

~~BREACH~~

The Beanfield at Edinburgh Fringe 2015



Winners of the 2015 Total Theatre Award in
the Emerging Company Category.

About the Show:

"I don't know where the Beanfield is anymore. No one does. It's a very sore subject around here, there are raw wounds."

This summer marks the 30th anniversary of the Battle of the Beanfield, a brutal police assault on a convoy of over 500 new age travellers to prevent the 1985 Stonehenge Free Festival. Called away from policing the miners' strike to uphold an injunction around the Stones, officers took the tactics of Orgreave to a field in Wiltshire: battering and arresting civilians, burning their homes and forcibly removing their children.

So we thought we'd stage a historical re-enactment.

Theatre-maker Billy Barrett and Guardian award-winning video artist Dorothy Allen-Pickard direct this multimedia show set between 1985 and 2015. *The Beanfield* is part documentary - detailing the company's research, preparation and eventual attempt to re-enact the clash on location with a limited cast and resources - and part live performance, as they try to give audiences an experience of the 2015 summer solstice at Stonehenge.



About the Company:

Breach is a Total Theatre Award-winning company comprised of theatre-makers Billy Barrett and Ellice Stevens, and video artist Dorothy Allen-Pickard. They create politically engaged, formally innovative pieces for live performance that cross disciplines and mash up different media.

The Beanfield is Breach's first show together and was made at Warwick University with a cast of six. Anna Himali Howard, Grace Holme, Tom Wright and Max Kennedy co-wrote the show with Billy and Ellice through a collaborative writing and devising process, with Dorothy directing and shooting the documentary footage and interviews.

The Festival:

This was an extremely exciting year for Warwick companies, with there being more companies from the University than ever. The work created gained a reputation for being high quality, fiercely political and formally innovative. Having made an impression with previews at the Warwick Student Arts Festival and then at Theatre 503's Edinburgh Preview season, there was a buzz around the show and once at the festival the show went from strength to strength with sell-out shows, rave reviews and insightful think pieces being written about the show.

Press:

★★★★★ "theatrically ambitious and boldly political" - *The Guardian*
<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/aug/13/the-beanfield-edinburgh-festival-space-on-the-mile-stonehenge-new-age-travellers-review-1985>

★★★★★ "a truncheoning force" - *The Sunday Times*
https://twitter.com/breach_theatre/status/636147398826442752

★★★★★ "very funny... genuinely unsettling" - *The Stage*
<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2015/beanfield/>

★★★★★ "hard-hitting ... empathetic and outraged and, frankly, great" - *Fest*
https://www.festmag.co.uk/theatre/102841-the_beanfield

★★★★★ "honest and searing" - *Total Theatre*
<http://totaltheatre.org.uk/breach-theatre-the-beanfield/>

★★★★★ "incredibly engaging" - *A Younger Theatre*
<http://www.ayoungertheatre.com/edinburgh-fringe-review-the-beanfield-thespace-on-the-mile/>



Aims:

We went to Edinburgh with the knowledge that the show would be of particular interest to Warwick staff, students and alumni since the project's research and development coincided with tensions between students and the West Midlands police regarding protest on campus. The events of December 3rd at Senate House provoked local and national debate about freedom of assembly and the right to dissent in a university context.

In Billy's initial meeting with Jonny Heron about the Student as Producer project, he suggested that it may pose an opportunity for us to process and in some ways "heal" these conflicts, which Billy worked into the fabric of the show through its reflexive structure.

During the previews at Warwick much of the feedback from students has suggested that it problematised their assumptions about policing in an engaging and sensitively wrought way. And, in Edinburgh this feedback continued with not only Warwick students engaging in the conversation but students from a variety of universities.

The conversations around the show also extended to (ex-)members of the police force and the traveller community; many had heard about the show through contacts we had approached when making it but there were people who were there in 1985 who had come across the show in Edinburgh. After each performance we invited the audience to talk to us about the show and as a result we got to talk to travellers and police who found the production difficult to watch but a well-researched piece which echoed their thoughts about institutional violence.



Audience Responses:

These were some responses left by audience members on our EdFringe booking page:

A huge amount of work and research has gone into this piece. I remember being disturbed by the reporting of this event in 1985, and now I know that I was right to have been. The trouble is that our establishment (of which I am one) continues to react to the sort of challenges portrayed here in the same way now as they did 30 years ago. I observed it myself in the City a few years ago, and I am disturbed by the way we are demonising immigrants now. Shows like this make you reflect on these issues much more powerfully than TV ever succeeds in doing. I congratulate the troupe.

- *Crispian Denby*

Couldn't recommend this play enough. It's hugely powerful and engaging performance from the first second to the end. It's a brilliantly told exploration of the people, the culture and mind-set of both "sides" who clashed in one of the most horrific events in the history of protests or the break up of public gatherings in the UK. The direction and performances are superb. I was particularly impressed by how they managed to expose the horrors and brutality but without simply dehumanising the police. This play should be seen by every officer in training and anyone who's interested in powerful drama examining issues of violence, injustice and protest. Yet is it far from depressing or purely gritty, at times it wonderfully funny and beautifully up-lifting. Be prepared to be taken on a fantastic journey.

- *Jonny Kinross*

Cleverly splicing interviews, re-enactment and first person comedic monologues the play lifts the lid on a largely forgotten stain in the history of the Wiltshire Police force, whilst retaining an empathetic stance towards many of the people on the ground on both sides of the battle. Excellent work from the company - I very much look forward to seeing what else Breach do in the future.

- *Ben Thomas*



Company Development:

The run at the Edinburgh Fringe festival allowed the company to grow and develop on numerous levels.

The experience cemented the close relationship between all members as we pulled together to deliver the run. This was more than evident in the show itself where the ensemble delivered a slick, collaborative performance.

Running the show at the Edinburgh Festival allowed us to manage, and deliver the technical demands of a multimedia show in a tour-like setting and iron out any teething problems for future runs. We maintained our production values, and high quality delivery in a space with limited technical capabilities.

Whilst at the festival we were able to reach out to various producers and practitioners who were more than happy to talk to us about our experiences and begin partnerships. We are indebted to their help and support throughout the festival.



"A young company with a strong creative identity"
- Natasha Tripney, The Stage

"One of the most exciting new companies on the Fringe"
- Shelley Hastings, BAC

The Future:

Going to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival allowed us to showcase our work in an exciting environment. Through audience feedback and conversations with programmers we saw that there was a real interest in taking the show on tour and have already embarked on bringing *The Beanfield* to a wide range of regional theatres in Spring 2016. The Edinburgh Fringe created a great starting point for the company and has propelled us into touring opportunities and laying the foundations for work on the next show!



Thank you!

IATL have supported the development of *The Beanfield* from its beginnings as a Student as Producer project and through funding has enabled us to take the show to the Edinburgh Fringe. This support has not only contributed to the creation of this company but its longevity and future work. Thank you to IATL, all of our funders and audiences for supporting the show.

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