

**Quarantine [Simon Banham]**

**7:30 for 8:00**

**Cooking with my daughters**

## **The menu**

### **See Saw**

*Two slices of seating banks separated by a red silk curtain flowing down the centre.*

### **Something a taxi driver in Liverpool said**

*A small fragrant room of flowered wallpaper and upholstery served with tea as a preparation for a liquorice black journey of smells and sounds from the edges of your memory.*

### **Frank**

*A collection of old memories and new experiences housed in private spaces wrapped in a communal corridor with soup at its heart.*

### **Eat Eat**

*Two slabs of concrete perched on steel legs sandwiching a path of under lit rice, prepared in the timber framed Tudor Hall in Leicester.*

### **Rantsoen**

*Discovered in a crumbled garage in Ghent, and served on a warm red tray containing a circular table of cherry wood and rice.*

### **Geneva**

*750 light bulbs on a bed of black cables with a dress of faded flowers*

### **White Trash**

*A single green pool table on a surface of scuffed vinyl tiles sprinkled with tab ends.*

### **Butterfly**

*A parquet dance floor spread with white balloons and edged with buffet tables under a glaze of 150 mirror balls, with a side dish of freshly prepared sandwiches and crisps.*

### **Grace**

*In a mould of shuttering ply under a sagging star cloth nestles an awkward litter of plastic chairs, a pink wall, Lidl bags, a water cooler, a broken neon sign all garnished with a fake palm tree.*

### **Susan and Darren**

*A squash of spectators at the breakfast bar layered with the flicker of television screens, the slow pulse of cheap disco light and a sliver of polished dance pole to secure the whole.*

## The invitation

*"What are you making?"*

When my daughters ask me about my shows, I can answer very simply or at great length. They are inevitably keener to show their friends the remnants of old models that pile up on the attic shelves: rowing boats beached on scaffolding stages, stained glass windows wedged between Ferris wheels and spiral staircases, the leftover medieval feast shoved into the back of a Fiat 500 and a collection of period figures quizzing the Snow Queen as to the origin of her saucepan hat. Leaving aside their fascination with the miniature, it may seem that the world of make-believe, the sense of illusion that so draws them is less apparent in my work for Quarantine....but is it? I still thrive on spectacle, I still enjoy making something beautiful, I still have to remind myself to stop. Many of the same questions and processes pertain; they are just calibrated differently in Quarantine's work.

***Susan and Darren:** Sitting drinking tea in the front room, Sue leaning in the kitchen doorway always on hand to prepare food whilst Darren talks, stretches and watches television, the door to the house left open for the inevitable visitors: this task is a theatrical envisioning of Susan and Darren's living room. Everything present but extended for presentation, on its best behaviour, perhaps a little over dressed, a space that encompasses both the public and the private –a show that must include a dance class and some sandwich making - one party's ending the next (with our help) in preparation, as they share their 90 minute biography of lost loves, precious childhood memories, violent deaths, living room carpets, rape, cooking, friends and endless fatalism.*

## The Guests

*"Can we come? What happens?"*

We hope to be taken by surprise by our audiences; we want to give them the opportunity to reshape the event by their presence and actions. This is one of the key aims of our work, and for me the hardest to achieve successfully: the integration of the spectators into the space and activity of the performance, not only a physical engagement but also an invitation to act, to partake, be an active presence, and actively contribute to a confusion and fusion between performers and audience.

We have often used shared rituals, usually meals or parties, to breach the divide between the audience and performer (*Eat Eat, Rantsoen, Butterfly* and *Susan and Darren*). These familiar social gatherings have their own codes of behaviour that allow and encourage an interaction that may range from the intimate to the public and as such can be exploited within the peculiarities of the theatrical context to extend the experience beyond the moment.

***Frank:** On the edge of the stage, sandwiched between fly ropes and prompt corner you sit awaiting your turn. In front of you the backs of flats and beyond*

*these a variety of half-remembered sounds underscored by the repeated playing of Frank Sinatra. After a period of waiting, listening and observing from the wings, you enter a perimeter corridor, dimly lit and smelling of boiled cabbage, where some doors are locked (the interiors only accessible through the spy hole) whilst others give access to a variety of rooms and installations, through which you can wander at leisure. There is no limit to how long you spend in the installation and no knowing if the people you encounter are performers or other audience members.*

*The process of the individual journey through rooms enables a 'remembering' of self, whether this is by tapping into an old memory triggered by a smell or moments of self-reflection in a mirror, or simply the heightened perceptions enabled by alone-ness (maybe in the cupboard full of old toys and fur coats). Until the penultimate room, a soup kitchen. This, by chance, proves to be a strong focal and gathering point, an accidental success, the threads of which can be traced in our subsequent work. Here complete strangers will settle and talk, creating a strong sense of community, in fact a new community that begins within but develops a life of its own beyond the performance. You reach the soup kitchen with a renewed, heightened, or 'opened' sense of self and this promulgates the extraordinarily intimate communality of the penultimate room. A situation where you can reveal as much or as little as you wish, where you can be as honest or as imaginative as you choose – the making of that choice is interesting and it is both heartening and intriguing that 'in the company of strangers' we choose to reveal rather than disguise.*

**See-Saw:** *Before you arrive at the theatre: a man at the train station with a bunch of flowers waiting for – whom? ; teenagers on opposite sides of the street, swapping chips and flirtatious insults; milk spilt outside the theatre doorway. The very ordinary, un-noticeableness of these actions - by these 'performers' who you will meet later in the theatre - which becomes utterly different when you place them under the lights, in a theatre...*

*At the theatre: each seating bank (separated by a concealing curtain) is seasoned with audience and 'performers' an unknowing and unknown mixture. The entrance to the performance is through a darkened gauze maze originating in door A or Door B (whose traces remain in the Tramway today, used still to divide and allocate, tickets printed with the ghost of a previous production) and finally placing you in 'your' auditorium – after suitable anticipation the curtain falls and for a moment you're facing a giant mirror until the reflection doesn't repeat your wave, until the twins in the front rows scratch different ears, then surprise turns to laughter, turns to embarrassment, and back to laughter; who is supposed to perform? Then the stories begin, people from Glasgow sharing their memories, their lives, with their neighbours; who is performing?*

## In the Kitchen

*"Do you make the shows on your own?"*

Since 1998 Quarantine has made 10 pieces of theatre. Initially three core members, directors Richard Gregory and Renny O'Shea and myself (the designer), there are many people we have since worked with repeatedly who have contributed significantly to the shape of the work, in particular the lighting designer Mike Brookes and more recently our administrative producer, Verity Leigh.

It is not possible to disentangle my contribution from that of my collaborators, as the scenography and performance elements are developed interdependently from the first concept, which is almost always presented as a visual idea. This then has to be translated into space, and it is in this transition that it finds a new dimension, when Mount Everest becomes a field of light bulbs [*Geneva*].

*Quarantine* is more like a rubber jelly mould that can stretch to fit whatever contents are poured into it. The initial idea may be to make a rabbit but if it turns out to be an elephant nobody is too surprised.

**Director's Note:** *I like to picture us arriving at our collaborations hatless - only polite when one's sitting down to eat. Each of us - designer, director, lighting designer, choreographer, writer, producer, whoever is involved at the beginning - start from the same place, interrogating our subject freely, forgetting that we'll have a particular role. At some point, sooner or later, each of us will need to put on the hat labelled 'designer' or 'director', (whatever we happen to have some degree of expertise in), but at the start, we're just offering the ingredients that our own particular human experience suggest.*

*But of course we need to start with something- a little 'amuse gueule' to get our juices flowing. Any of us might bring this. Most often mine happen to be visual - a formal construct (2 seating banks for 'see-saw', a pool table for 'White Trash') that might evolve into a trope where our explorations can be sited. Simon takes these and shakes them up and distils them until only the essence remains - sometimes unrecognisable as stemming from the miniature crumb I offered.*

*The visual, spatial, aesthetic choices that Quarantine make are an exact corollary with the way in which we develop live performance material. These elements are inseparable and inextricable - the one the function of the other. In rehearsal, I try to develop material with performers that is at the same time a genuine reflection of their lived experience and somehow a heightened, theatrical comment upon it - through textual framing and juxtapositions, the choice of performance languages, a host of strategies.... Simon's work - those mirror balls floating above the familiar party setting for 'Butterfly', the polished pole linking earth to heaven in 'Susan and Darren' - does something very*

*similar: offering images which are at one and the same moment familiar, mundane even – perhaps ‘real’ – yet somehow suggesting something beyond the everyday.*

*Simon’s scenography for Quarantine is most definitely and defiantly not simply the table our work is served upon. He chops, stirs, spices and salts like the rest of us. Our collective aim is to try to make something tasty enough to share...*

*(Richard Gregory- Artistic Director)*

## The Ingredients

*“What’s in them?”*

We might start with one question and twenty people, perhaps one hundred questions and two people, the outcome always confounds expectations and assumptions.

1. What have you forgotten?
2. Name something that you believe in...
3. What was the date of the last time you cried?
4. What stops you?
- 5...6...7...

Quarantine make theatre with, and arising from, the histories of the people we work with: a Glaswegian family; seven young white men from Manchester; a dancer and his mother who cleans; refugees in Leicester, immigrants in Ghent; a group of performers from various cities, yourselves...

Quarantine are not a reality theatre company, we are not the stage version of Big Brother, but we do often choose to work with people who are not trained actors, people who are not trained to tell other peoples’ stories and who could not tell stories unless they were true [or their own lies]. And we ask these people to share their stories and experiences, to show but never to pretend. We use theatre and its means to develop a context for people to make discoveries for (and about) themselves and we create situations, circumstances and environments that encourage interactions between people that can be intimate and invisible, public and celebratory. We try to make work where these moments can emerge unforeseen and unscripted, and continue beyond the frame of our work. We want to remove ourselves from the centre, to make space for others (paying guest or paid participant) to meet and determine if there is to be any further outcome; what might exist beyond the moment of connection. The work is a reflection of what we see in front of us, what we think is intriguing or confusing about the world that surrounds us now.

**White Trash:** *“a dirty ballet” of young white working-class men who tell us of their ambitions, their fears, how to survive growing up in Manchester, when they laugh, when they cry – provoking questions about what is ‘real’ and what is ‘true’. A performance that takes place on and around a pool table (in a pub?), in a theatre surrounded by friends for the night, balancing sympathy with respect, eyes opened wide.*

*When you book a ticket you are given the choice of sitting within the performance space or standing outside the space – on chairs on the stage surface within low boundary walls or standing outside the walls looking in - but it becomes clear that when the audience enter the space they adjust their preferences according to their immediate reaction upon viewing the options, the choice effectively between being onstage or offstage, participant or observer, active or passive.*

*“the seven are finding themselves as they perform, because their performance is their triumph, their nightly act of self-definition. In short, you're not told what happened; you're there as it happens.” (Peter Preston)*

**Grace:** *A collection of people who are accustomed to performing are asked to present themselves, to be the person they are, perhaps to tell us things they should only tell their friends, to bring their cultural and social individualities together to squeeze a city into a theatre and see what happens next; tiny moments with huge consequences, can we recognise them? Can we change them? The set is slightly too big for the stage: it contains an arbitrary assemblage of glimpses from a city life, a collection of objects that, like the people that inhabit the city, have to find some way of functioning together however fragile or temporary. The stage is only accessible from the auditorium (only accessible from the city?) so the movement between the two is continuous, interrupting any notion that the audience seating is a refuge from the determination to tell stories that have been untold, stories that are always interrupted, stories that are best finished in the dark, in silence.*

## The Recipes

*'So how do you make the shows?'*

The structure of the idea arrives very quickly and in fact it is usually born with the initial concept of the show – two seating banks facing each other / Susan and Darren's house / a table to share a meal at / a series of connected rooms / a ruby wedding party/ a stage / a pool table - all these are situations that have in common the possibility for action and intervention, they are very 'real' settings or situations in the sense that they are at the very least recognisable and may also have very particular resonances, associations and memories for the spectators.

Of specific concern here is the tactile quality of the environments. The audience are always in physical contact with the 'set'. If my design work outside Quarantine principally feeds the eyes, here I have the challenge and pleasure of determining what it looks like both on a macro and micro level, what the temperature to the touch should be (a concrete table or a wooden table); it matters what it feels like, even what it smells like. This extension of the audiences experience allows us to work with them both collectively and individually, allowing an element of choice, that allows a variety of experiences to be drawn from the same evening.

However familiar and 'real' these environments might be, they are performance environments and do not pretend otherwise. It is in that contradiction that the design situates itself, tinkering with the reality of the familiar and positioned at its edges, looking for even the small spaces of ambiguity and tension between what we expect to happen and what might happen, an ambiguity that plays in the realm of the imagination.

**Butterfly:** *is made with three generations of a Glaswegian family. Each night they take us through a map of their lives and relationships. Each night the usual complications of family life manifest themselves within the performance. The situation is perhaps a family celebration of significance – the Tramway laid out with dance floor surrounded by seating and tables for the guests, buffet tables with food for the interval, a bar at one end and the top table at the other. On the dance floor white balloons rebound amongst the dancers, whilst above their heads, where there may have been a single mirror ball rotating forlornly long after the party is over, there is now a cloud of 150 mirror balls floating over a parquet sea, the ceaseless meanderings of their refractions plotting a course to a thousand other celebrations.*

*It is an investigation of our public and private worlds, of what we show and what we hide. It looks at ideas around family and belonging, at the contradictions and the complications of those relationships that none of us ask for - at the accident of being born into a set of people that we're stuck with, one way or another, for life.*

**Eat Eat:** *The table is set, refugees to the UK offer their experiences in a performance which takes the form of a shared meal for performers and audience. A table and a room for a 'simple' supper, but at a table (concrete, steel and uncooked rice) that needs to resonate beyond its immediate function to echo with the histories that are unfolding around it.*

*Once seated at the table the view of the concrete table in the Tudor hall fades to be replaced by the sensation of the concrete on the palms of your hands the sound of plates scraping across the surface as the food is served and the feel of the rice that traces a path up the centre of the table. This fades to be replaced by stories of loss, stories in song, stories in dance, stories told through photographs and official stamps, stories whispered in your ear, stories discovered in a parcel of herbs. This fades to be replaced by the conversation with your immediate and distant neighbours – the 'show' fades to be replaced by friends.*

**Rantsoen:** *A development of Eat Eat in Ghent is in many ways more aesthetically satisfying experience but does not function as well. Located in an old garage, a smaller walled and floored space is created, painted a deep red, within this a large circular table with a perimeter band of warm wood and two*

*tonnes of rice in the centre. The rice is raked and smoothed until a soft mound gives the table the sense of being pregnant with stories waiting to be born. However, the shape and scale of the table means that the guests are restricted to communicating with those within their arc of the table rather than, as previously, those across the long table. In this new environment those on the opposite side of the table are only observed in the same way that the performance moments on the table become 'on stage'. Thus the shape and scale of the event denies the intimacy that is created when, rather than only observing a performance, you become implicated in the action.*

## **Table Linen**

*"Do you do the dresses as well?"*

I think we have made one costume in the 10 shows we've created and we rejected that at the dress rehearsal in favour of something found in the costume store that wouldn't quite do up at the back. The costumes are clothes belonging to those making the show, they are clothes that carry the biography of their owners, clothes that have the marks of idle hands and rainy days, mismatched threads and lost buttons, clothes whose elbows knees and buttocks could only belong to one body, clothes that carry the familiar smells of home cooking, grass cuttings, the remembered traces of cigarettes, cigars and pipes.

## **Washing Up**

*"Do we have to?"*