

LISA WESLEY *Dichotomy of a Donkey*

Of late I've had one of my clear outs which, as a rule, results in holding onto baggage I can't throw away for unbeknown reasons and then the following year thinking "Christ on a flaming bike why did I keep that crap?" Then the said crap is deposited in a black bin liner before you can say Desmond Tutu. My props cupboard was recently the object of bin bag scrutiny as lack of storage space combined with the knowledge that ninety nine percent of my accumulated back catalogue will never be of any practical use again is a constant issue. Why was I holding onto, for instance, an old latex face mask stuck together with old glue I'd been too lazy to remove (i.e. too much of a rush to get to the bar) and which now bore a resemblance to the genitalia of an alien life form? A decision was made to hold onto a keepsake item or two per show (something to show the Grandkids), either a tape, a fragment of costume or a copy of a script*.

Some scripts seem shockingly primitive, typed on an electronic typewriter from days of yore (reckoning at the time that this piece of high-tech kit was the bee's knees!), scribbled notes correcting dyslexic spelling and rather elaborate technical directions in capitals reading **LIGHTS UP SLOWLY, LIGHTS FADE DOWN SLOWLY** and **END** (perhaps the real reason I've always struck up a camaraderie with techies in my time). Amongst the *Mablethorpe Donkey* performance props were my tribute *Wizard of Oz* ruby slippers ... an end of sale pair of shoes acquired from the Moor in Sheffield which I plastered in glue, sprinkled in red glitter and fashioned with satin red bows.

I showed *Mablethorpe Donkey* at the National Review of Live Art in 1996. I'd left college the year previously. I suppose this short piece gave me what might be termed my big break (i.e. I got a few more gigs) and for years after I ran away from it as if it was a great, big, flippin' albatross round my neck. The piece was born out of the aftermath of a relationship I was just out of combined with snippets of dialogue from a glamour model's Christmas do back home in 1995 that got lodged in my drunken brain cells. It was set, for some reason, in Mablethorpe (a Lincolnshire sea side resort we holidayed at as a kid). Donkey was a derogatory term I'd overheard in reference to a woman who'd been ridden quite a few times on a beach (no not me!). It's a piece I didn't understand at the time but got to understand better the more I performed it and quite frankly I didn't care or see why it would cause such reactions in an audience. One strong comment in particular was that I was "asking to be raped". For those who missed it, I crawled around naked on all fours, made up with lipstick and white powder on my face and lady's bits, banged my head on the floor, wore a sanitary towel taped across my mouth whilst trying to speak, urinated on the floor, had union jack stickers on my backside and made references to Jeff Banks, chips, drunk driving and trying not to puke up in a taxi. Oh ... and clicked my shoes together 'there's no place like home' style. Throughout most of the piece I didn't seem to be there

and would find the marks and bruises later. At the time a certain ‘promoter’ (who’s grown a rather fetching beard of late) couldn’t differentiate between the ‘Donkey persona’ and the shy and retiring Ms Wesley and was actually too frightened to talk to me so got his underling to do the dirty work and exchange phone numbers.

As well as being a NRLA virgin that year, I also had the novelty of staying in a hotel. Said novelty quickly wore off on discovering my room was positioned slap-bang next to the kitchen. Like having a malodorous monkfish clout you about the chops, I was rudely awakened for the next three mornings at 6am by the kitchen’s tape-deck, Wet Wet Wet’s ‘Wishing I Was Lucky’ resounding through the paper thin plasterboard over and over again. Without becoming over sentimental and delving into graphic detail, luck did play a huge part in my life at my first festival, so I’d like to use the space here to say cheers to the NRLA for not only introducing me to my prince charming (even though I presumed him to be a stalker for a little while) but also for just taking me as I am and letting me do what I do without question. Nikki Milican is one of only a handful of people I feel confident in sending an idea or a proposal to - trusting it will be appraised on its merits and not on its clever wording, if it fits into a festival theme, or if you’re hot or not.

**Salvaged from the Props Cupboard: Emma is smitten by a very provocative pink, quilted dressing gown which she promises to use in a ventriloquist show in which she performs in her pyjamas; Ian gladly takes both a resin garden snail and resin rabbit ornament for a creation extraordinaire; Sarah Jean pilfers the resin rabbit ornament from Ian to embellish her garden; Bruno is given a box of acrylic paints for a Bruno masterpiece (with apologies for the half dried-up Cadmium Yellow ‘cos the top wasn’t put on properly); Andrew takes a t-shirt for DJing which simply says “Office Wanker”. Back in the cupboard goes: a cardboard moon bearing the beaming face of Liberace; a compilation tape with adverts recorded from Radio Hallam; footage of a drinking competition that ends in monumental vomiteering I found by accident at the end of a video tape; a thinned down collection of baseball caps advertising Yorkshire Tea, Duncan Doughnuts, Beef Future and Worlds Greatest Lover ... and of course I keep my Mablethorpe Donkey shoes, hardly ruby slippers but I now honestly think they are something I could never relinquish. They now reside next to Mark Owen from Take That – an official limited-edition doll complete with box circa 1994 and an antique of the future!*