



FOCUS

Spring 2011

News from the School of Performance and Cultural Industries



New Stages, Bright Futures.

Postgraduate research in the performing arts can be a surprisingly lonely pursuit. It's easy to sit by your desk or editing suite, stretch in the studio or stand singing in a black box and wonder, 'What am I doing this for? Who's going to see it? How will I know if it's any good?' The New Stages festival, hosted and curated annually by the School of Performance and Cultural Industries, gives postgraduate researchers from the school and across the university, a platform to answer some of these vital questions with the help of their peers and public.

The launch of the event this March could not have been more public, with Gavin Rogers (MA Culture, Creativity and Entrepreneurship, PCI) parking his Union Jack festooned Mini Rover slap bang in the middle of Briggate, and asking the participating public to question their sense of British identity. Where Gavin wove his research into the cultural fabric of Leeds, other offerings, such as Adam Strickson's (Teaching Fellow, PCI) tenderly exposed collection of stories, poetry and theatrical masks drew an intimate circle around cultures as exotic and familiar as Bangladesh and Burnley. Caroline Lucas' (PhD, Department of Music) sonic, visual and visceral presentation drew crossings between women's subjugation and ideas of nationhood, while Jessica Walker's (practice-led PhD, PCI) surreal biographical ghosting of the late singer and actress Patricia Kirkwood was alternately hilarious and tragic. DARE Cultural Fellow Cheryl Frances-Hoad's research group responded diversely to Schumann's *Women's Life and Love*, displaying the new fruits of the university's collaboration with Opera North, and the launch day culminated in Stage One with Kathinka Walter's (practice-led PhD, PCI) four-hour durational dance installation, *Before I Decide*. Walter's co-presence with the dancers as 'visible choreographer' created an ecstatic and effervescent performance that explored acts

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and processes of communication with mesmerizing agility. Later in the term, Duncan Marwick (MA Performance, Culture and Context, PCI) treated audiences to a seething rendition of Berkoff's **Actor**.

The festival is packed until the end of term with shows from across the disciplines, including tea ceremonies (Siwei Wang), award winning new writing (Jan Perry) and a performance from PCI's Incubator Scheme participants, Northern Creative Theatre, to name a few. New Stages gives postgraduate researchers the opportunity to stretch their ideas and place performance truly at the heart of their research practices. Also, indispensably, the festival gives the public an opportunity to engage with the pioneering creativity of one of the regions' creative hubs and catch a glimpse of the bright future of the performing arts. *Sara Zaltash MA Performance, Culture and Context*

New PCI Technician

Colin Leppington has joined us from Opera North as Technical Co-ordinator for PCI. He started working in the theatre in Ireland and has toured extensively. He has worked in Barcelona for 4 years and has been involved in opera, contemporary dance, theatre and live music in various technical roles.

Three new Research Fellows join the School

Louise Ann Wilson is an artist and scenographer who makes site-specific theatre performances and designs and directs theatre, dance and opera productions for both conventional theatres and non-theatrical spaces both in the UK and internationally. She is the artistic director of the Louise Ann Wilson Company - a company that creates site-specific performance works that explore the relationship between rural landscapes and human life events. The audience experience is often central to Wilson's work which is characterised by collaborations with artists as well as experts from other disciplines not usually associated with performance, such as neuro-scientists, geologists, cavers and sheep farmers.

Dr David Jiang (a Leeds alumnus) is an internationally renowned theatre researcher, practitioner, and drama educator with extensive experience of work and study in China, USA, UK, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. He worked alongside University of Leeds colleagues on the Shanghai and Bregenz chapters of the 2008-10 European Cultural Cooperation project, OPENCOV, and

gave considerable input in to the team's developing understanding of the theory and practice of cross- and trans-cultural performance in the English and Chinese traditions.

Ric Green is Operations & Technical Director of Opera North, the only national English Opera company based outside London. He is a regular contributor nationally and internationally to strategic planning for the sector. Ric has had a long informal relationship with the University of Leeds which has become more formalised through the DARE project (2006 - current). He was a member of the small core group which proposed and developed this innovative partnership with the University and has played an active role in projects such as the research working group established to consider the effect of EU legislation on employers and the monitoring of noise exposure, and the EU cultural co-operation project OPENCOV. You can find more information about OPENCOV at www.opencov.eu and the DARE Project at www.dareyou.org.uk

King Lear - Third Year Performance Project

This performance project – one of the final inter-disciplinary collaborations for the third year BA students at PCI, saw a reworking of Shakespeare's great tragedy from a company of performers, dancers, managers and designers supervised by Research Associates Katie Beswick and Kelly Preece.

As one of Shakespeare's greatest dramatic masterpieces and a harrowing exploration of the nature of human suffering and kinship, both the story and the characters are complex and any contemporary production needs to address the issue of adaptation for a modern audience. The greatest challenge of the process was editing the play, to pare down the text to a shorter, more appropriate length and help to clarify plot lines. Working with the language and negotiating the cuts was difficult and time consuming but extremely rewarding come production week as we were able to present a strong and clear version of the play without losing the poetry of the verse. The performers, who were responsible

for editing the text, worked with designers and managers, who used themes and ideas from the play to create the stage space. A mirrored floor, echoing the play's themes of distorted vision, formed the centre-piece of the set design.

The group were cohesive and hardworking, making for a positive collaborative environment which shone through in some fantastic performances. The success in the undertaking of male roles by female performers is just one of many indications of the commitment it takes to bring such an ambitious project to the stage.

More information on the production can be found in the online programme http://www.leeds.ac.uk/pci/King_lear.



Left & Right Images from King Lear





Opera research: something for everybody!

By Dr Kara McKechnie

I have been involved in the partnership between the Opera North and the University since its beginning, engaging with opera research at all levels: currently, I am teaching a group of Year 2 PCI students on Collaborative Processes. They are delivering music workshops to two inner Leeds primary schools in May with the help of Opera North Education staff. For this, I have gained a new qualification: Music

Ambassador for Opera North. It is great fun to be working with a range of musicians and primary school teachers and then to pass on my new skills to the students. We will find ourselves chanting 'My head is high, my feet are low and this is how I bungalow!' or work on story and music devising techniques with Opera North's recent children's opera *Cautionary Tales* as inspiration. I also supervise two PhD students on the collaborative project 'Opera as Adaptation' (they are co-supervised by colleagues from Opera North) and work with another student on creative models from a joint singer/author perspective. Finally – my own research. There are several projects in the pipeline; the largest being a monograph about Opera

North and applied opera studies: history – ethnography – production analysis. I spent a productive five months with the company on study leave last year. More short term, I am writing a programme article about *Rheingold*, the first evening in the *Ring cycle* by Richard Wagner, performed in a semi-staged production by Opera North in their 2011 summer season. I am also making a contribution to the current Freedom season in a University workshop on the production of *Fidelio*, Beethoven's only opera. From undergraduate to monographs – it's all in a day's opera work. See you at the Grand Theatre or the Howard Assembly Room!

Image of the Howard Assembly Room by Malcom Johnson

24 Hour Rehearsal *Just Before Dawn*

By Laura-Jane Zielinska – A Manager's Perspective

Students on the Level 3 Performance Project module recently devised for a continuous 24 hour period in preparation for their final performance event of *Just Before Dawn* - here is a managers perspective on this unique event.

"One space and 24 hours to create immersive material for the third year Performance Project, *Just Before Dawn*. An environment created through lack of sleep, exhaustion, mental blocks and sugar highs and lows. This was for most of us a challenging yet

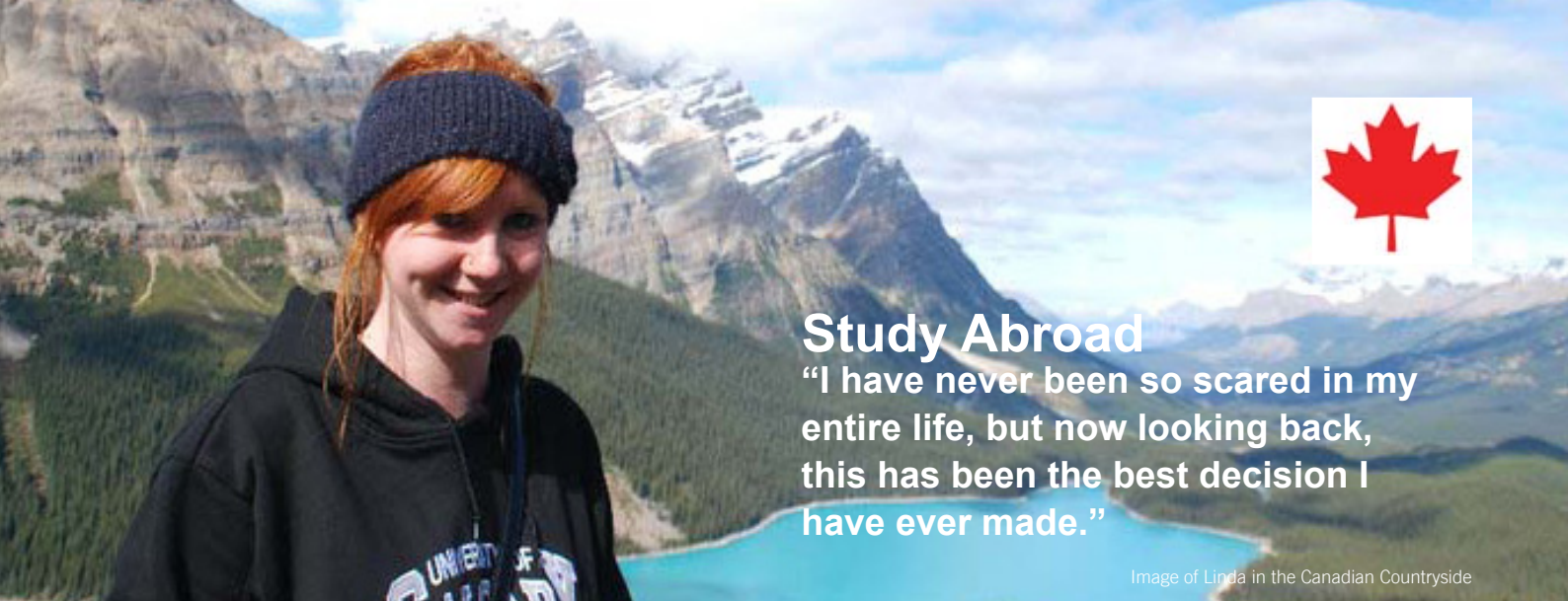
strangely exhilarating and extraordinary experience. The majority of the *Just Before Dawn* company shared the sentiment of finding the empty space of the theatre quite calming. However as the event progressed our fond memories of stage@leeds as a familiar place began to distort, in the early hours of the morning, into a claustrophobic and oppressive atmosphere. Fluctuating emotions throughout the 24 hour period definitely affected our approach to the work. As tiredness set in, so also did irritability. However, a positive determination to create new work was also established. Tiredness and personal experiences were drawn upon and when material was conceived in response to the space and time, there was an exhilarating buzz of excitement.

The limitation we were presented with in regards to resources within the space had a surprising positive affect on the work that was produced. Props such as shopping trolleys, guitars and wedding dress were all incorporated within the devising process, providing

different ways of using the material which normally may not of been considered.

At 2am in the midst of developing a movement piece the atmosphere was electrifying. The stillness of the night was upset by the heavy beat of music. At a time where most people were sleeping, the energy within our 24 hour 'prison' was rising. Bodies moved in tune with each other and for the non-performing members of the company, the years of lack of play were forgotten as we all became immersed in the developing drama. With moments like this intervening in our night, the apprehensions regarding tiredness and tensions were dismissed as we prepared to show our material to an invited audience - it was a night none of us will ever forget."

To experience *Just Before Dawn* for yourself the event runs 11 -14 May 2011. Book early to secure your desired time! For more information please visit www.justbefore dawn.co



Study Abroad

“I have never been so scared in my entire life, but now looking back, this has been the best decision I have ever made.”

Image of Linda in the Canadian Countryside

Study Abroad Student Linda Horsburgh of Managing Performance talks to Focus about her Study Abroad placement she is currently undergoing in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

“7 months ago I boarded a plane at Gatwick airport bound for Canada. I was embarking on my study abroad year, majoring in Drama at the University of Calgary. I have never been so scared in my entire life, but now looking back, this has been the best decision I have ever made. Calgary is situated in Alberta, one of the western provinces of Canada and the closest city to the famous Rocky Mountains. Whilst here I have been hang gliding, ice skating on a lake, skiing, snow boarding, tobogganing, to the largest

mall in North America, eaten countless amazing burgers, all in amongst studying and being a part of the university’s Drama department. As a Managing Performance student it has had a huge impact on my view of my studies to have the opportunity to study acting for a year. Teaching here is very similar to that of a UK drama school, as many of the U of C drama students hope to go onto become professional actors. The most important thing for me though is the vast array of people that I have come into contact with. I have met new friends from all over the world; friends I know will be around for the rest of my life. We’ve all experienced living far away from home for a year and have been determined to make the most of every second. This for me is the year of saying ‘Yes’,

and since I got off that plane last September I haven’t once regretted it. I would advise and encourage anyone to do Study Abroad, it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity that is far too good to miss!”



What is study Abroad?

Students opting for Study Abroad take an additional year of study between L2 and L3 of their programme making the total period of study 4 years. Study Abroad is an excellent addition to any CV. The ability to network cross-culturally is increasingly sought after in a global workplace, and will enhance your graduate employability.

For more information visit www.leeds.ac.uk/studyabroad



A Space Hopping Love Story

PCI student Alex Bromley and his band **Escort Knights** dominated the busiest shopping street in Leeds with space hoppers on a Sunday afternoon in order to film their new music video for forthcoming single ‘Contagious’ The four-piece band led one hundred fans in a flash mob style event, bouncing down the length of the busy shopping street, whilst being filmed. Shop assistants stopped work and joined shoppers in the streets whilst other onlookers filmed the stunt on their mobile telephones. The whole event was staged as the climax to the new video for **Escort Knights** forthcoming single ‘Contagious’. “We have completed three days of filming prior to this.” Explains keyboardist Jonathan Doherty (27) “It is a love story on space hoppers with the grand finale being the mass of space hoppers we had today.” ‘Contagious’ is out now. Image of hoppers on Briggate, Leeds



2010 graduate lands BBC Job

Performance Design student Ali Knowles graduated in 2010 and has since landed a job straight away working for the BBC. So far Ali has worked along side industry professions on many projects including; standby Art Director for feature film **Inbred** (pictured), Blue Peter Art assistant and lots more. “I feel the skills and experiences I have gained from studying Performance Design at the University have enabled me to go straight into working within the film and TV industry. Having gained knowledge and confidence I am able to make the best of the opportunities I have had so far, these have been both rewarding and challenging”.