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VOLCANO THEATRE LAUNCHES 'ENCOUNTERS UNKNOWN'

Swansea-based VOLCANO THEATRE has launched a programme of work, new and continuing, for the duration of the lockdown. The company has called the programme ENCOUNTERS UNKNOWN.

"All of this work" says Volcano's Artistic Director PAUL DAVIES, "is geared to the continuity of the creative spirit, to a sense of communality and to the idea that when we do return to the rehearsal room, perhaps we will do so with a greater understanding of our lives and the places that we live and the people that we choose to love."

The flagship project within the programme is [NOTES FROM THE INTERIOR](#), a series of performance tasks set by Paul Davies, to which anyone is invited to respond. Each week the company releases a new public task based on a text, an image or some other stimulus.

"I thought" says Davies, "as the crisis unfolded, that it was vital we immediately offer a number of performers that we were intending to work with the chance to continue working, so I invited them to present a digital response to a number of tasks that I set, and I started to see the possibilities reaching outwards..."

The actors working on the project get advance notice of the task and each of them films a creative response to it. The company then publishes their videos as examples to inspire or intrigue and opens the floor to the public. People can have a go at the task privately, just to challenge or entertain themselves, or they can send their responses to the company, who will share them on social media.

NOTES FROM THE INTERIOR is partly the company's lockdown answer to what would be a period working in the studio with actors on the development of a new piece of work. This process, usually invisible to audiences, is now on view. In lockdown, we suddenly have a process that is simultaneously much more private (created alone in the participants' own homes or localities) and much more public (in that each response or idea is shared as we go along, and everyone is invited to join in).

"Whilst theatre is a singularly public gathering," says Davies, "I wanted this new strand of work to celebrate the private possibilities of performance. After all, we all know that performance takes place within the private sphere every day."

The actors involved are all Wales-based or trained in Wales, all with strong skills in improvisation and devising and, importantly, all of them bring humour and playfulness to the tasks as well as expertise and individuality. Whilst everyone is understandably anxious about the seriousness of the situation, there is little to be gained from an endlessly earnest dramatization of our predicament, and meanwhile new absurdities present themselves everywhere we look.

The actors currently working on NOTES FROM THE INTERIOR are Christopher Elson, Neal McWilliams, Mairi Phillips and Rebecca Smith-Williams.

ALSO IN ENCOUNTERS UNKNOWN...

"As another part of our programme of work in the lockdown we also have digital offers or challenges to our VOLCANO YOUTH COMPANY (14-21) and to our younger participants aged 9-14, who work under the rubric of THE MIGHTY NEW," outlines Davies.

THE MIGHTY NEW had just got going for the season before shutdown, so the company found themselves with a new group straining at the leash and fizzing with ideas. The group is led by the company's Movement Director Catherine Bennett.

"The Mighty New now meet online every Saturday," says Bennett. "Made up of mostly 9 to 12 year-olds, they are full of energy and adept at improvisation. Tuning in from their own homes, the children have embraced responding to choreographic tasks. The kind of tasks proposed, informed by how we are navigating our way through this pandemic, have considered the choreography of space, rather than the kind of choreography we are used to making for the stage.

Duets are popping up everywhere. On the streets it can feel like a game of chicken. Who will be the first to make space? What is the latest swerve or hop? It can feel a bit lonely without our dance partners at home, but we have objects to duet with. A duet with a chair, an imaginary glass box around us, an imaginary character. Perhaps our imaginations are more important than ever to have a conversation with, to keep us amused. The children are playing chicken hop not only on the pavements, but with objects, themselves, their imaginations and us, the virtual audience."

The company has built a special website where the group will set tasks, share ideas, try out their moves and give each other comments and feedback. This is not currently visible to the public, as it aims to replicate the space of the rehearsal room where ideas can be tested and explored without fear or judgement. However, the company will be sharing selected work created by the young people later in the season.

The older youth group, VOLCANO YOUTH COMPANY, led by Paul Davies, have been set a different challenge.

"I've invited them to 'Cindy Sherman' themselves," he says, referring to the American artist famous for creating images of herself in the guise of others. "It's an exercise in disguise and deceit. It's early days for this project, so we will see where they go with it..."

The first tasks in the NOTES FROM THE INTERIOR project are already live. You can join in and find out more about Volcano's ENCOUNTERS UNKNOWN programme on the company's website:

www.volcanotheatre.co.uk/whats-on/encounters-unknown