



INTER-PLAY - session 1 Thursday 30th July 2020 notes

Acknowledgment of Country and Welcome - Caroline Stacey

INTER-PLAY - part of a suite of writing programs at The Street Theatre; includes First Seen, Made in Canberra and The Hive

Practicalities of cancellation and postponement of work with implications for all parties involved

The key - to get through the pandemic with the sector not only intact, but improved

Framework for certainty...

12-24 months of work programmed, either through re-programming or anterior commitments - how this impacts ACT theatre-makers

Re-engagement with live theatre - audience comfort levels crucial to this - upwards of 70% of audiences considering February 2021 at the earliest. Generally - an appetite to return - in time - of course, health and well-being impact this; what are the pockets of capacity?

Introductions - several experienced published writer/playwrights, several earlier in their creative journey - aspiring writers for theatre and the internet, and theatre-makers - broad interests in writing, dramaturgy and all good storytelling

Shared and individual experiences of the period - programmed work cancelled or indefinitely postponed; writing on hold because subject matter, genre or setting seems inapt [right now]; scripts stalled at final workshopping stage, as they are unable to be rehearsed; diverse opportunities and gigs cancelled; interstate move indefinitely postponed; work in rehearsal resonating more potently, and/or changing purely because of the current situation; the pros and cons of how COVID has changed our perceptions or perspective on both pre-existing works and current projects; a collective experience experienced in isolation; acknowledging the spotlight that's been shone on the state of the arts in Australia; visibility of issues such as raising Centrelink payments, free childcare, youth and women disproportionately affected by job losses, a dearth of appropriate levels of mental health, aged care or disability support, the issue of black deaths in custody, and Black Lives Matter [systemic issues that need to be addressed]; work hasn't changed, but the context has - what happens in this space?! what does this mean?

The myth of the prevalent narrative of the pandemic being the great equaliser...

If you don't have an audience, or the work doesn't have a life, is the creative act the most important thing?

Positives of theatre people are missing - collaboration - working in a team, the physical/live/3D space shared with others; risk-taking; taking part in intellectually vigorous, creatively courageous work; tapping into a shared consciousness/universality; 'ephemeral, live communal empathy'; the magic; the post-show discussion; mutual imaginings shared in the same space, in real time; the generosity of audiences - audiences accepting and appreciative of having their imaginations stimulated, their thought processes interfered with and their ideas challenged; being encouraged to think, as only theatre can; live humans, who are inherently fallible and the psychology of the precipice - the unspoken rule that something could fall over/go wrong at

any moment and everyone willing it to be a success - the intangible feedback loop of this 'liveness'; A questioning of what material might be relevant, pertinent or apt right now - how our personal behaviour and responsibilities feed this; incidental interaction and/or conversation; the reckoning we are asked to face each time we enter the theatre; strong bold work - is this still what we want?; Art's function as a reckoning - our instinct to serve out that function; sharing stories with a whole new audience

What is theatre? Live performance with an audience... connection/gathering/assembly. A literal exercise in empathy. What passes between stage and auditorium is inexpressible in words - a feeling

Purpose? To distract, comfort or to disturb. Will the reckoning that ensues have the capacity to change the form? Will there be an appetite for work adhering to this transformed paradigm, taking us beyond the domestic reckonings we've been focused on in Australian playwriting recently?

Liveness - what is it? the exploration of the space between filmed and live work; these hybrid works play to live audiences in the space with the performers, and are also livestreamed to a wider audience - however, they are not recorded, so the event is a-live only in the moment of performance

Core nature of work alters [the performance] when performed and/or viewed online

Uncertainty = recalibration... or reimagining

Answers are definitely not as important as questions right now

Is it okay for me to start writing again? Should we [I] bother? Why am I bothering?

Immediacy. How can we harness this?

How long will/can resiliency last?

What is the world going to look like? What will happen to this work - who's going to perform it?

Progress made during crises frequently stalls post-crisis, with no follow-up - how do we avert going backwards?

Language as a tool to improve culture - clarifying and streamlining [redaction]

The virus has revealed and exposed issues that are endemic to our society - a heightened awareness and understanding of social inequality - how do we ensure lessons learned assist us in the future?

The condensation of time -

What is normal?

If theatre were to change [as a consequence of COVID-19], what might change? What might we want it to change [in]to? How might it look, sound and feel? Should things change, and why?

Feeling like there's nothing in the playwriting toolbox; exhausted and despondent acting out the scenes and finding something positive and reinvigorating in the process - allowing further insight and focus

The slow process of creating theatre - 3 to 4 years to get a show written and produced.... What will the work look like by then?

Artists have 24-hours to commiserate or celebrate following failure or success - a useful tool now

What's inspiring us? The vibrancy of political action, and the necessary willingness to act. COVID requires collaboration - or a shared agreement - to move forward towards the future. Everyone is going through something communal - as artists, we're grappling with how to summarise this experience afterwards - the feeling, emotion and experience - relevance - a fear of, or reaction against, tokenism

Inspiration coming from across art forms - novel 'Dark Emu' - Bruce Pascoe, play 'Blackie Blackie Brown' - Nakkiah Lui, film 'Edmond' - Alexis Michalik, novel 'The Constant Rabbit' - Jasper Fforde, score for narrative dance-piece, 'Three Worlds' - Max Richter, and novella 'Lie with Me' - Phillippe Besson