

StanSlat – Twenty years too later

Well it's been a while – almost six years since I last saw John (Stanton) in the flesh and a good year since we last spoke on the phone.

Life, as we like to say, gets in the way.

Now, trying to piece together a semblance of anecdotal evidence from which to conjure memories of a performance we presented at the National Review of Live Art back in 1988 seems like the summoning of spectral entities from the well of lost souls....I immediately find I can't remember a thing.

So I call and find John is at home, on holiday from his job as a managing editor with the Sky Corporation and is currently performing a little 'sanding the floorboards' routine in his hallway in Guilford.

It's good to hear his voice again after so long, he was my spiritual big brother (even though I'm two years older) – we spent several of our formative arts years together – first at Art College in Cardiff and then after, moving around the country – each of us trying to maintain / build lives and credible artistic careers.

'Split' our performance at the NRLA that year had been created intermittently over several months in 1987 while John moved to Cornwall to set up home with Shona his wife and I had moved to live in Brighton. We had shown the work a few times, but you couldn't say we earned a living doing it.

After our talk I find the images come swimming back – of two towers of bricks wrapped in news papers – riot shields and dust masks – torches, smoke and the towers toppling over – images which sound scarily familiar now.

Not that we had somehow summoned some weird magical mojo to see into the future - 'Split' was of its time and place – a kick against what we saw as the dominating power structures of media and politics of the time.

Though it would be interesting to see what people made of the work....

The NRLA was a formative experience for both of us – John had already presented a solo work at a previous NRLA, and I had somehow ended up working for Nikki as her assistant. I have a strong memory of my own personal turmoil as I was 'Split' between being performer and presenter all in one day – strange how uncomfortable that felt! Running around after everyone and performing was probably too much to take on and I paid the price in the form of a drunken fight at the end of the festival (yes, those were the days!) and saying goodbye to someone forever.

So, finally, where is StanSlat? Well, we are part of a certain history, we played our part and then we moved on. Another show followed, commissioned by the Third Eye Centre and that was it. We ran out of space in our lives to hold onto something that required a huge amount of energy and time – remember this was pre-internet at the dawn of rudimentary computerisation - so everything took a lot longer to do.

StanSlat are now artists of life, husbands, fathers, workers, experts in DIY, friends and I hope, still able to dream.

Happy Birthday NRLA!

Steve Slater