

## **Emerge Festival and Laboratory 2014**

14/7/15

Report: Matt Burman

The Emerge Festival 2014 was a collaboration between the Warwick Arts Centre and the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL). As well as showcasing the work of graduate theatre companies, we conducted a series of workshops over four days in the Helen Martin Studio. These sessions were experimental, participatory and open to the university community. The festival and its laboratory were curated by Matt Burman, Jonny Heron and Laura Elliot to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Arts Centre in 2014 and to look ahead to the fiftieth anniversary of the University in 2015. We were particularly interested in exploring theatre and performance-making as learning and research in their own terms, and were delighted to welcome back so many alumni and bring together associates of both institutions.

For the laboratory, we engaged co-facilitators, guest practitioners, festival volunteers and workshop participants. While these different roles involved variable levels of experience, everyone had an equal right to participate, and the ethos of the collaboration was that of the ensemble. The co-facilitators were Jonathan Heron (IATL/Fail Better), Wallace MacDowell (Theatre and Performance Studies), Matt Burman (Warwick Arts Centre) and Rachel King (Drama Education/Dumbshow). The guest practitioners were drawn from emerging companies Barrel Organ, Dumbshow, Fat Git, FellSwoop, Kill the Beast, and established companies Forced Entertainment and God Squad.

The aims of the project were to:

- Celebrate the Warwick 'legacy' and the role of performance in the lives and studies of current and graduate Warwick students
- Connect past and present students to exchange knowledge and share learning, both creative and professional
- Showcase the work of Warwick graduates to both student, staff and public audiences
- Present an integrated and complementary programme of workshops and performances, including established international companies and emerging artists

All of the aims of the project were achieved. Panel discussions were lively and engaged, with a genuine sense of democracy and knowledge transfer. All participants commented on the need for

such opportunities and for future consideration of how we (Warwick Arts Centre) might help bridge the gap between student-making and professional life. The bringing together of the 'Warwick Mafia' (the flippant name given to the large cadre of Warwick graduate theatre-makers, performers, actors, directors and writers working across the UK) facilitated the sharing of information and ideas between groups and between graduates and undergraduates in way which was positive, instructive and creative. Attendance at the performance strand were particularly high in comparison to the rest of the programme and the flow from daytime activities to evening performances allowed for conversations and debates to continue around the scheduled activities.

The performance programme had an audience over 4 nights of 615 people with a significantly high percentage of students (29% compared to an average at the Arts Centre of 10%). Whilst sign up for the workshop sessions by students prior to the start of the academic year was high (with 30-40 places filled per event), pressures of the taught timetable encroached and on average there were 15-20 students present at each of the 3 daytime events (with a total of 204 attendances across the week).

We reflected on and reviewed the project following a very successful pilot, and are planning a second year's Festival and Lab for November 2015 (with a focus on the university's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and an imagining of the next 50 years of performance at Warwick). The performance programme will showcase Warwick graduate companies once more, and the Lab programme will be reviewed to ensure a higher level of participation and engagement, with the intention of looking at a formalized and open application process for a more limited number of spaces and a more focused programme of events.

In 2014, each day followed a similar pattern;

- 9.30 Warm-up and welcome
- 10.00 Practical workshop (graduate companies)
- 11.00 Break
- 11.30 Panel discussion (question-based)
- 13.00 Lunch
- 14.00 Afternoon event (open to a wider audience)
- 16.30 Break
- 17.00 Open forum (incorporating documentation)

18.00 Dinner

19.00 Performances begin (public programme)

### **Tuesday 28 October**

#### **Co-facilitated by Jonathan Heron & Wallace McDowell**

Warm-up workshop from FellSwoop Theatre (contact: Bertrand Lesca)

Panel discussion: 'What does performance mean at Warwick?' Jonathan Heron with Rachel King, Bertrand Lesca. Alasdair Pidsley (Barrel Organ) and one undergraduate (all TBC).

Afternoon event: *How to ... Produce*: Matt Burman with Ric Watts, Emma Beverley and Natalie Querol

### **Wednesday 29 October**

#### **Co-facilitated by Matt Burman & Jonathan Heron**

Warm-up workshop from Fat Git Theatre (contact: Josh Roche)

Panel discussion: 'What are the urgent questions for contemporary performance?'

Afternoon event: Gob Squad

### **Thursday 30 October**

#### **Co-facilitated by Rachel King & Matt Burman**

Warm-up workshop from Kill the Beast (contact: Ollie Jones): *'How to look like an Idiot'*

Panel discussion: 'What strategies do you use to engage audiences/participants?'

Afternoon event: Forced Entertainment (workshop led by Terry O'Connor)

### **Friday 31 October**

#### **Co-facilitated by Jonathan Heron & Rachel King**

Warm-up workshop from Dumbshow (contact: TBC)

Panel discussion: 'What role does failure play in your work?' Panelists TBC

Afternoon event: IATL Student Ensemble with Fellswoop and Fat Git



