

SEASAW

Derek Purnell, General Manager, Tilted Productions, outlines some of the issues to be taken into account and the benefits that accrue in undertaking work outdoors

SEASAW is the most recent work created by Maresa von Stockert for Tilted Productions. SEASAW is a trail of contemporary dance, performance art and physical theatre vignettes inspired by the relationship between humans and water. Its creation was prompted by Maresa's interest and concern with the impact of man on the natural world and a desire to explore and comment on that precarious relationship. Whether evoking childhood memories of seaside holidays or provoking thoughts on current environmental issues such as water pollution and global warming, SEASAW set out to both entertain and challenge.

Appropriate to the subject matter, Maresa chose a coastal location to develop, inspire and place the work. With support through the Eastern region's Escalator Outdoors scheme and support from Norfolk and Norwich Festival, a research and development period took place at Cromer in North Norfolk in May 2010. Known for her site-specific indoors work, Maresa embarked for the first time on creating a promenade piece for the outdoors.

Beyond merely being inspired by the setting Maresa wanted to fully integrate the location into the performance: architectural features became platforms that the performance was moulded onto / under and landscape features such as sandy ground became a direct catalyst for movement material.

The enthusiasm to develop this work was increasingly shared by the local traders, beach hut owners, dog walkers, joggers, holiday makers, fishermen, passers-by and users of

the promenade and foreshore. By being on site the work integrated with both the environment and the local community, questioning the familiar and encouraging further exploration. The environment inspired creativity, which in turn engaged local interest, which further encouraged creative ideas, hence a positive cycle evolved which, unless raining, continued unabated.

Following the success of the research and development period in 2010 the project resumed in 2011 as part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival with performances also taking place in Watford (that famous seaside town!), Bournemouth and Great Yarmouth. Tilted Productions also performed SEASAW at the prestigious Viva Cité festival in Sotteville, France.

It is estimated that approximately 4,000 people saw SEASAW in 2011. These performances have prompted further interest and SEASAW will tour extensively both at home and abroad in 2012.

Creating site-specific outdoors work offers both challenges and opportunities. Advance planning and consultation with local authorities is important so as not to fall foul of regulations, permissions and conditions. Local knowledge and contacts can provide valuable information and often, prove keen to assist, advise and promote performances. To be open to working in different settings, preparedness for any weather and an ability to adapt to events as and when they occur – were important attributes required of the dancers, choreographer and production team. Inevitably by moving

away from the familiarity of working in conventional settings, the number of variables, which often fall outside your control, increases. This element of unpredictability and a degree of spontaneity informed the creative process and performances. Expecting the unexpected and being open-minded is both a necessity and a pleasure of working outdoors. Tilted Productions' experience is that outdoors work (un-ticketed, free and open to everyone) engages and connects with an audience in unique and unusual ways. An 'audience' varies from pre-informed followers to chance encounters with unsuspecting passers-by, all of whom are able to come and go as they please. The physical proximity between audience and performers creates its own dynamic, not least in that everyone can see each other and play with responses. There appears to be a very strong sense of a shared experience between the audience and the performers.

SEASAW was performed at different times of the day, which increased the range of audience demographic and added different dynamics dictated by the natural world, e.g. weather, tides and light. Each performance was genuinely unique, attributable to original ideas and the subsequent creativity borne out of working in an outdoor site-specific setting. The work is engaging, challenging, witty, beautiful and poignant – if you missed it in 2011 be sure to catch it in 2012.

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