend in June. With organising and technical queen Helen Varley Jamieson now living in Europe, it was with a sense of satisfaction that we got organised, in particular the technical challenges of a Skype presentation by Jill Greenhalgh, founder of the Magdalena Project, in Wales. For the many who had never met Jill in person or heard her speak, it was a real treat to have her online from the UK after the opening round.

Jill spoke of the origins of the Magdalena Project which arose in the 1980s out of the "Third Theatre" network and the group theatre movement (based on an holistic approach through training and development). Her curiosity about, and wish to acknowledge, the power of so many of the women she witnessed working in male dominated companies led to the 1986 festival of women's performance which established the Magdalena Project. Jill talked of how in the late nineties the Magdalena board were able to turn a loss of major funding into a positive situation by seeing it as an opportunity to move away from the endless need to satisfy funding bodies with particular criteria and to be freed from administrative responsibilities. This made more room for the continuing action of making work. Hence the birth of the virtual office of the Magdalena Project, which our own tech

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queen Helen was instrumental in setting up, and still maintains. Jill talked about the Magdalena Project's ethos as wholistic and non-prescriptive, not necessarily using the scripted text as a starting point, but rather devising work where the impulse could include any of the recognised disciplines such as voice, music, dance, clown, mime, etc, and some not so well recognised disciplines like Helen's cyberformance work. Most importantly she spoke of the usefulness of the network in defying the isolation that women artists so often feel, a network of contacts that assist the work to grow and to help people make their work. And she talked of her own current work, *The Threat of Silence*, and the many collaborations both nationally and internationally that it has entailed. She exhorted us to start to teach, to share the things that we know and to invite people whose work we admire to come and work with us, and she reminded us of the need for regular if not daily commitment to our practice. Our thanks to Jill for her ongoing and profound inspiration. Despite the late hour at her end, her omnipresent passion and energy for women making theatre bounced off the screen.

Jill's words beautifully dovetailed with the many questions and reflections we had planned for this first 2010 gathering. One of the key purposes of the three Magdalena Gatherings this year has been to promote the work of the Magdalena network worldwide and the work of Magdalena Aotearoa to a younger generation of women theatre makers, as well as to those who have hitherto not attended any Magdalena Aotearoa event.

Because the Magdalena Project and Magdalena Aotearoa are networks of women in contemporary theatre rather than production or theatre companies, newcomers can sometimes be a little bemused about what we actually do. We began the day by asking newer participants what were their existing perceptions of the network and we asked those who have been involved with the network over a number of years to reflect on that involvement and to challenge ourselves and each other about what more it could be.

The perceptions were many and varied. They included the notion of the Magdalena as a network of women practitioners focused on action, learning, teaching, and sharing in order to develop work and give feedback in a nurturing environment; and Magdalena as a focus of resistance born out of the group theatre culture which involved ongoing



Caz Sheldon and LJ Hay.



Pedro Ilgenfritz offers feedback to The Hooligan and the Lady cast after their work-in-progress showing.

training and investigation and long-term development of work and ideas, as opposed to the one-month turn-around model of the scripted play so common in New Zealand's commercial theatre context. There was appreciation of the network's role in opening up opportunities such as the recent trip by Auckland's LAB Theatre Company to Brazil to present their clown show *Alfonsina* at the Magdalena festival *Vértice Brasil* (see page 9).

Others appreciated the gatherings as an activator of dormant projects and ideas. One speaker likened it to the baking soda effect: "You can't just listen and sit back, you have to take part and do stuff." Some reflected on the creative space that Magdalena provides: a time to think about the possibilities of work away from the other demands on time and resources.

There were positive comments on the constructiveness of the feedback model we have developed over the past few years. One woman described it as a cauldron, and the pleasure she took in being able to contribute feedback. She felt that the conversations had the potential to open up to the infinite and touch on profound very things.

Others who had been involved in bringing works-in-progress to past Magdalena Aotearoa gatherings had felt well challenged and supported to continue the writing and development of their work. Participants had found it useful to be able to select specific people as responders and also appreciated that though sometimes it was hard to simply sit and listen to what people had to say about their work without jumping to its defence or attempting explain further, that it was a good discipline to develop and they learnt much from the process.

The possibility of holding Magdalena Aotearoa events in Auckland and other parts of the country was raised. The Trust has held events in other centres, including tours of international artists, and intends to continue touring international Magdalena artists in New Zealand when the opportunity arises and as resources allow. At various times there have been meetings organised in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin — such groups come and

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go according to the needs and energies of whoever is involved at the time. The trustees are always open to invitations to present Magdalena in other centres.

There were other questions about whether or not the trust structure could be used to support and umbrella others' funding proposals. The Trust has occasionally done this in the past, however as our administrative resources are currently quite low we are not able to offer this kind of support at the moment. There was also a comment that the Magdalena 'brand' was not hugely in evidence though it was acknowledged that events such as the Gathering were part of improving that situation.

Moving away from the various perceptions of Magdalena itself, our next activity was to share some of the current questions we had about our various practices. These included specific questions arising from current work we are engaged with, and questions we had of our own practice in general.

Many of these questions revolved around the necessity to prioritise the making of work in the midst of lives with many demands on our time and resources. There was an acknowledgment that many female practitioners struggled to give themselves time and permission to focus on their own work — that we often feel the need to justify why we have chosen this path, and that it is important to resist the puritanical work ethic origins of such feelings. We talked of the importance of valuing ourselves, each other and the work, and of recognising that the work itself *does* feed us and that it does not necessarily have to involve 'sacrifice' if we can find the right balance between the energies and time we give to ourselves and our work, with that given to family and community. The difficulty of separating domestic and artistic lives could be removed by understanding that it is all 'the work' and perhaps it is a more a matter of integrating the two realms.

Other questions included how we recognise and respond to the underlying political and ethical impulses that drive our work; the compatibility, or not, of risk and danger with a nurturing and joyful practice; and how to make work that transforms and challenges the economic imperatives of capitalism. Finally we spoke of the way in which the Magdalena Aotearoa network might pose another model for a way of being 'in company' — given the difficulty of creating and sustaining an ongoing company in this country. Is it possible that the time and energy that goes into building a company can distract from actually making the work? Are there other modes of collaboration? Are we already 'in company' through our common understanding of a certain approach to theatre

making and the networks we are creating?

The afternoon programme involved a beautiful sharing of a recent performance research project entitled *Sowing Incantations* by Ake Ake Theatre (Jessica and Rhys Latton). This began with an invitation to us all to participate in an energising vocal and movement-based training exercise which included rhythm, pulse and stamping, and ended with a showing of some improvisations with violin, vocals and movement the company had been working on throughout their winter training. The presentation finished with a flourish in the form of a polyphonic Russian folk song.

Jo Randerson then gave a PowerPoint presentation that she had recently completed for her Masters in Theatre Arts. This wonderfully playful but deeply serious, concise and thoughtful presentation analysed her own art practice but with a view to proposing what the optimum conditions might be in general for a female creative performance art practice.

The final presentation of the day was a rare chance to see lighting designer and technical director Lisa Maule plunge through the fourth wall to appear on stage in her new autobiographical solo work-in-progress, filled with so many lists and laughs and really bad costumes

but with some stunning insights into her life in theatre over the past 20 years as an organiser, lighting designer, thinker and collaborator on literally hundreds of projects. It was great to see her revealing herself in a way that was both matter-of-fact and whimsical; a deceptively simple performance by a self declared non-actor. The audience enjoyed the low-tech lighting effects from our high-tech diva and being invited to be part of Lisa's performance by producing sound effects using plastic bags, lighting gel and harakeke fronds.

The evening presentation included two quite polished scenes from *The Hooligan and the Lady* by Pauleen Hayes and company, proving the efficacy of the Magdalena Aotearoa work-in-progress sessions in sustaining development. Pauleen is hoping to present the first public production of the work in the next year's Fringe season at BATS theatre.

MC extraordinaire Kazz Funky Blue, dressed especially for the occasion, oversaw the smallest blackboard concert ever by first introducing the only act in it i.e. *The Hooligan and the Lady*, then closed the evening and the day with a rap poem that brilliantly wove together all the words and ideas she had picked up on during the afternoon sessions.

Madeline McNamara, Janet Dunn & Lisa Maule



Pauleen Hayes and Hannah McKie getting into the discussion.

2010 Gatherings

Art & Practice Sunday 29 August

Each gathering raises new questions about our regional/national network and its *raison d'être* and *modus operandi*. Composing these questions below after the June Gathering, I invited selected women theatre-makers to respond to them at the next Gathering.

1. About your practice: What is your current work and practice? How do you identify it as such? (There are many different ways to identify a practice.) What problems do you have, if any, in identifying and carry out your practice? What are your inspirations to maintain a practice? What you are doing/not doing?

2. About Magdalena Aotearoa: What are your questions, perceptions about Magdalena Aotearoa and The Magdalena Project? Do you see the network as having value for you? How can you see it working for you to support and inspire the work you currently do and the work you want to do in the future? What would you wish to contribute to the network? Is being in conversation with other female artists in a semi formal space of value to you? If so why is that? Do you currently have other opportunities where you can do this? If so what are these?

I was excited by the range and calibre of those who agreed to speak, and put together a programme which promised stimulating ideas and



examples of diverse practices. The presenters were: musician Chris White (who created *The Year of Barking*, a sound work that spoke about her practice); Minge Culture (three young women from this new women's theatre collective); Maori playwright Challen Wilson; poet Lucy Orbell, who interviewed filmmaker Rachel Davies and director Rachel Lenart (Theatre Militia); director Nina Nawalowalo (who spoke about her current project *Masi*); Jean Sergent (a young independent theatre maker); directing student Erina Daniels (showing a work-in-progress); and visual artist Jack Trolove.

While individual presenters gave interesting and thoughtful talks, overall the day did not match my expectations, and I suspect did not match those of some participants either. Since then I have been contemplating why this was the case. There are a number of practical reasons, such as the miserable weather and lack of heating at the venue. Physical surroundings are important — we were in a small huddle at one end of a cold, cavernous space which was hardly conducive to getting lost in deep conversations. However, the main reason that I have identified is that my focus was split between organisational and facilitation roles, leaving me unable to facilitate as effectively as I could have.

Within the Magdalena Project, facilitation is highly valued and there are many women skilled in this area in the international network. Locally, we have been building towards this level of skill for many years, particularly over the last four years through the Gatherings. So it was clear to me even during the day that my facilitation of the event was less rigorous than the circumstances required. When I am 'in the moment' performing as a facilitator, I can recognise the subtle adjustments that need to be made — it's like being a



Above, Madeline introducing Rachel Davies, Rachel Lenart and Lucy Orbell. Below left, Nina Nawalowalo.

tuning fork for the audience, finding the delicate balance of conditions in which they can be drawn into in the energetic confluence of ideas. The facilitator needs to hold and support both audience and presenters, and conversely the facilitation role needs to be supported by the structure of the event — which is difficult to do adequately within the resources and infrastructure that we have at present.

Because of all these circumstances, I found myself unable to hold this balance — something that I had not experienced for a long time, so at first I did not understand what was happening. The conversations became generalised and unfocussed, drifting away from the specificity of the questions. I felt as if everything was liquefying, sinking in on itself, sliding into the nebulous so much so that even I forgot about the questions I had posed and failed to recognise that the presenters were not always addressing the questions either.

Good facilitation keeps people on track, drawing the focus back to the core — which sounds simple enough. But facilitation is like a magic trick: the mechanics are invisible and more complicated than the illusion appears.

Our thanks to all those women who shared so much of themselves and their work and stayed the distance despite the terrible weather. We look forward to making up for those inhospitable circumstances with a warm, convivial and celebratory final 2010 event on the 27th November.

Madeline McNamara

Celebration/Desolation

Rachel Baker writes about her work with theatre company Binge Culture and dealing with dark matter.

I am very interested in what our social and personal responsibilities as artists are when we deal with dark subject matter in our work. It comes from my increasing awareness of this society's obsession with the dark, disturbing aspects of our nature and a need to make sense of this strange need for the morose.

At the June Magdalena Aotearoa gathering in Newtown within a circle of lively women discussing working questions this thought struck me. Within the echoey walls of the Newtown community centre, within a circle of lively woman quite unlike those that stare sombrely and distantly from passing buses in their seductive gloom, this thought struck me. I believe deeply that theatre and art has the potential to cultivate joy, and I have experienced that; joy for its makers and joy for its receivers. But it too then must be able to cultivate misery.

I think of the throbbing songs of grimy heartache I play on repeat, the cruel wrenching feeling I get following a particularly dark piece of theatre or the tears for a character I have only know 90 minutes in a harrowing film. I can't really articulate why I am drawn to these but nevertheless these are all experiences I actively seek out and am trying to create now in my own work with Binge Culture.

Binge Culture is a theatre company formed from an honours theatre research assignment into Forced Entertainment, a UK-based theatre company from Sheffield known for their dark edgy work. Famously, they once began a show of theirs naming the means of eventual death

for each audience member: "You ... heart attack ... you, car crash ... you, cancer ...". Obviously they have many walk-outs (incidentally something which overly-polite kiwis don't tend to do), yet Forced Entertainment have achieved cult status in Europe.

Invited into this project, I relished dark play, improvising around concepts such as the end of the world and cultivating the on-stage presence of a more edgy, fragile and doomed version of myself. It was a release,



it felt charged and liberating. This is why just under two years later in Auckland with the same company on a tour of our two successful shows *Drowning Bird Plummeting Fish* and *Animal Hour*, faced with a particularly raucous crowd, I was shocked to suddenly be questioning why I was even on stage.

Armed with a yellow Pak'n'Save bag and wearing the grin of a girl past the edge and plummeting from reason, I am expected to then suffocate the nearly naked man brandishing just a leaking plastic bag over his genitals as he fails to come up with top ten ways to save the planet. In the show's third season it was an action I had done many times, yet suddenly with an

audience vocally imploring me to not go through with it, I faltered. In that moment I felt sick, unsure of my right to be forcing an audience to witness something they wish to be blind to.

So when at the Gathering I was asked to articulate a working question, it was this moment which stirred my thinking. This feeling that it is not enough to be edgy for edgy's sake with no reasons above and beyond simply shock. This particular theatrical moment could

and had been read as reminiscent of Guantanamo Bay torture and of a game going too far. I must ask whether in contrary to shedding light on such situations this is in fact adding to the existing abundance of dark impressions from the media, daily life and art. When is art simply exploiting our darkest moments

to be avant garde, shocking, bold or other hot words reviewers like to use?

I am obviously nowhere near answering this question, yet bringing it as a focus feels important in this age of increasing unhappiness. I am not advocating the blinkered life but interested in how one can find celebration in playing with the unimaginable. To play is a privilege but also a need, as in truly playing we can see not only what is but also what could be.

I thank the women involved with the Magdalena gathering last June; that day to me was a celebration to meet with you all and dream a little.

Rachel Baker

Different Stages

Randai from West Sumatra



Recently Megan Collins, who gave a Randai workshop and demonstration at the 2008 Magdalena Gathering, brought 19 musicians and dancers from West Sumatra to Wellington. From 23rd September-2nd October, audiences watched Randai dance theatre, heard gorgeous flute and vocal music and listened to fabulous traditional and contemporary music and dance from the highlands of West Sumatra. Concerts and a public workshop were held at Te Papa on 25 September, and a concert on the 26th at Victoria University.

KAHUKU

Empress Stilt Dance in Cairns

During August 2010 Empress Stilt Dance was invited to do an artist-in-residency in Cairns, North Queensland, Australia. The idea was to bring the performers from our new show KAHUKU and further develop the work while living there. The regional council got behind the project and provided us with an outdoor site to rehearse and also a crane, which we use for hanging from in the show. Kahuku is a physical dance piece using stilts, aerials and acrobatic dance to present a romantic and joyful look at the monarch butterfly story — its migration and life cycle.

There were 8 of us in total. We rehearsed every day outdoors on the crane for the month of August, breaking the show apart, training the different roles, fine tuning choreography, devising new scenes and new interpretations. We then performed the result (as part of the Cairns Arts Festival) to enthusiastic audiences who were 'enchanted and moved' by the show.

The company really enjoyed living together in the wonderful house provided for us and also the 30 degree tropical heat and exotic jungle setting. We got burnt, bitten, and worked far too hard but ate together communally and had many laughs.

The performances were successful and all up we had a stunning, memorable time.

101010 UpStage Festival

More than 50 artists from around the world will collaborate online, in real time, to present 18 cyberperformances in the 101010 UpStage Festival, 10-11 October 2010. This is the fourth annual cyberperformance festival, organised by Helen Varley Jamieson, Vicki Smith, and a host of ethereal cyberperformers.

The festival coincides with the Tempo Dance Festival in Auckland, where there will be a screening of four of the 101010 performances, at 8pm on Sunday 10th. The New Zealand Film Archive in Wellington will also host screenings of the shows during the day on Monday 11th October. If you are not physically near either of those places, don't despair! 101010 is an *online* festival, you can watch everything from the comfort of your own home/office/yacht — anywhere in the world! All you need is an internet connection and standard web browser.

The programme includes work by experienced cyberperformer as well as artists from other disciplines working online for the first time, and a preview of Helen and Paula Crutchlow's new work *make-shift*. For the full programme and further information, visit www.upstage.org.



Vértice Brasil

*Andrea Ariel, of Auckland's LAB Theatre Company, writes about her experience of encountering the Magdalena Project at the recent festival in Brasil, where the company performed *Alfonsina*.*

On July 12th, at Auckland Airport, with *Alfonsina* packed in a few bags and a team of six of us ready to embark on a 47 hour plane ride to Brazil, I could not help thinking back to the day when Pedro Ilgenfritz invited me to start a theatre company with him and two more actors, both women. Back then, *Vértice* was only a dream goal.

The simple concrete reality of getting on that plane was already tremendously overwhelming, without even knowing or imagining what was to come in the two weeks we were to spend in Florianópolis. And I have to thank the festival for their invitation and trust in us, and UNITEC, for being our sponsor and believing in our dream from day one. Being Argentinian myself, this trip was the opportunity to not only experience for the first time what an international festival encompasses but also to be able to take back what I have learnt these past four years to the land where I first discovered my passion for theatre, South America (even with an Argentinean character!).

After a few days of relaxation at Pedro's parents house in a quiet neighbourhood by the ocean, we moved into the festival hotel in the vibrant centre of the city. We went to the opening ceremony, and to Claudia Contin's performance in *Arlecchino e il suo doppio* (Scuola Sperimentale dell'attore, Italy). I got to the hotel that night feeling butterflies in my stomach; there was no doubt that there was going to be a before and after *Vértice Brasil*.

There were over 80 people participating in the gathering. It was a tight schedule with performances, demonstrations, workshops, talks, routes, dinner, lunch, hotels, transport. I cannot imagine how complicated and chaotic it must be to organise an event of this calibre, yet all I felt was a great atmosphere for exchange from day one. This was possible thanks to the hard work of Marisa Napolini, Cleidi de Oliveira, Barbara Biscaro, Gláucia Grigolo, Monica Siedler, and the rest of the organization team who made *Vértice Brasil* happen. Every mistake was seen as learning, there was no room for frustration only for sharing and collaboration. This year the festival focus was



Pedro Ilgenfritz, Katie Burson, Andrea Ariel, Claudia Contin and Genevieve Cohen at Museo de Escola for Julia Varley's book release.

crossing, which generated an immense will to give and receive. I was ready to cross that border which represents all borders. I was ready to travel to others and within myself.

What does it mean being a woman in this profession? It is a question that has always meandered underneath the surface of my work. Even before I knew what *Magdalena* was about or even before I knew what I was actually

asking myself. In this company, we are young — literally young — and this is the very first time we participate in a *Magdalena Project* festival. Taking part was a great way to find an understanding of what the question even entails. And it opened my eyes to comprehend that this is something that is part of my personal journey but that it is still present in my work as a member of LAB: Research Theatre Company. Listening to Julia Varley talking in the launch of the Portuguese edition of her book *Pedras da Agua* (Stones of Water), made me think about the fact that I'm part of a research theatre company and that I should therefore document all my work. This documentation, journey and investigation in the art of theatre that I share with Pedro and my two fellow actors, Genevieve and Katie, should be definitely recorded through the uniqueness of my woman eyes as I grow and find my identity.

We had the opportunity to perform *Alfonsina* twice. We had toured the show around New Zealand a couple of months earlier and it was a success. But, performing in our first international theatre festival for a mainly non-English speaking audience, with a show that is based in Auckland and mainly in English, made circumstances a bit different. We decided to provide Portuguese subtitles

and tell the story as it was. One of our aims when we created *Alfonsina* was to make a piece that was universal. Yet, we had not been able to prove this, and performing at *Vértice Brasil* was our first 'experiment'... it is!

We had the pleasure to work with Geddy Aniksdal (Grenland Friteater, Norway) in *Crossing Frontiers*. The workshop concerned the actor abilities to be their own dramaturg through the

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Below: Geddy Aniksdal's workshop; photographer Cleidi de Oliveira



Obituaries

Sadly, we have farewelled three talented women over the winter months; singer-songwriter Sue Dunlop, actor Peta Rutter and film-maker Kathy Dudding. All three women made unique and important contributions to their communities and their passing is a great loss for us all.

Sue Dunlop

6/12/1958 — 11/07/2010

Wellington singer-songwriter Sue Dunlop died in July after a brief battle with cancer, at the age of just 51.

Napier-born, Dunlop cut her teeth as a musician playing bass in a number of bands in Hawke's Bay and Wellington from as early as 1976 – and claimed to be New Zealand's first female professional bass guitarist.

She went solo in the late 80s and released her debut album in 1992, a live recording called *Better Than Normal*, which followed a solo cabaret-style show with the same name, where she introduced the character Lezzie Presley. In 2005 she released the album *Random Deviations*.

Dunlop was also a stage performer; she was a member of the lauded women's comedy troupe *Hen's Teeth* from 1989 and performed in the comedy spoof show *The Truth About Love* from 2003.

A review in the *Evening Post* describes Dunlop as singing with power and clarity, saying she "has the ability to switch from humour to pathos without pulling out all the sentimental stops".

Dunlop is described by friends as having many wonderful qualities, including a kind and incredibly generous nature. She leaves behind her partner Fran Hoover and family and friends who loved her dearly.

Excerpted from Jacqui Stanford's obituary for Sue, published on GayNZ.com; read the full text at www.gaynz.com/articles/publish/34/article_9055.php



*Above, Sue Dunlop.
Below, Kathy Dudding
(photo by Himiona Grace).*



Kathy Dudding

11/01/1961 — 21/08/2010

On 17 July in Wellington at the NZ International Film Festival, film-maker Kathy Dudding's new work *Asylum Pieces* premiered to critical acclaim. Although she attended the opening, Kathy was by this time seriously ill with cancer, and too unwell to hold media interviews. A little over a month later, she died at Wellington's Mary Potter Hospice.

Kathy died at the peak of her creative career, having produced films for almost two decades — including two feature-length films — as well as writing poetry, prose and academic commentary. Earlier this year, she had travelled to New York as the recipient of a Fullbright Award, where she presented a paper at the Orphan Film Symposium.

In the earlier stages of her career Kathy completed a Master of Fine Arts while juggling single parenthood and work. Later, in her role as a researcher and cataloguer at the New Zealand Film Archive, Kathy was instrumental in archiving film and video work by the late Sally Rodwell, founding trustee of Magdalena Aotearoa, including rare early footage of Red Mole.

Reviews of *Asylum Pieces* can be found online at: <http://lumiere.net.nz/index.php/kathy-dudding-asylum-pieces/> and <http://onfilm.co.nz/editorial.asp?EditorialID=52160&src=E>

Julie Pullman-Webb's obituary of Kathy is online at: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL1008/S00149/obit->

Peta Rutter

1959 – 2010

Auckland-based actor Peta Rutter died in July shortly after being diagnosed with a brain tumor. Her extensive career in New Zealand theatre, film and television spanned 25 years, but she was best-known internationally as Udonna, the White Mystic Ranger and mentor in the American television series *Power Rangers: Mystic Force*.

Off-screen, Peta specialised in cross-disciplinary theatre, and co-directed *Nightsong Productions* with her partner, actor Carl Bland. *Nightsong Productions* produced *360* at this year's NZ International Arts Festival, in collaboration

with Theatre Stampede.

The two companies also collaborated on *Head*, for the 2005 STAB season.

Peta's career began as a dancer with Darc Swan (Sydney) and including working with choreographers Shona McCullough and Douglas Wright, and in recent years she performed with Indian Ink in *The Dentist's Chair*.



A Pilgrim's Process

Madeline McNamara writes about the ongoing process of her solo performance, her efforts to develop the conditions in which it can evolve, and the places where she has found support and inspiration.

For the past two years I have been working on the creation of a solo performance inspired by writings by both black and white women on the issues of white power and privilege and by both black and white critics of critical whiteness theory. A recent source of inspiration is an essay by Fiona Probyn of the University of Sydney called *Playing Chicken at the intersection: the white critic of whiteness*. Probyn states that her inspiration comes from the challenge to white feminist practice by leading indigeneous Australian scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'to theorise the relinquishment of power'. Probyn speaks of the importance and difficulty of this, especially given feminism's goal of addressing empowerment as opposed to the giving up of power, and explores the 'impossible necessity of giving up power and recognising when it has been taken away'.

Although inspired by the discourse happening across the Tasman and elsewhere, I want to develop my work within the context of the colonisation processes that have occurred in Aotearoa. As Pakeha historian Giselle Byrnes says in her book *Boundary Markers*, 'the means by which Europeans came to occupy New Zealand, together with what the conditions of continual occupancy might be, are among the most pressing concerns for New Zealanders in the early 21st century'.

In July of 2008 I wrote to Julia Varley to ask if I could present a work in progress based on these themes at the Transit 6 Festival, Women -Theatre — Periphery to be held in July 2009 at the Odin Theatre in Holstebro, Denmark. I was honoured that my request was granted. I was galvanised into action and spent the next twelve months working towards that end. Despite my determination, that period of time was marked by great personal losses and financial difficulties. The need to work at many different jobs to finance the trip also made finding quality time to work on the show a struggle.

During that period I made two quite different work-in-progress presentations to Magdalena Aotearoa colleagues, and prior to my departure for Transit I managed to set aside six solid weeks for further writing, improvising and devising. Treasured colleagues Jade Eriksen and Jo Randerson committed time and head space to help me and we set a schedule of rehearsals. I worked like a dog, generating a number of texts, and some interesting pieces began to emerge. However at a certain point I began

to lose confidence in what I was making. My creative practice has always been marked by considerable lashings of doubt but this felt very different. It was as if the work itself resisted, fought back, refusing the light of day. I, equally determined, pushed on despite my growing misgivings. Jade and Jo insisted that the work had great value and continued to encourage me. In the end, one day before I was to leave for Europe, I cancelled an intended final showing to a small invited audience and withdrew from the Transit programme. At the time I felt that my body and mind had revolted against my will. It was as if my brain had overheated and my body had frozen solid. My entire creative system slammed into shut down mode.

My initial impulse was to not attend the festival but encouraging and gentle emails from friends and colleagues persuaded me to just come and be part of it. They said that being among other Magdalena practitioners was the best place for me to be at such a time. Although I did attend Transit my mental state

was very fragile. I felt a gut wrenching disappointment and profound sense of failure; despite the incredible richness of the full programme, there were times when I found it very painful to be there. I am very grateful to the women who took the time to help me through those moments and to dear friends who helped in the aftermath.

In hindsight, there were a number of factors that led to the unfortunate situation.

Some were of a personal nature, also physical exhaustion, lack of resources, time and money, but there were other things that had to do with the work itself that I couldn't articulate clearly at the time. I think the work demanded that it be fired in the volcanic craters of this land before being presented in an international context. The more I wrote and created, the greater the need arose for an audience politically and critically informed about the issues I was dealing with, an ethical (re)sounding board of activists, thinkers and fellow artists who I could speak with when I ran into political, emotional and artistic dead ends.

Around this time I began having conversations with Jack Trollove, a visual artist who was experiencing similar difficulties in a work that she was creating for a visual art exhibition based on similar themes called *GhostPaper*, scheduled for late April 2010. We began to talk about



Some days were more difficult than others ...

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how we could bring such a group into being.

On my return to New Zealand in October 2009 our discussions continued. We craved a space where we could speak about the blocks to the work that kept emerging and the feeling of being on such slippery ground while at the same time feeling the necessity of continuing to make work in this area. We wanted to see who else was out there making work of this kind and to bring that community into contact with one another.

On the weekend of the 15 and 16 May of this year we hosted a weekend of presentations and conversations for artists, poets, theatre makers, performance artists, dancers, singers, treaty activists and educators and academics who are using their various disciplines and mediums to examine Pakeha relationships to historic and current colonisation. We wanted to explore ideas arising from literature currently emerging in the field of critical whiteness studies. We wanted to create a space we had been craving; a window of time where creative work being made in this area was supported, challenged and explored. The title of the gathering was *Whiteness/Whitemess: creative disorders and hope – a ‘critical’ gathering* and it was held in the Berhampore School Hall, Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington. There were 22 presentations and 50 people attended. The full programme is available at www.whitemess.blogspot.com.

Prior to this weekend, I had two other opportunities to present aspects of my solo work. One was to the first year acting students at Toi Whakaari — NZ Drama School and the second as part of a research conference at the school organised by students under the guidance of theoretical studies tutors Jade Eriksen and Heather Timms. On both occasions I was able to work sections of the material directly in front of an audience. These were original pieces that I had never performed before. I had a text and an idea of how to work the material but I had not, until the moment I was in front of the audience, tried it before.

Despite a ‘no show’ at Transit, by the time of the *whitemess* conference I had made 6 completely different public presentations; *whitemess* was to be my seventh. As is so often the case in my life when I am making work in between trying to make a living and other projects, I had very little time to prepare. However by this stage I was starting to feel confident that I did have enough material, more than enough. I had presented aspects of the work many times and this had been helpful. A pattern was emerging: decide on one of my texts (that I had written) and work it live, in front of the audience. Risky, but it might take the work to a new level.

I chose the text entitled *The Call*. The character answers

a telephone call, a kind of metaphorical karanga. We only hear one voice, that of the person answering the call, which turns out to be an invitation. The questions from the caller are implied by the receiver’s responses. The character receiving the call has a great deal of trouble ‘hearing’ the caller. The text is humorous but unsettling.

I didn’t want to just read the text and was searching for a way of working with it in front of an audience. Some years ago, theatre director and vocal artist Bert Van Dijk hosted the Paris-based director of Pantheatre, Enrique Pardo, in New Zealand. I attended a workshop in which Pardo introduced us to an exercise which he called *The Deranging Angel*.



*The road may be long and uneven,
but you’re never alone ...*

In Bert’s ebook *Practical Exercises for Devisers* he describes the purpose of Pardo’s exercise as being to, ‘derange the literal meaning of a text in order to discover unforeseen possibilities’ and ‘it works on the principle of taking away the speakers control over the context of their text by playing a ‘master-servant’ game in which a deranging angel (the master) takes the speaker (the servant) through a wide range of experiences and sensations’. This exercise was a good match for the themes I was exploring.

I asked four people from the audience to be my ‘deranging angels’. One was a student director, one a circus performer, another a butoh-trained clown and another an actor recently returned from overseas

who had also worked with Enrique and was familiar with the technique. Their job was to destabilise me in every way possible, to interfere with my reading of the text as vigorously as they could. I gave them permission to be as rough as well as intimate with me as they wanted. This involved, over a 15 minute period, picking me up bodily and swinging me round, putting their hands over my mouth, shaking me, tickling me, moving my body in ways that affected my voice, leaving me alone, sitting on me, bouncing on me, stroking me, lifting me off the ground, and turning me upside down. They gave me a major workout and it was a real struggle. We worked in the round, so I needed to make sure that everyone could hear me even though I was often in the midst of a huge scuffle and always at some point had my back to half of the audience. This meant that the sense of urgency and desire to communicate and hear ‘the call’ was intensified. In the text, ‘the one who has picked up the phone’ speaks at times of being in an ‘uncomfortable position’ and how ‘if they could just get themselves comfortable they might be able to hear better’. At times, with my physical body and movements in complete surrender to the four ‘deranging angels’ there was an exciting synergy between the spoken words and the physical state and position of

whitemess

In May, Jack Trolove and Madeline McNamara organised a weekend seminar to bring together artists and thinkers working with ideas around critical whiteness theory, in conjunction with Jack's exhibition GhostPaper: Thoughts on being an Unsettled Settler at Toi Poneke; Jack reflects on the weekend.

Five months have passed since about 70 artists, makers, singers, writers, activists, educators and performers from all over the country piled into the Berhampore hall on a May weekend heaving with rain.

The weekend was intense and it still feels hard to reflect on what happened during that time. I'm not sure whether its because in part it felt like a blur of tiredness, nervousness, hope, fear and excitement or that there is another reason its hard to recall what happened; like with many intense experiences sometimes it seems there is a button that goes off which refuses to record anything. Things change in archives, maybe it's that reoccurring Pakeha amnesia again.

In any case, what can I recall ...

A whole lot of us, busting our guts to have creative conversations about stepping up to the responsibilities of our history, of pakeha privilege, of how we remember without dismembering (again).

The strongest feeling I am left with is how good it was to get us all under a roof, to give it a go, to remember these conversations are always volatile but that we can still take care of each other and still have them. That it's good to share food with each other. The presentations were for the large part inspiring, breathtaking, gutsy and incredible. The conversations were still often hard, complex and frustrating but that seems to be the nature of working inside loaded colonial contexts like ours, and the blessing was that within all of that there were

moments of pure magic.

I loved seeing educators drop their familiar tools and bust out performance poetry. I loved seeing a staunch activist drop his familiar language and challenge himself to say what he had to say via a stand up comedy routine.

I loved being reminded that for the artists and makers among us our images, words and bodies speak so much more eloquently than our textual theorising can with this sometimes too layered territory. I loved seeing artists flexing their creative muscle to communicate around the issues, and feeling didactic conversations go limp in the presence of strong artistic work. I loved this with the combination of academics who are eloquent with their words and their beautiful, radical research but I loved the usual default-dominance of academia being unsettled.

I loved hearing the poets and word-smiths unpacking the complexities of the white mess in Aotearoa by piling up words. I loved Sunday morning being with the Treaty educators and how it felt like they held home for us.

I am deeply grateful to all the politicised artistic souls who made their way from far and wide to the Berhampore hall and the gifts everyone brought in their creative work or contributions to what will always be tricky but crucial conversations.

Anyone who's interested in the nitty-gritty of the weekend or seeing the programme and presentations can go to www.whitemess.blogspot.com

Jack Trolove

me the actor which opened up completely unexpected meanings in the text.

The feedback was very interesting. People said that they liked the way it wasn't polite. I liked that a lot. I don't want this work to be polite. They also read into the presentation all sorts of things that I hadn't intended. I found this very helpful. It is so important to know how the audience is 'reading' the work. I want to make a complex and layered work because that is the nature of the issues I am working with but I want to be sure that the audience is not picking up meanings that run counter to what I intend. I also want to present the work to people of varied cultural backgrounds. We read things differently depending on our life experiences so it must be clear what the work is saying and what it is not saying.

I have not worked on the solo since May but some opportunities are coming up for some further explorations and I am beginning to warm to it again.

This year I have been involved in a number of projects led by other colleagues, which is as close as I get to being part of a company — something that is very hard to

sustain in New Zealand. They have included a feminist film project led by Marian Evans called *Development*, the incredibly rich *Ex-isle of Strangers* led by Bert Van Dijk (a site-specific work between four locations on Matiu Somes Island, a predator-free scientific and historic reserve in the middle of Wellington harbour), and I am currently working with a small group of female actors on a piece which Jo Randerson is directing for her Masters in Theatre Arts.

I have accepted that my solo work will not come easily or quickly and so I work on it when I can and with collaborators who have the time and interest to help me. I aim to open up larger spaces for the work to inhabit next year and am using the final months of this year to plan these openings so that I don't hijack my own creative intentions.

In the meantime I am getting on with making a living, getting out of debt, and collaborating with others whose work inspires and feeds my own.

Madeline McNamara

Skies Bridge Minds

Separated Only by an Ocean. Water Connects; fluidly.

June – July 2010, Challen Wilson (emerging Māori playwright, among other things) went again to Alaska for the next installment of the Alaskan Indigenous Playwrights Synergetic Collaboration that is *Winter*. Cathy Rexford (Inupiaq, Alaska) and Challen Wilson (Ngati Tamaterā, Ngati Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Kai Tahu, Ngati Kuia, Ngati Koata, Ngati Raukawa) were entering into their third year of collaboration on the epic theatre piece and journey.

This time in Alaska it was the middle of summer, 24 hours of light, ‘midnight sun’ in existence and a time for whaling, hunting and tundra adventures. The two writers delved into, as usual, a very spiritual, connected and sharing time together. A lot of writing was done for *Winter*, for synergy, for future and this time for business also.

Few from New Zealand can tell you of the painstaking process that is international theatre collaboration. And those few will also tell you in the pain and the learning your worthiest dreams are realised. From Challen’s perspective Alaska is like a home away from home. This northern-most city of the world creates layers to open up doorways and portals for her. Only in dreams are these spaces opened in her native home of Aotearoa. This is often the very place that *Winter* takes us all to; the layering of time and space.

Always as part of this collaboration, which has been a fantastic time to learn and add value to craft mastery and spiritual union, do understandings of self and journey come quickly to the forefront of these journeys. The journeys add so much value to the creation of the theatre epic, elemental connectivity between the two

indigenous playwrights and later (optimistic production date: 2012) to national and international audiences alike. For this is the journey of *Winter*, this is what the ‘old’ have foretold and this is grand.

Now, as you may have sensed from the start of this — *Water Connects; fluidly* — there was a major turn in the voyage that is *Winter*; but only for the best that can be given to the work. Coming back to New Zealand, Challen was eager to map the next stage of development, but she knew that there was something in the wind. She also knew that it was not for her to speak word of. It was for her colleague and dear friend Cathy Rexford to articulate. Collaborations evolve over time and the new direction that ours will move in has Challen voyaging for the next part of *Winter* without her writing partner, but with the spiritual relationship intact in a more potent recipe of collaboration and wise counsel.

Back in New Zealand, Challen is continuing her writing and research, particularly in the area of Asian artforms. Zeami, who wrote a treatise on the traditional Japanese Noh Theatre in the early 1400s, has been particularly inspirational, and the following are quotes from his writing:

“To see the spirit is to grasp the substance. To see with just eyes is merely to observe the function.”

“Without substance there can be no function.”

“Everyone wishes to imitate a master actor, yet no one should try to imitate him. Here, imitation refers to function, resemblance to substance.”

*Shona Paterson
aka Challen Wilson*



Inventing the IQC

In the second part of her two-part article, Meg Torwl elaborates on inventing the IQC – Identity Quotients Calculator.

First a little herstory which frames the meandering road of my journey to the Balancing Acts Festival in Calgary 2009.

Kathleen Shannon founded Studio D, the National Film Board of Canada's women filmmakers' studio, in 1974. This became part of the career of Moira Simpson, a mentor who ALWAYS turns up and gives me feedback on my work – thanks Mo! She has worked on some 30 films for the NFB as a director and/or cinematographer. Bonnie Sherr Klein joined Studio D in 1975, and made many films, perhaps best known, *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography* (1981). Her filmmaking went in to hiatus in 1987 after she suffered a stroke. In 1998, Bonnie was inspired by the passion and creativity of performers she was meeting in the growing international disability arts movement and she founded Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture with Artistic Director Geoff McMurchy. Kickstart held international arts festivals in 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010. I had a film in the 2001 festival and photography in 2004. Aotearoa's own comic performer Philip Patston performed at the 2001 Festival. Upon returning to Aotearoa he founded the online community IGODAP – International Guild of Disabled Artists and Performers, which has since grown many creative offshoots: Giant Leap 2005, NZ's first International Disability Arts Festival; online networks Creative Momentum, NZ Disability Media Collective and Wise Species, under his Diversity Works Trust. He facilitated a recent series of workshops with Arts Access Aotearoa on inclusive practice in May 2010.

Bonnie Sherr Klein and I were practically neighbours in a small coastal town. In 2003 I was a consultant on her ground breaking NFB documentary with 5 artists with disabilities, *Shameless: the ART of disability*. In 2004 I worked with the NFB Pacific and Yukon Office, as project coordinator with AccessNFB, an outreach project to put the NFB in touch with media makers with disabilities aiming to make more films BY people with disabilities, not ABOUT people with disabilities.

While I was working with Bonnie and the NFB, the Pacific and Yukon Executive Director was Rina Fraticelli, a filmmaker with a background in theatre and author of the 1982 study *The Status of Women in Canadian Theatre*. From 1987-1990 Rina was Executive Producer

of Studio D (which operated from 1974-1996). After my working in video 2000-2007 in Canada, and radio in Aotearoa 2007-2008, I returned to Canada in 2009. Rina Fraticelli was by then Executive Director of Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture, employed me to work in community outreach, event promotion and workshop production. We auditioned people and produced a training workshop with Deborah Lewis for Canada's first live Audio Description Service, EarSighted. Audio Description brings theatre alive and more accessible to visually impaired audiences. Description between the

actors lines, describes action, lighting, sets, costumes, through a transmitter, to a single ear piece.

I produced and was a participant in a Kickstart's 2009 Human Writes Story Creation Lab with director Jan Derbyshire. She has a wonderful ability to create a safe and goofy place for people to be themselves and try out new things. With my coordinating role I didn't always contribute in the group, but wrote feverishly at home. This became the basis of a script for a commission from Michele Decotignes, Artistic Director of the Balancing Acts Festival 09, in Calgary. This festival is a forum for disability arts holding an annual festival since 2002 through her Stage Left Productions company, developing professional and emerging talent in theatre, film, visual arts. It is strongly grounded in Theatre of the Oppressed

(www.stage-left.org/current.htm). This afforded me a rare and treasured opportunity to portray aspects of many communities I belong to, both as a person and an artist.

Comic, actor, playwright and director Jan Derbyshire received a Balancing Acts commission in 2008 for her revolutionary show *Funny in the Head*; she agreed to direct me in 2009. Somewhat of a mirror in terms of sexuality, gender and disability, she pushed me to a higher level of emotional honesty in performance through workshopping, rehearsals, and by challenging me to dig deeper in my writing. From her blog *Inklings* in 2008, "So the colossal squid is weird looking and awkward and deeply shy. I like her. I relate. To deter predators she squirts ink in the shape of her body. It is a decoy, it gives her time to get away from whatever terror she is currently experiencing ... I write to find the truth in my own lived experiences. I help others to write to find their truth as



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Inventing the IQC

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well. We are all colossal squids, I think, wide-eyed and frightful and lovely and gracious all at the same time.”

The result was *That's so gay!*, a solo show with spoken word, new media, soundscapes, and a photo/colour based projected backdrop that considers the many ways people are defined as ‘other’. Opening and closing with the program maxmsp/jitter which converts music to colours, referencing alienation through a *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* atmosphere. Interwoven are the stories *Purple Star Fishenator* – a true story of being touched by a star fish, exploring our fear and attraction to difference, our desire to find others like us; and *Solidarity* – about colleagues supporting each other’s struggles as First Nations, disabled, and queer during the time of the 2007 police raids in Aotearoa. *That's so gay!* is kept lighthearted by sensuous poetry and use of the Identity Quotients Calculator, a tool for the multiply marginalised – how much of each identity we can be in any given context. Who knew pie charts could be so funny!

Frustrated at times by a lack of understanding of my work, even within/between the various marginalised communities I belong to, I analysed my work to discover in what context different disciplines have been presented 1999-2009. This resulted in the invention of my Identity Quotients Calculator – IQC ©. If mainstream society of the dominant culture defines ‘normal’ as male, European, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, the further you are away from that, the least likely your work will be presented, commissioned, funded, reviewed in a mainstream context. This I call the Standard Deviation – how far you are away from ‘the norm’.

The more I am physically present in my work, such as performance, I am defined as 60% queer; or radio, audio on the web 100% disabled. In film I am 1/3 female, queer, and disabled/human rights activist. When I work in new media I am 50% disabled, 25% human rights activist, and 25% mainstream — but neither queer nor a woman. When my poetry is published, and I’m not present I am 40% mainstream, and 20% each female, disabled, queer. Go on get out the calculator, work out your own IQC!

I performed *Purple Star Fishenator*, and Jan Derbyshire performed *Mrs Green* in July 2010, at Gallery Gachet’s Eco Madness Cabaret — The Heart is an Endangered Species: Postcards from the Psychic Wilderness (writer/performers in support of the Earth).

Next up I will be coordinating a season of Audio Description launching with several theatres in September 2010. Working on BRIAN – BC Regional Integrated Arts Network, launching an online network in August. Hope to get back to that book of poetry in 2011.

Meg Torwl

Meg on the web Integrial Media:

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

Read about *That's so gay!* in her Dec. 2009 posts.

Vértice Brasil

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exploration of gesture/voice relationship. It was a highly rewarding work as it is part of what we are investigating in LAB. To then see Geddy, in her seamless solo performance, *My Life as a Man*, was a privilege and a pleasure that I will never forget. It made me ecstatic.

We also participated in two of the four days of Arlequinno Claudia Contin’s workshop: *Hey, it's not me anymore – the mask and the visit to a ‘sculpted’ body/character experience*. The proposal consisted in getting to know some famous Commedia dell’Arte masks. We looked at how and why they are built the way they are and the importance of physical rigour. It was the most detailed and precise window ever opened to me to the craft of a theatre form that I considered a beautiful artisans piece. Having the opportunity to network with her wound up my momentum and gave me inspiration to continue my work, as she is on a journey similar to the one we just started to walk on with LAB.

We were going to take part in Jill’s workshop, but due to health problems she could not be with us in the festival. But, as I said before, this did not break the spirit! Technology came to the rescue and we managed to have a Skype talk to her from Wales.

By the second week my brain, body and heart were about to explode with excitement, pain, knowledge, exhaustion, love, passion and inspiration. I had a huge bag of questions next to my pillow, and a few answers.

All women that belong to this collaborative network are full of talent, generosity, heart, humility and wisdom. Each one has given me a part of themselves, which I take with me to give back later. They all left a mark in my heart and brain. From day one, for the very simple fact of being a young woman dedicating my fullest to theatre, I felt supported and welcome to the Magdalena Project. It is an intricate and beautiful web with thousands of threads that started to be woven the year when my mother didn’t even know a theatre devotee was growing in her belly. Today, I look forward to keep on knitting.

The very last performance I got to see was *Semillas de Memoria (Seeds of memory)*, performed by compatriot Ana Woolf and directed by Julia Varley. It was a magnificent piece of theatre, which particularly touched me deep in the heart for being Argentinian. It opened something very special in my soul. I could feel something that started ticking inside me.

That night we all went to a bar to relax. I looked at the long, long table of women (and a few men!) who I shared the past two weeks with; all talking loud, sipping on caipirinhas, dancing around and I knew that I’d changed and that that initial thought was true: there was a before and after in myself as a woman in theatre thanks to *Vértice Brasil* 2010 and all women involved in it.

Andrea Ariel
Auckland, New Zealand

International News

Teatr ZAR Work Session, Poland

From 24-27 August two New Zealanders, Sandra Sarala and Sascha Perfect, had the privilege to attend an intensive residential work session as potential stagiaires (interns) with Wrocław's multi-national group, Teatr ZAR.

The two and a half day meeting took place in Brzezinka, the forest base of the Grotowski Institute, an isolated, lovingly renovated mill/farmstead site surrounded by mixed forest, with almost no digital technology reception. 'Zar' is the name of the funeral songs performed by the Svaneti tribe/family inhabiting the high regions of the Caucasus in north-west Georgia: Teatr ZAR, under Jarosław Fret's directorship, has worked closely with the family and their centuries-old songs since the company's inception in 1999. The company has also worked with traditions/music from Corsica, Sardinia, Ukraine, Romania, Iceland, Chechnya, Japan, Egypt, Bulgaria, Greece, Andalusia, Armenia and Iran.

ZAR's theatre primarily deals with a singing actor, in that their work hinges on a strong desire to communicate that theatre is something which should be heard – the actor's body shines and emanates its inner sound energy. The openness of the physical, music-based (as opposed to more text-based) work creates deep images which utilise minimal technical support – "All I need is a plug," says Jarosław, speaking of staging needs. Each piece takes approximately three years to evolve into a 'finished' work through a constantly shifting process.

Although ZAR's next piece will be concerned with Armenia and the Near East, song-gathering expeditions are yet to occur so our group of 12 plus four ZAR company members worked with 2000-year-old polyphonic Georgian songs for three magical evenings, led by Jarosław. We also engaged in a mix of physical and vocal sessions led by various members of the ZAR ensemble which included acrobatics (supported somersaults backwards off the wall, wa-hey!), contact dance, rhythm/breath-rhythm work, and harmonic improvisation. Each day consisted of four 90-120 minute sessions starting with pre-breakfast physical workout at 8:30 a.m., and ending late at night.

We were especially fortunate to be provided all our meals, a no-cooking luxury enjoyed communally at the huge table – made from boards recycled from the farmstead – in the cosy ex-stables red-bricked common living area accompanied by a crackling fire-box. By dint of seating choice at our first sit-down, Sascha and I became a team-New Zealand dishes/



Festivals coming up

Magdalena Torino

1-5 December, Torino, Italy

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

Magdalena Sin Fronteras

January, Santa Clara, Cuba

the third festival organised by Roxana Piñeda & Estudio Teatral

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.

Magdalena India

Trivandrum Kerala, 2012

Start saving and planning for the first Magdalena festival to be held in India, dates TBC.

cleaning team, giving us chances to swap stories of offshore (we've lived as expatriates for extended periods, Sascha in Ireland, me in South Korea, Russia, Poland, Czech Republic and Germany), and recent New Zealand experiences.

Jerzy Grotowski's comment on theatre being created "for those for whom church does not suffice," movingly realised itself for me in numinous moments during the evenings of three-part singing. On our first night we lay in the smaller upstairs studio, fire burning, heads together, singing our respective parts in darkness, lightning providing moments of illumination during a powerful storm lashing outside. On the last night, also punctuated by a rainstorm, as we sang in the large ground level studio in front of the large open fireplace, the always temperamental power died and we were transported 2000 years back singing a song whose words are now only truly understood by their primal force.

Sandra Dempster/Sandra Sarala

Notices

Clown Workshops

If you are in the Wellington area, two are opportunities coming up to extend your clowning skills: Aileen Davidson is planning to run a workshop later in the year and Gabriele Gschwendtner is offering her PlayFoolSpirit workshop again.

A minimum of 12 people are needed for Aileen's workshop to go ahead, so if you are interested — please contact her at connaught@paradise.net.nz (put 'Clown' in the subject line) or call her on (04) 973 7585.

Aileen has run clown workshops for over 30 years. She helps to develop clowns who are able to exist in the 'real' world, while inhabiting their own reality. She has been a clown tutor at Toi Whakaari/NZ Drama School; Wellington Performing Arts Centre, and with Long Cloud Youth Theatre, as well as for many other groups.

Gabriele will lead her introductory workshop, *A Sense of Wonder*, on 9-10 October. Mindfulness, compassion and the power of being present in the moment are the roots of PlayFoolSpirit Clowning. With the simplicity and purity of the heart, the Clown discovers the world as a place full of wonder and surprise.

The workshop is an invitation to be yourself in the moment and to discover the clown in yourself, your abundance of creativity and the joy of playfulness.

This workshop will be followed by an advanced clowning workshop (*The Innocence of the Clown*) on 17-18 October. Contact:

Aileen Davidson
Phone (04) 973 7585
connaught@paradise.net.nz

Gabriele Gschwendtner
PLAYFOOLSPIRIT
Phone 04 /977 4839
Mobile 021 073 4386
www.playfoolspirit.co.nz

Newsletter contributions are welcome, particularly from outside the Wellington region: reviews, previews, interviews, opinion pieces and articles about your own work or work by other women theatre-makers. Photos too — remember to include caption and credit information. We may need to edit your material, or choose not to publish it if it is outside our readers' interest or if the newsletter is too full. Email contributions to info@magdalenaotearoa.org.nz



Let's Roar Loudly!

*Conversations about feminism and art
Group Exhibition and Symposium
23-24 October, Dunedin*

Lets Roar Loudly! A weekend of presentations and conversations for artists, musicians, writers, performers, academics and activists who are thinking about or using various disciplines to examine feminism and the everyday. The weekend is open to anyone for whom these conversations are useful.

Invitation to Artists and Presenters!

We would love to hear from you if you have work you would like to present in this forum. Works presented might be finished work, works in progress, excerpts or simply starting points.

To find out more: www.letsroarloudly.blogspot.com
letsroarloudly@gmail.com

Theatre Devising Classes

Lucette Hindin is offering theatre devising classes in Christchurch. Term four (10 weeks) begins on 18th October. For those who register and pay before 1st October, the cost is \$120.00 for the term.

We are lucky to have the use of the Philip Carter Auditorium in the Christchurch Art Gallery for the second half of the term, and the term will be focused on developing individual SOLO SHOWS, with an (optional) performance evening to end the year.

We will continue the sensitive and powerful work of term 3, using the Deborah Hay "performance meditation" approach to devising and performing. This is a highly imaginative way of working, allowing performances a surprising depth and a strong feeling of immediacy and presence. I have been inspired to work with this method over the past five years.

We will also consider ways of approaching the use of space and audience relationship and explore character, narrative, text and of course, devising process.

Register now at: www.creativetransformation.co.nz or contact Lucette, phone (03) 351 6956 or 021 175 9845

Dunedin Fringe Dates

It's official. The dates of the 2011 Dunedin Fringe Festival will be 17-27 March. Artist registration for the 2011 Dunedin Fringe will take place in late October and early November. Stay tuned to the website for information: www.dunedinfringe.org.nz/