

Touchstone Project 2013 – 2014

Salamanda Tandem

Celebrating 25 years 1989 – 2014

“ A State Of The Art Performance! It's a sad fact of the world that you cannot be cloned, to further enrich the lives of other visually impaired dancers”

Professor Mick Wallis, Performance and Cultural Industries Leeds University 2013



Final Exhibition of work made for Touchstone at Rufford Gallery



LOTTERY FUNDED



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Introduction

Touchstone invites audiences into the creative world of visually impaired people, noticing external and inner worlds through sound and movement, gaining additional insight and sensitivity into the building and themselves. The final work is intended to go beyond the usual perception of visually impaired people as those who are concerned with problems of transport and the practicalities of life. Instead we want to expose sighted people to an inspirational place that they may want to recover or have lost in childhood.

As part of our Touchstone project we made 5 interwoven works:

Ad Astra Performance: Estonia The Astra Building

Fragile? Symposium: Estonia The Astra Building

Touchstone Exhibition: Rufford Gallery and Tallinn University

Touchstone Performance and film: Corby Cube

Quarry-o-sion: Shaws Quarry Wirksworth Festival



The team of visually impaired dancers from Estonia, UK, Portugal and Norway in Rehearsal for Salamanda Tandem's Ad Astra in Tallinn, Estonia

List of Key achievements

1. Performances

Touchstone Site Specific Research Corby Cube

March 26th and 27th 2013

Touchstone Site Specific Research New Art Exchange

March 24th and 25th 2013

Touchstone Site Specific Research The Water Tower

Brigstock, 28th and 29th March 2013

Fragile? Symposium Key Note

Tallinn Estonia 20th April 2013

Fragile? Symposium Exhibition of Touchstone sound and photographs

Tallinn Estonia 17th April – 22nd April 2013

Ad Astra Site Specific Performance Finale

Astra Building Tallinn Estonia 21st April 2013

Ad Astra Performance

The Water Tower. Brigstock, Northants. 29th May 2013

Touchstone Lunchtime and Evening Performances: International Listening Day

Corby Cube Corridors, Library and The Council Chamber, Corby 18th July

A New Commission for Wirksworth Festival

Which included: Performances 7 and 8th September

A solo exhibition of Touchstone for Rufford gallery

Which included Touchstone Private View Performance 16th September

Touchstone Public Exhibition 17th September – October 16th

3. Publications, Web Sites, TV, Radio and Articles

- Arts Professional Magazine and Online written by Esther Harris July 2013
- Mailout Magazine Online written by Esther Harris July 2013
- 'Ad Astra: Salamanda Tandem UK in Performance Research, "On Value" Volume 18 2013 Taylor and Francis Online and in Print. Editors Jocelyn McKinney and Mick Wallis <http://www.tandfonline.com>
- Radio Nottingham Interview June 2013- Isabel Jones
- Estonia TV <http://etv.err.ee/arhiiv.php?id=137869>
- Independent Magazine – April 2013 Isabel Jones on the 100 list. Photograph on front cover of online publication, and principle photograph in printed Magazine.
- 'Reverberations across Small Scale British theatre' Editors: Patrick Duggan and Victor Ukaegbu. Chapter 11: Acts of Poiesis: salamanda tandem Mick Wallis and Isabel Jones <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk>

4. Project Legacy

Regional

- 3 new disabled associate artists join Salamanda Tandem.
- NMPAT HUB – leading regular training with the inclusion team, and building participatory projects with visually impaired musicians
- Salamanda Tandem mentor to The Core's TMC commissioning project
- New commission for Corby Cube as part of 'Made In Corby'
- The Water Tower as a studio / research space

National

- Commission from Ludus Festival and Leeds University to develop a new work with visually impaired performers for Leeds City Centre
- Commission for Grassington Festival, Threshfield Quarry June 2016

International

Salamanda Tandem became a lead partner on an EU project called Fragile with Norway, Baerum Kulturhus, Estonia Tallinn University and Portugal VoArte

Our artistic director became curator of the international symposium Fragile? which marked the conclusion of this project. This connected Salamanda Tandem to visually impaired artists and organisations specializing in this work internationally see below:



Symposium Delegates and visually impaired performers interact

Kjersti K. Engebretsen (NORWAY) FRAGILE Artistic Director, Choreographer “TOUCHED”
Isabel Jones (ENGLAND) Artistic Director, Salamanda Tandem; FRAGILE? Symposium Curator;
Director of site-specific performance “Ad Astra”
Ana Rita Barata (PORTUGAL) Choreographer, Artistic Director Vo'Arte
Ajjar Ausma (ESTONIA) Choreographer
Mick Wallis (ENGLAND) Professor & Chair in Performance and Culture, University of Leeds
Kaite O'Reilly (WALES) Playwright
Joselia Neves (PORTUGAL) Coordinating Professor, Instituto Politécnico de Leiria
Katy Dymoke (ENGLAND) Artistic Director, TOUCHDOWN
Dr David Feeny (SCOTLAND) Senior Research Fellow, Edinburgh Uni. Manager, VI Scotland
Lee Sass (ENGLAND) Artist
Delphine Demont (FRANCE) Artistic Director, ACAJOU
José Luis Pagés (FRANCE) Artistic Collaborator, ACAJOU
Maria Oshodi (ENGLAND) Artistic Director, EXTANT
Per Solvang (NORWAY) Sociologist and Professor, University College of Oslo
Gregor Strutz (GERMANY) Artist
Sarah Kettley (ENGLAND) Senior Lecturer, Nottingham Trent University
Saïd Gharbi (BELGIUM) Choreographer and Dancer
Ana Stegnar (SLOVENIA) Choreographer and Dancer

Rachel Gadsden (ENGLAND) Visual Artist
Dijana Raudonienė (LITHUANIA) Post-doc, Vilnius Academy of Arts; NGO Culture Artifact
Mickel Smithen (ENGLAND) Dancer Salamanda Tandem of “Ad Astra”
Izabela Morska (POLAND) Writer; Academic, Gdansk University
Erik Loide (ESTONIA) Chairman of the Council, Estonian Foundation for the Visually Impaired; Accessibility Expert
Ülle Lepp (ESTONIA) Chair of the Board, Estonian Foundation for the Visually Impaired; Researcher of the non-profit sector in Estonia
Kristin Kurtna (ESTONIA) Line-dance Instructor, NGO Huviline
Sülvi Sarapuu (ESTONIA) Expert in tactile books and audio description, NGO Kakora
Riho Roosioja (ESTONIA) Public Administration Master Student, Tallinn University
Kirke-Anneli Kuld (ESTONIA) Arts Therapy Student, Tallinn University
Indra Slavena (LATVIA) Dancer of “Ad Astra” Salamanda Tandem
Duncan Chapman (ENGLAND) Artist; Performer /composer of “Ad Astra” Salamanda Tandem
Geoffrey Fielding (ENGLAND) Photographer, Salamanda Tandem
Maria Lloyd (NORWAY) Film Maker of “Into The Unknown”
Pedro Sena Nunes (PORTUGAL) Film Maker of “Edge”; Co-Artistic Director, Vo’Arte
Vahur Laiapea (ESTONIA) Film Maker “See You On Stage”; Film Director/Producer, Ikoon
Nina Biong (NORWAY) dancer
Geir Hytten (NORWAY) dancer
Hege Eidseter (NORWAY) dancer
Katja Schia (NORWAY) dancer
Alexander Aarø (NORWAY) dancer
Bernardo Gama (PORTUGAL) dancer
Sofia Soromenho (PORTUGAL) dancer
Luís Oliveira (PORTUGAL) dancer
Joana Gomes (PORTUGAL) dancer
Jaan Ulst (ESTONIA) dancer
Kärt Tõnisson (ESTONIA) dancer
Hedy Haavalaid (ESTONIA) dancer
Marianne Bilger (NORWAY) FRAGILE Project Manger, Bærum Kulturhus
Morten Walderhaug (NORWAY) FRAGILE Project Leader; Artistic Director, Bærum Kulturhus
Karmen Ong (ESTONIA) FRAGILE project Estonian Coordinator, Tallinn University
Eveli Kuuse (ESTONIA) FRAGILE project Estonian Communication Manager
Karin Org (ESTONIA) – FRAGILE? Symposium Co-organiser, Tallinn Uni. Conference Centre
Clara Antunes (PORTUGAL) – FRAGILE project Portuguese Coordinator, Vo’Arte

Audience and Participant Comments

The response from our participants and public helped us to evaluate our project.

Estonia 18th – 21st April 213 Ad Astra

90 Artists and Practitioners were involved as contributors in this project, as well as visually impaired participants in Norway, Estonia and Portugal. Additional audience came from people who worked in the building around 600



Salamanda Tandem's performance in Estonia. Dancer Indra Slavena featured here

“I got home safely and hope you all did too. Thank you soo much for one of the most inspirational experiences to date it truly was amazing I love collaborating with you, you truly are an inspiration to me in visual arts, dance, song and performance. I look forward more magic moments in Corby. Do checkout my thank you message to all who were involved in the Fragile Symposium.”

Mickel Smithen Visually Impaired Dance Artist

“Dear Isabel,

Thank you for organising and visioning such a triumphant event! As you clearly witnessed I enjoyed every single minute of the weekend programme of events, I felt as if I was among kindred spirits, sharing ideas and making magic happen. I am fully aware of what an enormous task it is to put together a Symposium, and I can't thank you enough for all the sensitive thought process and intelligence you brought to creating such an engaging few days. I didn't want it to end, and I certainly hope this is just another beginning from where new ideas and collaborations can emerge, with the many wonderful creative practitioners that I had the joy to meet there does seem to be possibilities for that to happen. I had had a testing few weeks, I received further very tricky news regarding my eye sight a couple of weeks ago at Moorfields, but how wonderful that the Symposium was so near and I could further address issues to do with visual impairment in such a creative way, the best medicine any doctor could prescribe. I am in huge awe of the wonderful work you do and what a joy to see your work recognised last week in the Independent too, that was so fantastic. the past. It is a fascinating city, where every inhabitant you meet is so very friendly. The Symposium gave me so much to think about, firstly perhaps that there is still so much to do to ensure that visually impaired individuals have the opportunity to engage fully with the creative process at every level, but also being able to witness the magic that can occur when creative engagement is possible was exhilarating. It has been an utter pleasure meeting, engaging and collaborating with you, and I just so hope that we can find a way for it to happen again one day. Thank you for your encouragement and support, it was such a great privilege to be part of this.”

Rachel Gadsten Visually Impaired Artist.

“I wanted to congratulate you and Salamanda Tandem for your inclusion on the Independent Magazine Happy List – a welcome antidote to all those Rich Lists of which I can't see the point. Best Wishes with your valuable work”

Robert Nieri, Senior Associate. Freeth Cartwright LLP

“I Just wanted to tell you that our longer get-together and conversation yesterday gave me sooo much positive energy and motivation! You're just great and I'm really–really looking forward to meeting you today and with your

Salamanda Tandem full team on Friday: Fantastic!"

Eveli Kuuse Project Manager Estonia

"Thank you for inviting me to Tallinn. It was such a unique experience, and I'm both impressed and inspired by several participants: Maria, Said, as well as Indra and Michael, but I also believe that you are a very special person. Lilly-Marie says that some people have this manner of being and communicating that it is as if they were hugging you as they speak. You have that, and every time I spoke to you, I felt hugged. It was wonderful!"

Izabella Morsca Disabled Activist and Academic Poland



I enjoyed the conference. Met a lot of interesting people and was introduced to their projects. And the site specific dance performance you directed on Sunday was great. Congratulations!

Per Solvang Disability Academic Norway

"Congratulations!" – both in relation to being featured in the Independent but also for your Estonian project. Both looked amazing and it's great news for community dance.

Anna Leatherdale Foundation For Community dance



A fascinating plenary discussion on the work and the arts, as part of the symposium, between 11 blind and visually impaired people from Estonia, Portugal, Belgium, Latvia and UK. Invited and Convened by Isabel Jones



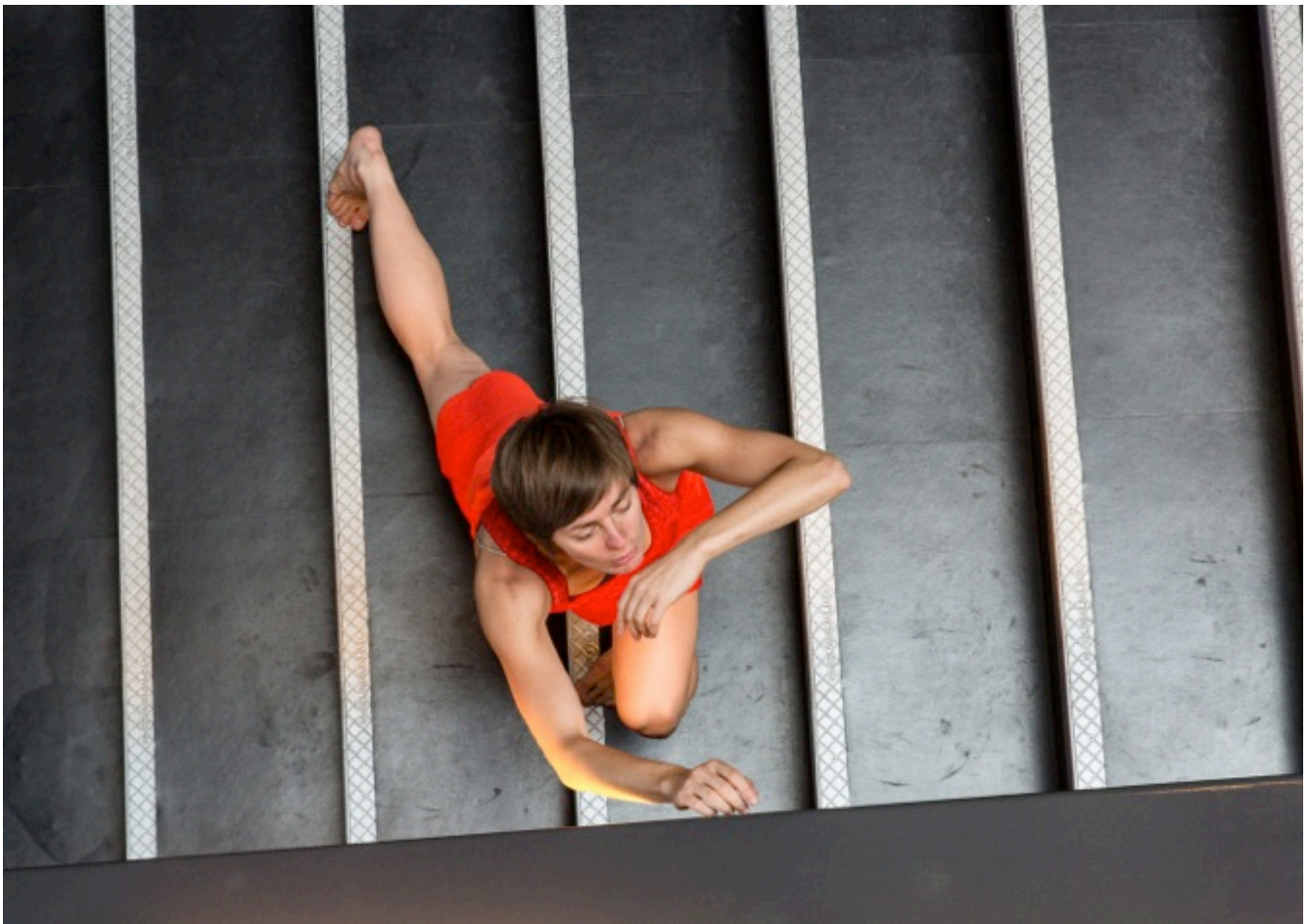
Tactile Map, in Estonia led by Lee Sass as part of Salamanda Tandem's team from the UK



Rachel Gadsden Workshop as part of the symposium programme

Touchstone Corby Cube 18th July

An audience of passers by who use the Cube regularly, as well as visitors who chose to attend our performance: approximately 300



Dancer Indra Slavina in Corby Cube

With Singer / composer Isabel Jones and Musician / composer Duncan Chapman

“ you know, last night in this very chamber was the most horrible public enquiry, packed with the press and public. The purpose was to decide whether to prosecute our old chief exec. For overspending on the build and mismanaging the project. He was a visionary, and stuck his neck above the parapet: his vision was of a place where an inclusive performance just like the one you have created here could be experienced. It’s been healing today to experience it, and actually what this place was designed for”

J Devereau Chief Arts Officer Corby Borough Council



Dancers Indra Slavena Featured here in the council chamber

‘Watching the dancer move through The Core and listening to commentary/soundscape through headphones made me look at a building I know well in a very different light. It was also interesting to hear the soundman talk about the different resonances from each floor tile (too subtle for me!) as the dancer’s stick moved across them.’



Radio headset transmission for audience
With Composers Isabel Jones and Duncan Chapman

Wirksworth Festival 7th and 8th September Quarry-o-sion
Attendance: 60 on Saturday and on the Sunday, many people stayed for the full duration of the piece 4 hours!



Beautiful and very soothing – loved it! Fabulous!



“Very powerful! Loved that there was multi-layers of time happenings – shifting our attention to different narrative and having time to look at the quarry and my own awareness of life.

Felt like my consciousness become alert and my mind opened to the possibilities of other realities

Best thing all day. Loved the way the pieces makes use of wirksworth natural landscape and combine it with a beautifully resonant audio piece.

This was sometime I would not normally have watched but I found it very intriguing and absorbing. I was particularly interested as I studied geology years ago!

Marvelous. A place of death and ghosts given life and grace. Reminds me of the Coliseum

Immensely enjoyable – surprisingly so multi-faceted.....quite fabulous place and experience. Terrific!

A quarry brought to life! Mesmerizing.

Good idea I Like sound and dance together

Lovely experience. Truly brought to life..the movement....

Lovely! Very evocative and reminded me to look fully with my senses and not just rushing through

Wonderful incredibly atmospheric and inspirational movement and it was accessible!!!!”

Truly immersive – this is a place I come many times..I love the way you have helped me see it in a different way – thank you.



Excellent– great atmosphere, dancing and wonderful sound!



Duncan Chapman and Volunteer Chandra Chapman setting up the sound under a canopy

So very beautiful. Very interesting and great sound quality!

Great experience lovely sounds and quite calming!

Incredible location and an interesting idea. Enjoyed the interactive 'live' nature of the narrative. Thanks

Great, quite odd, other worldly, dreamy

good, made the quarry seem different

great to be encouraged to explore this quarry. We walk through here often to explore this quarry, but this gives a new perspective, made me slow down and observe and think about its history and present. Thanks x

Beautifully immersive – transporting. The wonderful solitude of headphones.

Interesting use of space and exploring the history of the quarry



Isabel Jones and Indra Slavena Dance with 2 dogs out on a walk

A very atmospheric and moving experience of an environment which is well know from previous visits

Awesome – as to be expected great to see art/rocks music in the place to come to us in our everyday

Very enjoyable, imaginative thought provoking experience. Perfectly suited to the quarry setting – thank you

Very enjoyable – totally different and unexpected – thanks

A lovely experience with sounds and dance/movement – sun out made it delightful! I wish we could make more use of disused quarries for entertainment or physical activities for everyone. Thank you for the expressions and the different perspective



Absolutely absorbing, a totally wonderful immersive experience. Well worth the walk

Fabulous experience in amazing setting. Thanks – I really enjoyed this

I very much felt myself absorbed into the atmosphere of the quarry, its history and creation. A lovely feeling of tranquility and the performers added to this

Mesmerising – tranquil engaged. Fluid – opposite to what experience in the quarry years ago Amazing. What a wonderful way to interact with our landscape. I've been in the town.....The I came here and experienced this. What a great day. Thanks

A kind of mediation special and interesting

Great idea – interesting work lovely place. Very beautiful dancing and sound, a real joy to be part of this



The quarries are my favorite places it was lovely to see it being used in such away. It was great – very impressive!

Good use of the natural landscape in direct contrast to when this was a working quarry – good use of technology with a historic/traditional setting

An adventurous the piece of work wholly to be commended especially for its site specific relevance and make use of the history of this place. I much enjoyed the pace of the movement and the intensity of the performance. The integration of narrative with the dance.....a more abstract distillation of the elements....thank you very much indeed.

Loved the contrast of the voices, static recorded and live from the quarry, the sounds of the stones clinking and the visual of the dance. A beautiful experience, well worth the walk

Rufford Gallery 22nd September – 13th October Touchstone
3867 Visitors came to this exhibition



“really beautiful, I love the difference in the way the dancers move and their words, creating a real opening for others. The scene with many dancers was really captivating I could've watched and listened for hours. I loved seeing the stones when walking in, immediately my son Joe went to touch”

Julie Hood Dance Artist and Care Professional

Loved the performance – dancers, sound, audio description interwove beautifully and took me to lots of warm places! Thank you, Richard

Good space; works very well as a whole. Cath

Very, very interesting photography and the whole concept. Excellent display

and information. RG

Very interesting and imaginative, enjoyed the photos

Youth and freedom... I remember it well! Art for art sake, money for god sake. (Great space art work). Retired sparks/potter. Tony Moore xx

Moving and inspiring. Everything is possible through touch and movement. FH

Really wonderful photographs, interesting and elegant! SR

Fascinating exhibition. David G Jones Superbly helpful staff, thankyou!

Wonderful idea! Pause for thought definitely.

Very beautiful photos. Would have liked to experience the dance live to get the real feel of the exhibition.

Nice to see photos of the triptych performance brings back memories for me.
Hamish

Salamanda Tandem Artistic Director Evaluation



Visually Impaired Dancer explores the building

My father Lewis Jones was a deafblind man and a Welshman who lived in Nottingham for most of his life. He was one of three blind brothers and the co-founder of Salamanda Tandem in 1989. Sadly he died last year. Our work together was profound, and explored the meeting between his inner world of synesthesia and my work as a choreographer, composer and director. Our work together not only influenced me and Salamanda Tandem but also the growth of somatic practice and the field of dance and disabled people internationally.

‘The Touchstone Project’, allowed Salamanda Tandem to take this work to Estonia as a keynote presentation for an international symposium on arts and visually impairment, ‘Fragile?’ presented in Estonia. It also allowed us to make a new choreographic and sound art work with visually impaired artists and participants, conducting research and performing the work in 2 of the regions capital builds: Corby Cube and New Art Exchange, in 2 rural venues in Northants and Nottinghamshire and to form the finale of the international symposium in Estonia.

Touchstone Concept

One of my most important childhood experiences was of observing my father's extraordinary sensitivity to touch and the flow of movement that followed his mind as he handled a stone or utilitarian object like a cup. On the other hand I observed how his movements became stilted and fearful on encountering a staircase or busy street.

In both, it was clear to me that the connection between inner mind and outward gesture became very transparent in the movement world of a blind person, and I found such beauty and integrity in it.

On the other hand, where external visual references are dominant, it is easy to become disconnected. Bombarded with visual information we can just 'tune out'. This becomes a particular challenge for visual artists and the medium of 'dance performance' in particular. In trying to get an audience to 'tune in', the choreographer trains their dancers to dance 'faster, higher and stronger', leading us towards an often stilted process of rehearsing which can leave us feeling empty too. A body that doesn't fit the mold is made redundant from such a process; certainly there is no place for a child, non-dancer, disabled, older person or office worker here.

To my mind, these are terrible losses for the field of dance performance, and a desire to do something about that has become a constant theme in my work over the last 25 years.

Salamanda Tandem: essentially

I'm not the first to discover that if we can focus performance away from the notion of 'rehearsal' and more towards 'spontaneous' or 'lived experience' and be 'in the moment' now, we are somewhere closer to bringing audiences and performers together in mutual appreciation. Performance becomes like 'real life' and 'real life' like performance and we get closer to the very purpose of it. Where the inner imagination meets outer experience is the holy grail of the performer, and ultimately what makes us want to witness it.

One way in which I have particularly set out to achieve this is by making site-specific events for buildings and spaces where people are unaccustomed to seeing performance. This can helpfully change expectations and bring to light the potential for new things happening moment by moment.

A theatre or concert hall with its traditional arrangement of seats and stage, require the art work, performer and audience to behave in a certain way; any change from that needs significant effort, whereas in site specific work spontaneity is in the nature of the beast, we simply have to accommodate the possibility. This could happen with light, architecture, people, sound or movement, so if the aesthetic and compositional structure is designed to accommodate that, then each and every performance is significantly different, which keeps the work fresh and energetic which is what I find fascinating.



Artistic Research in the Astra Building Estonia

The Buildings and spaces we worked in

1. Corby Cube



2 Visually Impaired dancers explore through sensing the air

Each building offers different potentials, and it takes time to realize what these are.

A key part of the Touchstone project was our work with two visually impaired dance artists: Mickel Smithen and Indra Slavena. We know each other well through previous projects and have confidence in each other's processes, so in approaching The Cube, The Water Tower, Astra Building and Shaws Quarry we have been able to work deeply.

For example, our very first visit to Corby Cube as a group turned into performance. The place was pretty hostile for visually impaired people, and the staff were clearly uncomfortable with our arrival. We were even escorted out of the building before we had begun and the place felt unfriendly.



Developing Touchstone at Corby Cube 2013

Building relationships was key to the success of this project, and quite incredibly we were eventually allowed into the inner sanctum of Corby Cube – the prestigious Council Chamber by Corby Borough Council.

With the support of Yasmin director of Fermynwoods who had commissioned this part of our project, J the arts officer from Corby Borough Council and Simon Steptoe from NMPAT music hub who supported our project with musicians and audience development, we began to explore The Cube. Friendship came from an unusual place, our first performance happened in the empty Bistro Café where from behind the impressive glass wall, we found ourselves accidentally dancing with two teenagers playing on the outside terrace, a multitude of mums with buggies, as well as shoppers and local workers.

The mutual appreciation was palpable.

Our second performance took place as a duet between Mickel and Indra along the etched glass, marking the boundary between the corridor and beautiful Council Chamber –stunning.

In making performance happen at Corby Cube, we discovered a complex relationship between open communal space and the private space that lies at the heart of such a council building.

We touched on a multiplicity of energies as we have gone along the way: reflection, permission, fascination, confusion and even hostility as we have crossed boundaries between closed doors, and had doors opened for us. But a lasting image for me is of a sense of peace as two blind people rested on the Council Chamber floor, the deep soft red pile carpet with its swirling thistles supporting them and the Chief of Security smiling as he went off to eat his sandwiches.

2. Astra Building and Ad Astra

‘Ad Astra’ was a site-specific performance on the closing day of ‘FRAGILE?’ (1921 April 2013) – the culminating symposium of the EU-funded project ‘Fragile’, founded by Norwegian choreographer Kjersti Kramm Engebretsen. Stimulated by a desire to share her experiences of dance with blind people Europe-wide, and the fragility of this work, Kjersti invited UK choreographer Isabel Jones, Estonian choreographer Ajar Ausma and Portuguese choreographer Ana Rita Barata to join her in developing the project. Morten Walderhaug from Bærum Kulturhus (Norway) provided the bedrock of support to raise EU money and bring Vo’Arte (Portugal), Tallinn University (Estonia) and Salamanda Tandem (UK) on board.

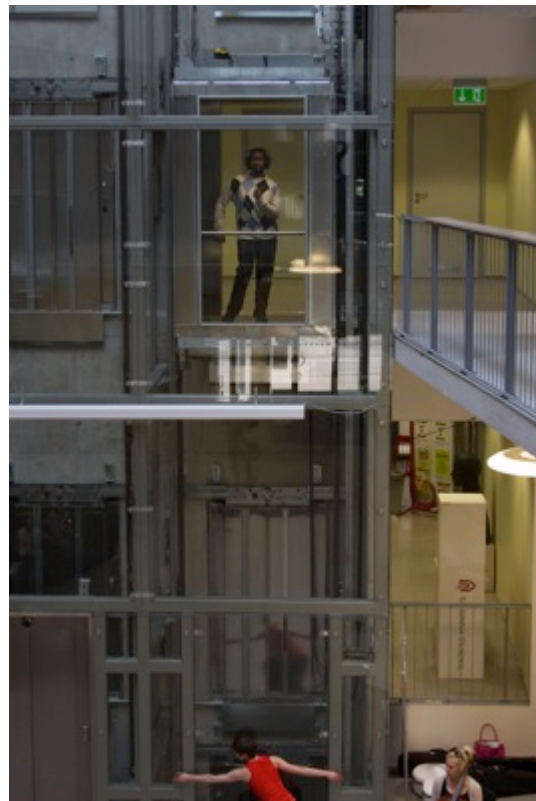


Sighted audience and Visually Impaired Dance Artists Interact

Crossing art as well as country borders, the team included composers, costume and lighting designers, and documentary filmmakers. Local visually-impaired people, dance teachers and specialist educators in the field of visual impairment were closely involved, whilst Kjersti held local workshops in collaboration with Ajar and Ana Rita in Portugal, Norway and Estonia. The process was designed to anchor the project within local populations in each

country, and help develop infrastructure to support the creativity of visually-impaired people (VIPs), through access to professional dancers and choreographers. This work resulted in three new choreographic works: 'Touched' (Kjersti K Engebrigsten), 'Edge' (Ana Rita Barata) and 'Plexus' (Ajar Ausma). Isabel Jones, Artistic Director of Salamanda Tandem (ST), both curated the Symposium and directed 'Ad Astra'. This site-specific work focused on the Atrium of the Astra Building of Tallinn University, where the Symposium was held. 'Ad Astra' brought together all the Fragile choreographers and performers, to occupy the Astra building through a collective embodiment – caressing its contours, resisting its barriers, enlivening dead corners, refolding the space.

That refolding was designed to reimagine its smart modernist architecture – rational and functional in appearance, but often hazardous and inaccessible to VIPs – as an environment fitted to easeful, creative and sociable use by all. Delegates and others gathered in the well of the 7-floor Atrium, the Estonian String Quartet Amaroza began to play a complex continuum of breath-like phrases, co-composed by Isabel with ST associate Duncan Chapman. And birdsong, collected from the fourteen different countries represented at the Symposium and composed together by Duncan, mingled in, both strands of sound beginning to fill the volume.



The site specific work takes over the Building

Visually-impaired ST dancers Mickel Smithen and Indra Slavena performed a duet, slowly coming together across the vastness of the space – he descending from floor seven in the glass-box lift, dapper with white cane, jiving tightly to private sounds from his headphones; she traversing the length of the space from street doors to the base of the lift, angular, anxious and urgent in her movements, as if both resisting and searching; and finally the two together, ‘Black hands on white skin; white hands on black’ as they cradled one another’s head.

Those words were sung by voice artist-composer and dancer-choreographer Isabel, part of her creative audio description of the dance, delivered not into headsets worn by VIPs but rather broadcast into the space as a third strand of the sound score of the piece. And then, as if seeping into the space from its every part and level, dancers singly, in pairs, small groups and large, VIPs and others, flowed into the galleried vastness – a sinuous, glacially slow flowing, sliding, unfurling. And the audience and other occupants were invited to fold into this growing – until the body of the building breathed with the life of this newly-fashioned community of inhabitants.



Estonian cloakroom women become audience and participate in sound recording

3. Wirksworth's Shaws Quarry

An evocative and sensory art experience



At Festival 2013 Salamanda Tandem performed at one of Wirksworth's ancient quarries, experimenting with the physical and auditory landscape to alter perceptions of what is heard, touched and seen there through an evocative and sensory art experience. Unfolding over a 4 hour period, visitors were invited to drop in and out, or stay all afternoon to experience the quarry and environs through live performance, audio description, location recording, natural and processed sounds, as well as movement. Behind scenes there was an evolution of a series of acousmatic works exploring stone and these were downloadable on the internet.



4. Rufford Gallery Touchstone Exhibition

A sensory exhibition of New Film, Photographs, dance, sound and music



Rufford Gallery Touchstone Exhibition September 2013



The Music

Starting from our inner world of exploration using touch, sonic vision and audio description touchstone invited audiences into an exploration of sound both as audio description for the visually impaired performers and audience, as well as offering insight into a blind persons perception of Corby Cube, The Water Tower and The Astra Building, transmitted as a world of touch, movement and sound from the inner imagination outwards into the building.



Using the lifts and radio transmitted audio as part of our performance

The music developed for the project was particularly significant in 4 ways:

1. In working with visually impaired people in a primarily visual medium such as dance, music becomes both a key conduit of access and a marvelous creative element in the process.
2. The music was performed both live, broadcast on the internet, as a film score and presented on exhibition.
3. The music was available at very high quality on radio headphones, to enable deafblind participants and live performers to get a sense of full immersion in the sound

Sound is of particular importance in Touchstone, and I worked with co-composer Duncan Chapman to develop it. The sounds we used in this work have been taken from a variety of sources e.g.:

- In working with the site, we composed a string quartet for 4 musicians from Tallinn University. In working anywhere it is important for us to work with local people, who contribute to the final work
- binaural sound recordings taken at Corby Cube and The Astra Building, and various other location recordings were collected
- bird song from each of the 29 European locations featured in the symposium. Such a sound world helps to generate a sense of immersive place and moment.
- Spoken voice through audio description, and narrative texts taken from the visually impaired performers lived experience.
- Rhythmic patterns and ambiences to support the atmosphere and generate movement
- Sounds that relate to the buildings and to the dancers body, e.g. shuffling of feet, the breath, the sound of a lift etc

My father lost his hearing when we were teenagers, I was studying music, and playing viola regularly in a chamber orchestra. He wanted to hear me and the music, and said he wished he could hear bird song again, I too wanted to find ways of connecting him to my world. It was always difficult, for him to enjoy our live concerts and he found that recorded music heard at high quality through headphones was the most satisfying for him. So in 1992 I started my journey into location recording, bringing back sounds from out there to him: water, birdsong, bees, lambs as well as the sound of my voice. Sometimes speaking as I audio described the landscapes and places I encountered to bring them to life for him, as well as singing. This kind of world is the one I bring to Touchstone, where the sound of the voice and environs are made more immediate as the audience experience the recordings I have made through wireless headphones.

Another key aspect, is the use of binaural recording here. It was with a great sense of excitement that I discovered binaural recording from Dallas Simpson

in 1998 and since then this has become my chosen medium. These super sensitive recordings – produced using microphones placed inside the ear–convey an impression when amplified of being centered in the action as though in real hearing. The potential for my father and I was palpable and we have worked with this potential in Touchstone. This is a very special medium and rarely used; it provides a unique experience of sound for the listener because it records and transmits the sound as though in normal hearing when we hear from 360 degrees. ‘The recordist’, records the sound with microphones inside their ears. As the recordist moves very slowly as though in meditation, enabling a unique experience of hearing that gives the listener a physical impression of being there – immersed within the environment.

Conclusion

“Although I am totally blind, I have an inner world of vision I call it my 'eye behind the eye'. This world is a powerful world of color, movement and sound inspired from the sense of touch. I have synesthesia, or subvision, both are considered to be medical conditions but for me this is where my imagination and creativity starts –deep within my sensory experience. So the idea behind our work is that it is deeply rooted in the perception of a blind person, and of how movement can spring from this inner world. I have been told that for most sighted people this world is one that becomes lost shortly after childhood and movement derives from external influences. Instead, we want to help other blind people, as well as sighted people to find their inner sight; a dance that expresses seeing, and feeling in a different way”.

Lewis Jones, March 2012

Lewis’s experience gave shape and color to an extraordinary inner world, an inner geography that stayed with Lewis all his life. One could think of it as a sense of mindfulness. This is where he lived, and where we wanted to take our performers, and audiences in Touchstone.

Context and Thanks for TouchStone

Making and developing 'Touchstone' was made possible with support from The European Union and Arts Council England through the National Lottery. A significant contribution to the project were the many hours of volunteer time, and alongside other support, added up to £33,000 of in-kind support from project partners.

We would like to thank Sarah Sanderson the diversity officer for encouraging us to apply for support for this project. The Arts Council England/National Lottery G4A support enabled us to make this new work in the east midlands with 2 visually impaired dance artists, and then to tour and work with 14 other international dancers both visually impaired and sighted as well as 120 delegates. The project expanded beyond our expectations with 2 new opportunities facilitated by Wirksworth Festival and Nottinghamshire County Council's Rufford Gallery.

We would also like to thank Rosalind Stoddard who has generously supported through offering her house 'The Water Tower' as a place to stay and make the work, as well as to help our development creatively.

'Fragile?' was a major part of this project, an international symposium funded by the EU held in Estonia at Tallinn University in April 2013. Isabel Jones curated the symposium, working closely with 4 international partners: VoArte, Tallinn University, and Baerum Kulturhus and Kjersti Englebrigsten, to create this event – the first of its kind in the world – sharing best practice across Europe in dance/art and visual impairment. As part of Isabel's work as curator, we'd like to thank the team of Estonian Volunteers who worked closely with her during the event. In addition to this, Isabel worked with Simon Steptoe to make the programme and work accessible to an international visually impaired audience in braille, large print, and audio. This was a significant part of the work and made possible with support from Nottinghamshire County Council's Braille Bureau based at County Hall. We would like to acknowledge support from The British Council, who enabled Salamanda Tandem to invite Lee Sass and Mick Wallis to work with us in Estonia. Professor Mick Wallis (Leeds

University PCI) worked closely with Isabel, to present two plenary sessions for all the delegates and to write an international publication afterwards. Major thanks to Salamanda Tandem colleagues, Geoffrey Fielding and Duncan Chapman who worked closely with Isabel to make the work and present an audio/visual exhibition accessible to visually impaired audiences in Estonia. This exhibition was developed in the course of the project and exhibited as a solo Salamanda Tandem exhibition, celebrating Touchstone at Rufford Gallery with the support of Senior Arts Officer Diana Pasek–Atkinson.

We'd like to thank Yasmin Canvin and James Stevenson of Fermynwoods for commissioning a performance of Touch Stone for Corby Cube. Also J Devereux from Corby Borough Council, Birinder Rakhra from The Cube, and Simon Steptoe from NMPAT for facilitating communications.

We would like to thank colleagues at Salamanda Tandem including Stella Couloutbanis who supported Salamanda Tandem immensely to make this work possible as well as board members Lisa Craddock and our chair Sibyl Burgess.

Finally to thank the following artists who worked with Salamanda Tandem to produce this project:

Isabel Jones Director / Co–Composer

Duncan Chapman Co–Composer

Geoffrey Fielding – Photographer / Technical Manager / Film

Mickel Smithen – Dance Artist

Indra Slavena – Dance Artist

Esther Harris – Writer and PR Consultant

Andy Eathorne (Fermynwoods) – Film Maker

Amaroza String quartet

NMPAT Musicians: Helena Frost, Jon Kendall, Alice Nicholls, Kate Rounding, Simon Steptoe, Julie Wright

Quarry–o–sion: Robbie Fitton Jones and Chandra Chapman.

Thanks to Richard Hughes for contributing his art works to the Touchstone Exhibition.

'Touchstone' and 'Ad Astra' are both works made in celebration of Isabel's father Lewis Jones (RIP) for his contribution to Salamanda Tandem and in supporting this project financially.



Lewis Performing in Salamanda Tandem's first ever performance at Bonnington Gallery Sound Round Robin 1990

Website archive: www.salamanda-tandem.org
<http://www.salamandatandem.wordpress.com/>
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