

Stephen Taylor Woodrow

I Can Remember Cornflakes and a Bunch of W*nk*rs

It feels very dramatic to have gone “off the NRLA radar”, when I first appeared at the National Review of Live Art many years ago they didn’t even have a radar! Or perhaps they did but I think it was an old wooden one, and people didn’t used to go “off it” quite so much in those days.

You may not remember me, dear reader, but I made my first appearance back in the early 1980’s, with a piece entitled ‘The Pasta Ballet’, the NRLA was then held at the Midland Group in Nottingham and was much more of a low key affair. Nevertheless it was still the place to meet like minded souls all hell bent on doing a bit of time based art work. At that time, apart from Rob Le Frenais and his Performance Magazine it was always quite tricky to keep up with who was doing what, so to have our own live art trade show was an essential annual forum. What a treat it was to meet folk from all over the world and watch them acting the goat! I clearly remember staying at the Waverley Guest house (prop. Olivia B. Boxall) and coming down to breakfast to meet Mineo Ayagamuchi from Japan (*endurance installationist*) and from America Eric Bogosian, (*monologueist*) whose ‘TalkRadio’ show went on to become a successful Hollywood film. Eric had the gravelliest voice I had ever heard and Mineo, who I don’t think had been to Europe before, ate milk and Cornflakes without closing his lips, which to a young and not very well travelled Englishman named Stephen Taylor Woodrow (*Living Sculpture*) was all absolutely fascinating. I can’t actually remember a bloody thing about the NRLA itself but I did for the first time meet Julian Maynard Smith of Station House Opera who subsequently became a friend.

Over the following ten years or so I was invited back to present stuff another three times at the NRLA, by that point of course in Glasgow and organised by the wonderful Nikki Milican (whose dedication and perspicacity really does make her one of the saviours of the medium). I met friends old and new, hopefully provoked a bit of thought, probably talked a load of bollocks, saw some great works and some real howlers! And whilst I’m on the subject of howlers I can’t let this opportunity pass without mentioning my last appearance some 12 years ago. At that point I had already begun my defection to the wonderful world of TV production, but was eager to make a come back with a show that really was a little different to anything else I had done before - and hopefully completely different to anything anyone else was doing. I reappeared under the pseudonym and disguise of ‘Simon Perry and his World of Cheese’ An extravaganza with song and dance. In retrospect maybe the inclusion of a full psychic cheese bending was going a bit too far- but surely you can’t be too controversial at the NRLA, can you? Well! It wasn’t really the booing, the venomous looks, the hurling of objects or the fight that broke out in the audience that upset me - it was the fact that I had somehow offended a few vociferous members of the audience (or wankers to give them their proper title) by doing something that was a bit too unexpected! Now forgive me if I’m wrong but isn’t that the whole fucking point of the exercise? I even heard two people in the bar talking afterwards saying, and I quote:

“That Word of Cheese show was rubbish”

“Did you know that was actually Stephen Taylor Woodrow doing that?”

“ Oh really? Wow, Right. Now I understand it! Cool!”

Well I for one could of spat! I can take criticism, but I won't be pigeonholed.

By the way, in case you are wondering the show wasn't actually rubbish – in fact I went on and toured a version of it round Butlins, (where if they like a show they don't clap – they let you live!) How many other ex NRLA performers can put Butlins down on their CV's, eh?

Also, incidentally, if you think psychic cheese bending is inappropriate or indeed too silly – I subsequently produced the first series of a television programme called 'Most Haunted' with TV's psychic Derek Acorah. You see it all filters through somewhere down the line!

The National Review has always been a great place to meet your peers, showcase work, do a few deals and of course expand your horizons. It's not so different from any other corporate trade show in some respects but at the same time thankfully is, and I hope always will be, everything that the corporate world despises. That is why Live Art is a far more righteous path than Fine Art, and hats off to all those who take that route. The NRLA should always be there for those who choose to be different even if what they are doing is a bit too 'experimental' for it's own good. Long may it live.

Lovely to speak to you all again!

All the best

Stephen Taylor Woodrow is now a senior producer for Talkback Thames Television with many successful television series' to his name.