

# bodiesinflight

## **NEW WORK: LIFE CLASS**

Our new show *Life Class* celebrates our greatest, most memorable, most requested role - our selves, and asks how we ended up playing this part ... in this scene ... with these lines, making these moves ... And who's that playing opposite?

Beginning with the most simple of set-ups, **two performers on stage facing one another in front of an audience**, *Life Class* ends with the most complex expression one person will ever make to another – I love you, followed by an uplifting audience-centred dance.



[At the opening, performer Graeme Rose with participant performer Beth Holland]

As an integral part of the process, *Life Class* offers opportunities for participants, specifically older movers, to share their reflections, inform and co-create the material, developing a discourse throughout the research process, hearing and recreating their stories of romance through social dance, determining how the show's sound score emerges from their memories, and performing in the work.

In celebrating 30 years of making performance, we began this new work with an initial three-week research phase in a residency at Dance4's International Centre 4 Choreography (Nottingham). We started with two performers in the studio exploring how we can take 'attentive dwelling' and the dialoguing process we have been developing through the *Dream Walks* (2009-16) and *Gymnast* (2011-13) into the new work (please see more about our community-based working practices in About the Company below). In this first phase, choreographer Sara Giddens and performer Graeme Rose worked with The Nottingham

Mechanics Osteoporosis Tea Dance club to develop choreographies and soundscapes that composer Neil Johnson and video artist Tony Judge developed into material for the show.

To conclude this initial R&D phase, we shared a work-in-progress at the Wickham Theatre (Bristol) on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2019 – the same venue where Bodies in Flight’s first performance was presented in 1989. We then premiered the work at the Djanogly Theatre, Lakeside Arts (Nottingham) on 21<sup>st</sup> June, alongside *Flesh & Text* – an exhibition celebrating 30 years of Bodies in Flight (Wallner Gallery), to great acclaim (see feedback below).

We then developed the work for the Lancashire Encounter Festival with Preston-based dancers from Fever Dance and the Preston People’s choir (September 2021).

## **Edited feedback from participant, audience and producers from the Nottingham performance and exhibition June 2019.**

[for moving image of the show & more feedback visit:  
<https://www.bodiesinflight.co.uk/events/event-title/> ]

### **From Participants**

“Thank you so much for the most amazing experience working with all of you. You gave us confidence to do things we wouldn’t have thought possible.”



[Barbara Clark and Beth Holland with Morven Macbeth and Graeme Rose]

“It was an amazing experience, one I initially didn’t want but I am so glad I did it. You all were all so generous with your time and my goodness so, so patient. Me personally, it brought out strengths I didn’t know I had, my confidence grew so much. I also saw a world, your world in theatre that I hadn’t seen before. Thank you so much.”

“I never believed that I could go on a stage and do what you asked me to do, but with your direction and patience I did it and I am so pleased with myself that I did. It’s an experience that I will never forget all due to you.”

“[People] all said how much they enjoyed it, and how emotional it was. It had some of them in tears. And also how good we were and they also said how much fun it was at the end and they loved it.”

### **From Audience Members**

“Thanks for the show tonight. It was just beautiful.”

“It spoke directly to me and of so much I see in relationships - I am very moved by it. Thank-you. So beautifully crafted.... the performances were painfully held and achingly raw at the same time... Just beautiful. I learnt something about living last night - isn't that just what great art should do. It was wonderful. Heart wrenching, funny, endearing, uplifting, straight-talking. I loved it.”



[The finale – Graeme and Morven dance cheek to cheek as the choir sings]

“Wow! Haven’t stopped thinking / talking (& dreaming!!) about the show. I already feel I need to see it again, it was so intense at times. Left me with many questions – which I love!! Thank you.”

“*Life Class*, for me, focussed on time – how it passes or lingers and how it is shaped by the people around us. Sitting with my soon-to-be-teenage daughter and her embarrassment at the thought of me dancing brought back memories of me thinking I would never want to stop dancing, yet I have stopped. The constant movement of feet beautifully reflected that time moves on, but we don’t all move at the same pace or necessarily to the same dance. The voices evoked a past time, but spoke of feelings that go on unchanged. We should all dance...even if only in the kitchen!”

“Congratulations on creating a gripping, moving, deep, intense, honest and entertaining show. We loved it! I was mesmerised by the two main players. I hope you are all very proud and delighted in what you have done over the last thirty years. A truly inspirational achievement.”

“Touching and generous work. Thank you.”

“An extraordinary, beautiful, intelligent, moving and intense experience.”

“I thought *Life Class* was one of the most moving pieces of performance I’ve seen in ... forever. The beautiful complexity and relationship between the performers and ourselves, the music, moves, voices and words, woven through with questions and layers of meaning. All of which left me with a mixed sense of joy and longing – for new loves and past lives. I loved it!”

“A heart touching performance. An exploration of insecurities through wonderful connections between generations. Inclusive and surprising, real and romantic.”

“A moving and thought-provoking show. Giving you lots to reflect on and much to make you smile. Ending with a lovely audience friendly dance.”

“It was brilliant! Sensitive, thought-provoking, beautiful, and very real. Powerful and challenging, but also full of delicate touches and warmth. Very very special, and the tea-dancers were amazing!”

“A very poignant and deeply reflective piece. I found myself in a personal dialogue at many points analysing myself and my reaction to what I was hearing- pulled back from thoughts by the movement that would ebb and flow to and fro in the space.”

“It was touching and thought provoking, fascinating in the way it blended together spoken word, dance and music. I loved the respect and understanding that took the experiences and reminiscences and blended them together to make art with the collaboration of the actual people.”

“Just a few lines to let you know how much I enjoyed the show and the fantastic exhibition that was on display. It was a first for me regarding attending performing arts, but certainly not the last.

The dancing at the end was very enjoyable and finished off the show superbly.”



[Everyone up to learn a square tango at the end!]

## **From Producers**

“Being new to Nottingham and to Dance4, my crossover with Bodies in Flight has been more immediate than historic. It was fantastic seeing the 30-year body of work that has been achieved over the duration in one exhibition. What an inspirational journey. It was really lovely to have the mix of film, photography and objects alongside the text and gave me a real insight into and animation of the work and ongoing partnerships that are clearly present. Seeing this and then watching *Life Class* (which was wonderful) a couple of weeks later was really special. Thank you.”

[Hannah Sharpe, Programme Director, Dance4]

“What words and what images ... in the mind’s eye and in digital form. It was a magical evening and I’m so thrilled to have been a small part of making it happen.”

[Paul Russ, Chief Exec and Artistic Director, Dance4]

“I found this to be a rich and beautifully constructed work involving older people who frequent tea dances. The narrative is a love story told backwards, from bitterness to joy. The central couple, the performers, dance around each other in the space, the erosion of anger in their words drawing them closer until they are a couple again, dancing in each other’s arms.

The inclusion of participants and their voices at key points ensures that *Life Class* is rooted in its subject matter. Bringing older people into a work that is about now is important. Their dancing is very special to see. Near the end a choir sings – spine-tinglingly beautiful, as their voices carry the words from a different place. The audience is encouraged to look and listen everywhere.

I find Bodies in Flight’s work to be understated, as it builds and weaves a complex narrative about time, ageing and relationships. It is rare to see work that has such gravitas and maturity, and involving participants so skilfully in the making. When I think of Bodies in Flight, I think of work that is provocative, work that challenges us. Work that also holds us whilst we reach a new awareness. Always aesthetically beautiful and considered. The music, the words, the movement, film – distinct and yet more than sum of their parts. But for me, it’s their way of bringing people into the work. Bodies in Flight make beautiful art. They invite people in, to a place that is intelligent, a little bit punk even, but most importantly, for me, a place that is human. Where we can recognise our limitations and our potential, at a safe remove, through the power of their extraordinary artworks.

[Suzannah Bedford, Creative Director and former ACE officer]



[Graeme and Morven in the work-in-progress, Bristol, February 2019]

## **Feedback Life Class: Preston**

“It was a very welcoming event – everybody in the venue had a smile. The pandemic has been a very difficult time for my mum who is in her eighties and lives alone. It was great to attend an arts event that we both enjoyed, and it was particularly lovely to see my mum engaging in the group dance at the end of the performance.” **Tania Callagher**

‘The show, especially in it’s new setting, provided an opportunity to physically connect closely with the performers, through audience placement and immersing ourselves into ‘their’ setting, intensifying the relationship and taking us along on their journey. As a local person, hearing local voices and witnessing intimate connections with the dancing couples in tandem was just beautiful, especially as the dancers returned to their original partners at the end, witnessing in the most subtle of moments, the reconnection and enjoyment they were sensing. It felt as though we were given a privileged view into personal moments in a way very rarely experienced as an audience. A brilliantly gentle unfolding of lives, journeys, moments and futures, making me think, feel, reflect...and then let go and celebrate.’ You could also just use.... ‘Bloody loved it!’ – **Sarah Hall**

“A poignant piece of dance theatre, with captivating and vibrant performances by the cast. My 12 year old and I both loved joining in to dance at the end. We know how good it feels to dance too.” - **Penny & Stella**

“Full of eye opening stories that gave an interesting insight into how unique everyone’s individual circumstances are. It really made me appreciate the art of dance even more than I already did... It made me feel really emotional seeing people touching and dancing together again. The end “lesson” was also a really nice touch, thank you :)”- **Misha**

“What a delight to attend the performance of Life Class at Fever Dance in Preston recently. An interactive performance that allowed the audience a captivating insight into the essence of dance and dance partnerships and the wonderful escapism of being absorbed in the moment.” - **Anne Kingston**

“It was very interesting and got people together and got them talking and dancing.” **Irene**

“ I very much enjoyed the show and even though I know the company were not able to showcase all the elements as planned, it was wonderful to see ‘real’ people performing in a ‘real’ setting – it was very atmospheric and I found each of the dancer’s contributions very moving. I am personally very invested in the world of dance and as we have been apart physically for the last 18 months, it was a real treat to be invited back into that world by this show and it’s performers. In particular I really enjoyed the grandness of the show’s themes set against a seemingly ordinary backdrop, performed with a sweetness and a knowing smile!” – **Philip Skyes**

“Thank you very much for offering Preston Peoples’ Choir the opportunity to take part at the “Life” performance. Because of the change of date and venue only some people of our choir were able to participate. The tune and harmonies were a challenge for us to learn, but we got there in the end. Sometimes it’s good to be challenged. And now I can’t get the song

out of my head. It was a remarkable performance you designed and presented, something innovative, something I never have seen/heard before. I very much enjoyed the possibility to be part of something so new, something integrating so different people with very different skills and life experiences. This was a great evening for me which I will remember for a long time. Congratulations to your performance and success under so difficult circumstances.” - **Sigrid Pach**

### **Collaborators Feedback**

“I was very pleased to be invited to take part in Life Class. Having initially been a liaison between the Bodies in Flight and Preston People’s Choir, I was later asked to complete the music composition work. In this role I had an active part in the devising process and experienced the considered, collaborative way in which Bodies in Flight worked with the actors as well as the accommodating, encouraging approach that was taken when working with the dancers and singers from the community groups.” – **Jon Aveyard, Sound**

“Working on this project has been a delight. The moment I saw the couples rehearsing in the space dancing and laughing I knew how special this performance would be. Not only telling such a heart-warming and soul touching story but to also be the first performance I saw after lockdown, let’s just say more than a few tears were shed. I loved seeing the community cast of Fever Dance build their confidence and develop a sense of team pride in their performance along the rehearsal journey. The performance was a whole new level of pride and joy, that I am glad I was able to experience” – **Sophie-Leigh Barrow, Bodies in Flight Intern**

### **NEXT STEPS LIFE CLASS**

Building on this success, we are developing a second phase for the project by identifying up to five further partners with whom we can apply what we have learnt in Phase One to new groups of senior dancers, choirs and their communities. With each partner, we will work with a specific Social Dance club, recording their memories, accessing existing archives and co-creating a bespoke version of *Life Class*.

In addition, we would like to explore presenting the show in theatres, galleries and participant friendly environments, so that their wider communities can experience their involvement in *Life Class* as a work which challenges expectations. Over 8 sessions, Sara Giddens and a local Dance Ambassador will work the senior dancers, as Graeme Rose gathers their memories, so that sound artist Neil Johnson and writer Simon Jones can construct a new sound-score that specifically reflects their experiences of social dance. We would want to ensure that the voices of the actual participants are heard in the show. Our video artist Tony Judge can then work with the participants to create a lasting legacy that could connect existing archival interviews to materials created with the participants through this process and bespoke visual images. This video work will be used in the show itself and be a stand-alone legacy asset available for the group’s and partner’s use.

The co-directors will then work with performers and dancers for two weeks to create the bespoke performance. Following that, the Dance Ambassador could continue the legacy work with the senior dancers. We would also be very willing to work with a local choir as we have done in Bristol and Nottingham and integrate them in to the work.



[The finale of the work-in-progress]

**TECHNICAL NEEDS:** very simple indoor open stage or space, chairs, plus ideally a basic LX cover and PA system and/or video projection/ surfaces. The performing configuration will be tailored to the specific qualities of the venue or environment (such as social clubs, dancehalls or theatres), and should be a minimum of 10M x 5M playing space.

#### **AUDIENCE (Development Plan)**

We are most interested in working in partnership with our partners' audience development plans to create a sustainable and meaningful connection with resident communities. We are committed to and experienced in contributing to encouraging local ownership of art and culture.

This work has the potential to reach some of the Arts Council England Mosaic profile audiences that are harder to hit: e.g. Hey Days, Home & Heritage.

Audiences will be generated through:  
Families & Friends of Older Dancers  
Museum Projects stakeholders  
Other dance communities in your area  
Partners' audience data base.

We will seek opportunities to take tickets to the communities – through Pop Up box office at rehearsals and through bespoke social-media advertising and Eventbrite ticketing.

Evaluation and reflection are an integral part of our working method: we will devise appropriate and bespoke evaluation methodologies that work with and alongside our

partners' own needs and strategies. This will include the use of audience agency questionnaires and reflection and evaluation sessions with older performers (dancers and choir members), facilitated by evaluators known by our partners.



[Barry Winship tells a story about the “domestics” he’s witnessed at the club]

## ABOUT THE COMPANY

Since our eighth show *Do the Wild Thing!* (1996), Bodies in Flight has developed a working method with an explicit agenda: to combine exciting new writing with dynamic choreography to explore the deepest reach and furthest throw of performance as an art-form, when-where flesh utters and words move. We have done this in two distinct, but related ways: through a series of innovative collaborations with artists from outside theatre working across art-forms (composers, musicians, video-makers, digital-artists and photographers); and moving between a standard proscenium-arch staging and non-theatre, site-specific environmental performances.

The central idea that links the twinned dynamics of our working method addresses what we think is the key concern for contemporary artists: why continue to make performance in an age of digital and convergent media? For us, the answer is in the mixing of the performance event itself, where individuals can encounter one another in an anonymous crowd, when bodies and ideas mix profoundly and lightly across media and persons and places. In our performance work we seek to go beyond immersiveness and interactivity to reach into the deepest pasts of our humanity and imagine the furthest possibilities of our futures.

Bodies in Flight has worked consistently with a group of associate artists, as well as been inspired and challenged by familiar and new collaborators, and in our last two works – *Dream-walk* and *Gymnast*, with participant groups from local and sports communities.



GYMNAST, Nottingham

A wonderful experience. Gorgeous vocals married with numerous, yet poignant video footage.

As a young gymnast, I totally got it! Having the “Heaven and Earth” song and the visuals really captured some special moments of those gymnasts’ thoughts and feelings.

A poignant, oddly holy tribute to the quest for perfection. Unlike anything I’ve seen. Transcendental. Well done!



DREAM-WALK, Wirksworth



DREAM-WALK, Skegness

### CALL & RESPONSE: THE WORKING METHOD

Since 1996, we have used Fra Angelico's Annunciation, described by philosopher Michel Serres as "the apparition facing the incarnation", as a metaphor for performance itself. We referenced it in our collaboration with the band Angel Tech, and our subsequent opera *Who By Fire* (2004). In this new project, Abramovic's version of the basic encounter in performance – *The Artist is Present*, which many of her critics disparaged as *theatrical*, prompts us to make the face-to-face the object of our investigation. This face-to-face between performer and performer, performer and participant-performer, performers and audience is fundamental.



Starting in autumn 2018 and building on our relationships with partner organizations, we have extended our collaborations with different community groups in *Life Class* to include older dance-based communities. We worked with the Nottingham Mechanics to explore and engage with key questions about the accumulation and transmission of experience in

and across generations. Such themes have long been concerns of Bodies in Flight, in such works as *Constants* (1997), *Who By Fire* (2004) and *Gymnast* (2011-2).

Working with our core artistic team (Graeme, Morven, Sara & Simon), we built on our method of juxtaposing choreography and text. In three weeks of workshops, the new work's basic dialogic structure was explored through a series of calls and responses: one performer calling to the other who responds. This process built up a repertoire of *calls*, each made up of a range of material (dance or movement, spoken word or song) that was available to both performers to exchange in any order, improvising sequences that coalesced or contradicted meanings and moods, emotions and reflections about the nature of our interdependence, this common need to both author and validate our everyday presentation of self.

## **ARTISTS**

### **SARA GIDDENS – choreographer & co-director**

Sara completed a practice-led PhD with Dance4 and Middlesex University which explored how interdisciplinary practice challenges conventional concepts of choreography and how the processes of making dance-works can be effectively articulated – both within and beyond the practice itself, particularly with regard to audience-spectator engagement. In 2005, she was one of six nationally acclaimed choreographers to be awarded a two-year research bursary from The Choreographic Lab (funded by Arts Council England and The University of Northampton) where she made *Triptych: Who By Fire* with film-maker Tony Judge and contributed to a range of salons, seminars and workshops exploring how we can frame and talk about dance and choreographic practice. Reflections from this work are collected together on-line at [www.choreographiclab.org](http://www.choreographiclab.org). Sara also works as a creative facilitator and project manager across the East Midlands, and is Reader in Choreographic Practices and teaches on the Dance Performance and Teaching course at UCLan.

### **SIMON JONES – writer & co-director**

Simon is a writer and scholar, founder and co-director of Bodies in Flight, which has to date produced 17 works and numerous documents of performance that have at their heart the encounter between flesh and text, where *words move* and *flesh utters*. He has been visiting scholar at Amsterdam University, a visiting artist at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Banff Arts Centre and has been invited to Shanghai Academy of Arts. He has published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, *Entropy Magazine*, *Liveartmagazine*, *Shattered Anatomies*, *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, *Performance Research: on Beckett*, co-edited *Practice as Research in Performance and Screen* (2009) and *Artists in the Archive* (2018) and his work with Bodies in Flight features in Josephine Machon's *(Syn)aesthetics? Towards a Definition of Visceral Performance* (2009).

### **NEIL JOHNSON – composer**

Neil Johnson is a musician, sound artist and composer who creates scores for theatre, film, video games and immersive events. He's performed all over the world including SXSW in Austin Texas, Glastonbury and Singapore. He has played in the band Angel Tech for the last 20 years, recording and touring extensively, and has been a part of North Sea Navigator as well as the experimental sonic art duo The Bad Wires. Recently he scored the performance *This Last Tempest* by Uninvited Guests. He has composed for various clients including BBC and Scottish Opera and has taught sound design at Bristol University for the past 15 years. Neil leads the Wayward Choral Society, a voice-positive, sex-positive choir which meets monthly in London and Bristol. He delivers workshops in such settings as Womad, Summer

House, Bath Festival. Previous shows with Bodies in Flight include *Skinworks*, *Secrecy of Saints* and *Who By Fire*, as well *Dream Walks* in Wirksworth, Skegness, Cardiff and Bristol.

#### **TONY JUDGE – video artist**

Tony is a filmmaker who has exhibited works for gallery, screen and broadcast including Channel 4, BFI, ICA and MOMA NYC. He is founder director of Creative Forum, a lens-based production company. He is currently developing a documentary series - *The Fine Art of Rock* that profiles a range of artists who have risen to fame with bands such as The Clash, The Specials and The Farm. Tony has been working with Bodies in Flight since 1989 when he was producing a documentary of Live Art at the Third Eye Centre (Glasgow). His first moving-image collaboration with the company was *Flesh & Text* in 2000. Tony also works as a creative mentor and teaches film-making at Leeds Arts and Edge Hill Universities.

#### **MORVEN MACBETH – performer**

Morven trained at The Academy Drama School (London) and has worked with many theatre companies, most notably imitating the dog and Improbable. Shows include: *Heart of Darkness*, imitating the dog 2019, *Bring the Happy* (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 2018) Invisible Flock, *Opening Skinner's Box* (Wexner Center, Columbus, Ohio, 2018) Improbable, *Nocturnes*, imitating the dog, *The Train*, imitating the dog 2016, *A Farewell to Arms*, imitating the dog 2014, *Horizontal Collaboration* (David Leddy), *Fire Exit* 2014, *LeanerFasterStronger* (Andrew Loretto, 2012), Sheffield Theatres, *Six Degrees Below the Horizon*, imitating the dog 2011, *Look Back in Anger*, Carpe Diem Theatre 2010, *Kellerman*, imitating the dog 2008, *Called to Account*, Tricycle Theatre 2007. Morven's work also includes TV and Radio.

#### **GRAEME ROSE – performer**

Graeme is a Bodies in Flight associate artist (previous work with the company includes *Rough*, *Skinworks*, *Who By Fire* and *Model Love*) and founder member of *glory what glory* (1987-91), *Stan's Cafe* (1991- present) and *The Resurrectionists* (1995 – present). He has also worked and toured with Insomniac Prods, Talking Birds and Red Shift Theatre Co. (Board Member since 2002). Other recent work includes education and community projects for artSites, Talking Birds and Stan's Cafe (as education co-ordinator), also directing devised work at the Universities of Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Recent performance includes Talking Birds's *25/7*, HamFisted!'s *Paradise Dreaming* and Stan's Cafe's *Of All The People In All the World* (aka. the rice show) and *The Cleansing of Constance Brown* which continue to tour internationally.

