

forced entertainment



SPECTACULAR

A Look Behind the Scenes....

**An introduction to Forced Entertainment's
new show with accompanying DVD**





Spectacular is the extraordinary new performance from contemporary theatre company Forced Entertainment.

This pack and the accompanying DVD aims to give you an introduction to this unique theatre piece, allow you to find out more about the company and how they work, and will hopefully add to your enjoyment of watching the show.

Firstly, here's a little bit about *Spectacular*:

A lone performer takes to the stage, explaining that the show we're watching is somehow different tonight. The atmosphere is different, his entrance was off, the lights are wrong, some scenery is missing, some performers are absent. The tone is all wrong. Things are somehow falling to pieces, or maybe things are just now falling into place. The audience reaction, our protagonist says, is not quite what he expected, not quite what he's used to. Perhaps the fact he is dressed as a skeleton has something to do with it.

Intimate and comical, Forced Entertainment's *Spectacular* slowly and seductively winds the audience into the world of a missing performance. Our skeleton host seems relaxed about it, cracking jokes, staying chatty and amiable. But still something's wrong. The fact that the next performer who comes on-stage is caught up in some long, melodramatic and agonised death scene may also explain the shift in tone.

Spectacular is about the now of the performance moment, the trembling edge of laughter, possibility and invention. It's about death and playing dead, about the strange contact between two performers on-stage and an audience caught between what they are watching and what they are being told.

Simple, logical, absurd, impossible and humorous by turns, *Spectacular* is Forced Entertainment's provocative and playful new work.



We recommend that you watch the DVD before you come and see the show, here are some of the areas it covers with information about how to find out more



The Company

Forced Entertainment are an ensemble of artists who have been working together since 1984 producing new works in theatre and performance as well as projects in digital media, video and installation. Led by Artistic Director Tim Etchells, the company continually strives to find new performance and theatre forms with which to describe contemporary urban life. Widely acclaimed in the UK and Europe, the group's recent work explores ideas of identity, language, theatricality, love, cities and memory.

Learn more on the DVD

Founder members of the company, Tim Etchells and Robin Arthur talk about Forced Entertainment and the kind of theatre they make, as well as what it's like to work with the same group of people for 24 years.

Dig Deeper

You can find out more about the company, its members, history and artistic policy by visiting this page of our website:

www.forcedentertainment.com/thecompany



The Process

Unlike a lot of more mainstream theatre, a Forced Entertainment show doesn't tend to start with a script. A project can be initiated by a conversation, a fragment of writing, a piece of improvisation or simply an idea for a costume, set or soundtrack. In the early period of rehearsals the company gather and explore this kind of material, testing it so that some ideas are discarded while others are developed. As a selection is made the company start to think about how these strands of material might interact and what kind of structure they might make. Through a complex editing process, often including work-in-progress showings in front of a small audience, the shape of the performance is formed.

Learn more on the DVD

Artistic Director Tim Etchells talks about Forced Entertainment's trademark collaborative process which has made the company trailblazers in devised theatre.



Dig Deeper

Here Tim talks about how the company uses video cameras to document rehearsals, examining the footage to make decisions about which direction a new piece of work might take. You can see examples of this rehearsal footage by visiting the Forced Entertainment Collection at the British Library Sound Archive:

www.bl.uk/collections/sound-archive/drama



Spectacular

Spectacular opens with an epically empty stage, followed by the bumbling entrance of what appears to be a skeleton, apparently as bewildered as the audience by the lack of theatrical paraphernalia. He begins to chat amiably enough about the missing scenery, performers and dramatic tension which usually accompany his performance and are all conspicuously absent this evening. Just as our host warms to his theme, sharing his secret doubts about himself as an actor and even the whole edifice of theatre, he is interrupted by another actor, Claire, determined to perform her 'big death scene'.....

Learn more on the DVD

Performers Robin Arthur and Claire Marshall give you a taster of the show including an out take at the end of the DVD.

Dig Deeper

You can watch the whole *Spectacular* trailer on the Forced Entertainment website:

www.forcedentertainment.com



Talking to the Audience

One of the key interests in Forced Entertainment's work is how a performance is created by the unique exchange which happens between the actors and the audience in a theatre space. This live dynamic is particularly important in *Spectacular* in which language is used to describe a show that doesn't exist and the audience's imaginative capacity becomes crucial in the formation of the performance.

Learn more on the DVD

Robin Arthur talks about Forced Entertainment's method of addressing the audience directly, increasing the sense of liveness, while Tim Etchells describes the pivotal role the audience has as a co-creator of a Forced Entertainment performance.



Playing Dead

The two central performances in *Spectacular* explore two kinds of death. Robin Arthur's skeleton is a caricature of death, a cartoonish halloween costume; while Claire Marshall's melodramatic performance is an equally unsatisfactory version of death, suggesting the central absurdity of acting and its inevitable failure to represent reality.

Learn more on the DVD

Robin Arthur and Claire Marshall talk about how their performances interact while Tim Etchells discusses how Forced Entertainment's constantly tests the boundaries of theatre.

Dig Deeper

Read an essay by Tim Etchells about playing dead on p.6



How does *Spectacular* relate to other Forced Entertainment shows?

Over its 24 years Forced Entertainment have produced a body of work in which each show stands alone as a performance but is connected to the others by a continuing quest to find out what theatre might mean in contemporary life. *Spectacular* relates to the company's previous work in a number of ways, including the presence of overblown theatrical costumes as well as the use of language to conjure up an alternative reality to the one on stage.

Learn more on the DVD

Tim Etchells talks about how costume and language are used in *Spectacular* and in Forced Entertainment's past shows.

Dig Deeper

Find a complete archive of Forced Entertainment's work on our website:
www.forcedentertainment.com/projects



When the actor plays dead no one's fooled for a moment.

We've long been gripped by the strange game of playing dead; that particular absurd edge of theatre in which the performers are charged with approaching the one thing, which above all others perhaps, can't ever be convincingly represented. When we're at the theatre after all, once all the drama and exertions of the death scene are done, the actor is always still breathing as she lies there on the floor. Always still breathing, eyes closed and waiting patiently for the curtain call. No-one's fooled. No-one's taken in. Doesn't matter how much fake blood, how much yelling, how much sobbing, how much stillness. No one thinks this is real.

But at the same time there remains a strange charge to this game, a cultural and emotional electricity which crackles and sparks the air around the actor who lives-but-dies, or who lives but plays dead. The death scene. The appearance of the ghost. The appearance of death himself. As if the patent absurdity of these things - acknowledged, known by all - always contains nonetheless a flicker, shimmer, crack or opening to some other possibility. Like kids fooling with a Ouija board, intent on scaring themselves, we've been back around this again and again, always approaching from different angles, with different intensities, unable to let it be. We've been dying from the early shows like *Let The Water*.. with its glorious competition of tomato-ketchup movie deaths right through to the later works like *Bloody Mess* with its blank diva-death at the centre, a scene which Cathy claims with comical bombast will "break something inside you forever". No one's fooled. But still we come back - as a culture and as a group of artists - waiting till there's no one around, drawing the curtains and starting to play dead again.

Spectacular, for its part, is two deaths sat side by side. One unexpectedly chatty and cheery, if somewhat philosophical, prone to distraction. The other agonised, exaggerated, abject and highly theatrical. The drama of these two together is something we were pulled to in rehearsals - a discovery that remained puzzling, upsetting, compelling in the months of devising. Each of these deaths - the theatrical emotional and the pantomime thoughtful - has its own comedy, and each its own seriousness, as if the performance wants us poised on a knife edge, balanced but unstable on the weird border of gravity and farce.

At the same time, right next to these comical, serious and unimaginable deaths, *Spectacular* concerns itself with another kind of absence. The stage is bare for the performance and much of what we're watching in its hour and fifteen minutes is, simply speaking, not there. Instead it's a performance which explores the possibility of language - of how words can work to summon events, describing things, and, in a certain way, making them happen. What's spoken in performance after all hovers, gains tangibility, and with the imaginative participation of an audience begins to appear.

Spectacular is in many ways a simple piece with its two deaths braided around each other, but a constant binary of emotions and thoughts which gets more complex the longer you stare at it, and which we hope creates something at the same time fragile, vivid and visceral.

Tim Etchells, Sheffield, 2008.



Spectacular had its world premiere at PACT Zollverein, a theatre in Essen, Germany. The company also spent their last two weeks of rehearsals at this theatre refining the material ready to present to an audience. Stefan Hilterhaus is the Artistic Director at PACT Zollverein. Having observed the project come together, we asked him to write us an essay for the *Spectacular* programme. Here it is:

A short while ago, I came across an interview with an astronaut: 'The fundamental principles of perception, in fact of any action, are so completely turned upside down in outer space, that in spite of the many tasks there', he said, 'weightlessness produces an unparalleled feeling of freedom.' Despite having a happy life, with a family waiting for him at home, he added, there were times up there in the freedom of space, where he wished that he would simply never have to return to earth.

That I'm seized by a similar feeling of exhilarating freedom in the performances of Forced Entertainment may at first seem like a contradiction, since these performances so relentlessly take place down here in the everyday world of work, bodies and daily life. And yet this sense of freedom is there.

We live in a time in which the culture seems set on replicating the same set of dreams, emotions and lifestyles in each of us and is designed to hide differences, faults and contradictions. For this reason perhaps, it's liberating to see a handful of performers who want no more than to show themselves for what they are.

One topic, a few rules, a meagre set and props consisting mainly of found objects - these things leave the actors of Forced Entertainment very little to hide behind and scant room to manoeuvre. Nothing is controlled or hidden by design, instead life with all its contradictions comes into direct contact with the disaster of empty promises, and with illusions that are both a blessing and infinitely sad.

Sat in the theatre I am sharing this beautiful but unspectacular space with them. They share with me the questions that I either don't dare to ask or the ones to which I know no answers. They make big claims, tell tall tales, make great illusions, all of which they then immediately start to dismantle again before my very eyes. In this dark, concentrated room of the theatre, they create something that cannot quite be separated from real life, that doesn't ever try to be more than it is - an act of public pretending - and which somehow points us outwards, to those things that lie beyond. Under the surface of what I am watching, an unbelievably lively, funny, complex, exciting and liveable life reveals itself. I am right in the middle of it, floating almost. Perhaps that is what being in space felt like.

In each of Forced Entertainment's works the performers pull me subtly into a kind of open dialogue. I am in the audience but am also a co-performer, an accomplice and co-author in what happens. The way the actors merge the fictive and the autobiographical, mixing direct dialogue with



rehearsed scenes, sucks away the limiting walls of theatrical space. Behind them, a corridor appears - a space that allows the audience room for the questions, doubts, helplessness and the courage needed to see the complexity of everyday life.

Reality bursts out into the space of theatre and as it does so subjects everything to renegotiation: the rules of the stage, the game, the roles, the boundaries between reality and representation and the relationship to the audience. Over and over again watching this work, I discover the familiar and experience something like stability only to find it immediately undermined by humorous, heartrending and otherwise unexpected twists and turns.

This is how I want to theatre to be. This opening up of space. To become an accomplice instead of being reduced to a consumer. With just a stage and a few props, Forced Entertainment reveal more about our relationship to the world and the great questions of our existence than an entire encyclopaedia could. Theatre can probably do no more. At least, not on earth.

Stefan Hilterhaus, Essen, 2008.



If you want to know more about Forced Entertainment and its work there's a number of resources you can use

Website

www.forcedentertainment.com

Here you can find:

- An archive of all the company's projects that can be accessed alphabetically, chronologically or by category illustrated with stunning photographs by Hugo Glendinning.
- Full details of all touring activity, including links to online booking where available.
- Links to online resources including a downloadable Information Pack and articles about the company.
- Chance to sign up to our free mailing list to keep you informed of all Forced Entertainment news.

The Online Bookshop

www.forcedentertainment.com/shop

Peruse our virtual shelves to order books, DVDs and other resources including:

The Research Pack

The Research Pack contains over 100 pages of articles, reviews, project information and notes on aspects of the making process. It is an invaluable resource for people with an academic interest in the company.

Performance videos and texts

High quality multi-camera performance documentation of most of Forced Entertainment's shows from the past 24 years and all the texts.

Making Performance

A 30-minute DVD exploring the company's working process.

Certain Fragments

Contemporary Performance & Forced Entertainment

By Tim Etchells

An extraordinary exploration of what lies at the heart of contemporary theatre. Written by Tim Etchells, his unique and provocative voice shifts from intimate anecdote to critical analysis and back again to investigate the processes of devising performance, the role of writing in an interdisciplinary theatre, and the influence of the city on contemporary art practice.



Not Even A Game Anymore

The Theatre of Forced Entertainment

Edited by Judith Helmer and Florian Malzacher

To mark 20 years as a company, this bilingual publication is the first in-depth attempt to address the group's work from the outside, combining essays with academic and artistic reflections by Patricia Beneke, Tim Etchells, Matthew Goulish, Adrian Heathfield, Judith Helmer, Hans-Thies Lehmann, Florian Malzacher, Annemarie Matzke, Andrew Quick, Anke Schleper, Gerlad Siegmund, Astrid Sommer. Photographs by Hugo Glendinning.

The Forced Entertainment Archive at The British Library

For further detailed research, a collection of archive materials has been put together to form the Forced Entertainment Collection at the British Library.

The collection includes:

- Over 300 video recordings of performances, workshops and rehearsals, from the conception of the company to the year 2000, plus commercially circulated DVDs to the present.
- Audio recordings of public talks and discussions, including the two-day symposium held in 2004 to celebrate the twentieth birthday of the company and the Indoor Fireworks series of dialogues featuring Tim Etchells in conversation with choreographer Jonathan Burrows and others.
- CD-ROMs, performance texts, publicity material and production stills.
- Related material such as the educational DVDs on ensemble work produced by Contemporary Arts Media, and the DVD *Somewhere Near Variety* by Tim Etchells and Adrian Heathfield.

Arrangements are currently being made to archive video documentation from the year 2000 to date.

For an introduction to searching the Forced Entertainment Collection on the British Library Sound Archive catalogue, and for information on other contemporary performance documentation available, please visit:

www.bl.uk/collections/sound-archive/drama

Access is free of charge but you will need to make an appointment:

Tel: +44 (0)20 7412 7447

Email: NSA-drama@bl.uk

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Spectacular

Conceived and devised by the company

Performers	Robin Arthur and Claire Marshall
Direction	Tim Etchells
Text	Tim Etchells, Robin Arthur and Forced Entertainment
Design	Richard Lowdon
Lighting Design	Nigel Edwards
Production	Ray Rennie and Francis Stevenson

Forced Entertainment

Forced Entertainment is Robin Arthur, Tim Etchells (Artistic Director), Richard Lowdon (Designer), Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden and Terry O'Connor.

Eileen Evans	General Manager
Gareth James	Administrator
Sarah Cockburn	Marketing Manager
Natalie Simpson	Administrative Assistant

Co-producers BIT Teatergarasgen (Bergen), Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin), PACT Zollverein (Essen) Les Spectacles vivants - Centre Pompidou (Paris), Theatre Garonne (Toulouse), Tramway (Glasgow).

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