

***The Shape of the Earth* by Jack Symonds**

Introduction:

The Shape of the Earth is a solo chamber opera that takes inspiration from Patrick White's epic and iconic novel *Voss*. This is a complex and colourful work that takes us deep into the wilderness and oblivion of the psyche in the desperate pursuit of meaning.

This work is the first in the series of *earth.voice.body*, set in Bay 20 of the Carriageworks space.

Set and Props:

In the centre of the space is a large raised mirror stage, six metres in diameter. The circumference of the circle is lined with a ring of LED neon.

At the rear of the stage space is a wall of circular lights that make a grid directly facing the audience. The grid is seven lights wide and four lights high, and the lights are all evenly spaced a metre apart from each other.

There is a piano at the far left hand side of the stage. The music director, Jack Symonds sits at the piano and plays for the duration of the performance.

Characters, costume and staging:

From darkness, our central figure appears lying down in the centre of the mirrored circle. He is a male of tall build, wispy brown hair, aged in his mid thirties. He wears a blue suit, white button up shirt, red tie, brown shoes and a party hat on his head.

As the music begins, he wakes from his slumber, sitting up and looking around the space. He realises that he has a party hat on his head and throws it off, not knowing how it made its way there in the first place.

He then gets up and moves around the space, noticing in the mirror that his now bare head is in fact the same shape as the earth. He gets incredibly excited by this revelation and moves quickly around the space, darting around in circles.

In a dizzy spiral, he falls over on the ground again. He then lies down on the mirror facing the sky as the lights around him turn purple. He is filled with ecstasy and a sense of transcendence. He falls asleep again.

He awakes suddenly with a new thought and rises to his knees, the lights shift around him. He looks up above and down into the mirror below and considers where 'up there' actually is.

The wall of light begins to glow brighter, he turns around and faces it. It looks somewhat like a wall of stars before him. He walks towards it. He then turns around and huddles over himself as he remarks on how much he will miss the night.

He moves to the party hat, picks it up then stands to attention, placing the party hat on his head. He continues to do so, with relentless repetition for a minute. The lights have a slight green hue around him. He lowers the party hat off his head, then destroys it, the silver ribbons that were once on the top of the hat, now fall to the ground. He then discards the party hat and walks away from it. He catches a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror again and bends down to look at it. He examines himself in the mirror, bending over in a pose reminiscent of Caravaggio's painting 'Narcissus'.

He then stands again and slowly moves around the mirror circle, in a slow, bent walk, as if stalking prey. He holds his hand out as if holding a knife in it, ready to pounce at any moment. Once again he notices his reflection, bends down looks into it, realising that he is in fact the being that he is trying to hunt.

In a moment of enlightenment, he realises that he must find a way to kill himself. He gestures through all the different ways he could perform such an act through mime.

He stands again, still feeling nothing. He decides to take off all his clothes. He begins with his jacket, then his shoes, then his shirt and pants. Only leaving his white underwear on.

Once again he feels nothing. He stands in the middle of the space and begins to examine his body, millimetre by millimetre working from the torso down to his ankle. Trying desperately to find where his soul is underneath his skin. He is just lit by the reflection of white light in the mirror. The wall of light produces a warm, low glow behind him.

The lights then shift green and blue as he stands and remarks on mortal man's flaws. He uses his clothing as props to assist in his presentation.

Following this he takes it in turns to look at each of his hands and consider them and what they are capable of, turning them so the palms face him and the face away in a poetically repetitive and somewhat dancelike manner.

Our central figure then walks to the rear of the space and looks towards us with longing eyes, as if to farewell us. The lights behind him build in intensity, into an almost blinding glow.

The lights suddenly snap away and we are left with a dim reflected red light on him. He contorts his body as he slowly moves down towards us and then back again. He is panicking and physically struggling.

The light wall behind him then builds to a blinding intensity again, flickering with a surge of electricity. He is lit by a reflected white light. He moves towards us and then decides to start attempting to pull his eyes out from the sockets. He succeeds in doing so. His hands and face, now covered in blood.

He falls to his knees in pain and crawls to the centre of the space. He lies down, exhausted in the same place we found him at the beginning of the piece except now bloody and almost naked. The lights fade to black.

***La voix humaine* by Francis Poulenc**

Introduction:

Based on the play of the same name by Jean Cocteau, *La voix humaine* is a work which spans forty minutes of an interrupted phone call between a woman and her former lover.

This work is the second in the series of earth.voice.body, set in Bay 20 of the Carriageworks space.

Set and Props:

Approximately seven metres from the first row of the audience, roughly 4 metres from the centre, there's a piano and pianist. Draped over the piano is a heavy canvas dust cover.

In the centre of the stage, there's a sofa-shaped object, also covered in a dust cover. About a metre and a half in front of that, to the right there's a red rotary phone.

Characters, costume and Staging:

Our central figure is a medium build, blond haired woman. She is aged in her mid-forties.

She is dressed in a pale coloured nightgown and heavy woollen coat. She isn't wearing shoes.

She sits on the sofa shaped object in a dim pool of light. Light is reflected from the upstage piano dust cloth.

As the audience seating lights go down, the central figure stands, walks towards the piano and pulls off the dust cloth as the music begins.

She walks back to the sofa shaped object, sits, and watches the phone.

She walks away from the sofa, then back behind the phone where she then kneels and holds her hand outstretched to the phone.

When the phone rings, as suggested in the music, she answers it, and speaks to the person who is calling.

She hangs up,

She answers when it rings again.

She leans back when she finally hears her lover on the phone.

Her hands fidget with the cable between the receiver and the phone base.

When she describes what she's wearing, she stands and walks downstage.

When the line is disrupted, she moves back to the sofa shaped object and sits down. The lights flicker.

She uses the sofa arm rests both to support her when she relaxes or when she feels tension. These states sometimes occur very suddenly, often with sudden shifts in the music.

When she describes what she thinks the other person is wearing, she walks towards the audience the same way as when she described what she was wearing.

She crouches on the ground.

She returns to the sofa object, then some time later, frustratedly takes off her coat and drops it a few metres in front of her.

She moves to the right of the stage when she talks about the image of the old woman.

She lifts the phone up, looks at it fearfully, then places it down on the ground in front of her.

She pulls the other dust cover off the sofa shaped object to reveal a 2.4m long replica rotary phone receiver. The phone has a coiled wire that is connected to the back of a black woollen (barely perceivable) block. She then covers the regular size phone with the dust cover. This phone is then no longer used for the rest of the production.

She sits on the upturned rotary phone receiver and moves between talking into the microphone end, and listening to the speaker end.

She moves between using the phone in a literal way, and as a sofa.

She picks up the phone and dances with it.

She moves the phone to the ground and uses it as a comfort pillow/big spoon.

She grabs the wire by folding herself over the speaker end of the phone.

She returns to be cradled by the phone, grabbing her coat to use as a blanket.

She lifts the phone and takes it a few metres to the right - there's a structure that holds the phone vertical. It has been barely perceptible but may be noticeable in this context.

She caresses and touches the phone as though it's a person.

She traces the length of the phone wire with her feet when talking about a revolver.

She carries the phone to centre and places it on another barely perceptible woollen box. It is placed in the hung up position.

She sits under the speaker end of the phone.

She wraps the cable around her neck.

She walks towards the audience, still with the cable around her neck.

She picks up the coat, and looks between it and the cable. The cable remains around her neck. She touches the cable.

She drops the coat.

There is one final loud chord, followed by a short note, the lights go out on this final note.

***Quatre instants* by Kaija Saariaho**

Introduction:

Quatre instants depicts the journey of a single figure as she traverses memories and sensations from a past intimate relationship.

This work is the third in the series of *earth.voice.body*, set in Bay 20 of the Carriageworks space.

Set and Props:

The stage space is dimly lit and filled with wispy fog so that the remaining objects are partially obscured.

The piano remains in the same position, but in front and slightly to the right of it is a large pile of rope. Towards the back right hand corner of space is a 4.8m long, square shaped plank of wood. About 3m away from the front row of the audience is a beach ball sized glass orb that is netted in rope.

Characters, costume and staging:

Our central figure is a medium build, strawberry-blond haired woman. She is aged in her early thirties.

She wears a structured black shirt/dress and black ballet flats.

From darkness and fog, our central figure appears from behind the plank of wood. As she discovers this first object in the space, the lighting gets slightly brighter.

She uses all four limbs to discover and balance, as she traverses the length of the plank.

Once she's stepped off the plank, she sees the glass orb amongst the fog, and travels towards to pick it up, look at it, and feel it.

She then finds one end of the rope, puts the orb down and collects as much of the loose end as possible until she reaches the larger pile.

She puts the rope down.

She stands in the centre of all three objects and pauses, looking in the direction of each.

She runs towards the plank and tries, unsuccessfully, to pick it up from the centre.

She then manoeuvres the plank into a mirrored position in the left hand side of the stage. She does this by lifting an end, carrying it into a new position, lowering and repeating until it's in its final position.

She then lifts the end closest to the audience, places it on her shoulder, and drags the plank towards the audience until she's 4 metres away from the front row of the audience, on the left hand side of the stage.

She then picks up the other end, and places it diagonally opposite on the right hand side. The plank may appear to float slightly higher out of the fog than before.

She then runs to pick up the glass orb, and place it on the right hand end of the plank.

When she does this, the plank starts to slowly spin clockwise.

She watches the plank spin one rotation before closing her eyes and moving with the flow of the spinning plank.

She then exits the pathway of the machine on the other side of the stage, before closing her eyes again and moving into the flow of the machine/plank again.

She sits at the central axis point of the machine/plank and lies down, perfectly balanced, as the machine continues to spin.

She then gets off the machine, walks towards the pile of rope and attaches one end of it to the end of the plank that does not have the orb balanced on it.

She lets the rope thread through her left hand and weave itself lengthways along the plank.

Sometimes the action of releasing the rope is a two handed pulling action from her chest.

She ebbs and flows into the path of the machine to better weave the rope.

She wraps part of the rope around her waist, still weaving it around the plank.

The rope is slowly running out - our central figure notices this and watches as the end of the rope reaches her outstretched hand.

The lights go out.