

My first sentence was going to be “I have had a 20 year relationship with Nikki Milican”. However that is not entirely true the company I belonged to Pants (which is 5 men) have had a 20-year relationship with Nikki and the NRLA (synonymous and metonymic). We were selected as Platform artists and having been given the stamp of NRLA approval were selected to take part in Singapore festival, commissioned by Third eye centre, CCA, Arnolfini, BAC, Chapter Arts, and being awarded Barclays New Stages (which we cashed in for used fivers almost immediately), funnily enough the arts council wouldn’t touch us with a barge pole. But Nikki and the NRLA would and effectively validated us, me as an artist. I have been lurking around the NRLA as a platform artist, technician, invited artist, board member, and someone who sends his students to witness work and to show work as platform artists themselves for 2 decades. I have witnessed on a first hand basis the extraordinary care, dedication and compassion that goes into making the ‘thing’ go on.

The role that Nikki and the NRLA has played in my life is significant, it has been a warm hearted, cool headed, frantic bodied European socialist haven in a cold hearted, hot-headed, dead bodied Thatcher-rite Britain.

As a young artist (but old man) I was able to show work next door to Derek Jarman and countless others, but I will always return – a constant return - to Derek Jarman (I want to say Del Boy but I won’t).

As a technician working for, and indeed at extreme moments under, the peerless Bob Pringle, cowboy boots, spurs and sprayed on tartan ‘trews’. I learnt the invaluable lesson for any aspiring techie/artist, how to open a can of beer at the back of the auditorium without disturbing the audience - as you pull the ring – cough, then hold up a sign to the performers letting them know how it is all going.

I remember moments of exquisite beauty as when Neil Bartlett walked across clay slabs with the names of loved ones who had died from aids (of course when I re-read this I am uncertain whether the clay slabs had names on them or whether I put them there in my minds eye – the vagaries of memory), with us ragged arsed and exhausted techies sitting up in the rafters raining sifted sand onto his head, mingled with our tears.

The time when the people show, dogs in honey and forced entertainment helped us put down a sticky silver floor in the gallery of the third eye centre in a 40 minute turn around.

As an artist to have somewhere you felt at 'home', where the work was all and where Nikki, insistently brought us/me back to the work – a constant series of returns, returning to Glasgow, returning to begin again, returning to the work.

I have heard said that those of us who have shown and seen work at NRLA are a family; for me we are not a family, happy, dysfunctional or otherwise, I already have my family. But we are a community constantly shifting, dissolving, re-appearing, looming, fading that are trying to ask questions about how the world is or could be. The NRLA is a 30 year project in practical philosophy.

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