



talking birds presents

THE WHALE

a talking birds project



Creative Outline

A giant metal Whale which swallows audiences whole, to enjoy a charming, playful and submersive theatre experience inside. Performed by a solo actor, for one person at a time, or small family groups.

It can be sited outdoors, in high streets, near water, offsetting a building, or on a festival site. The Whale is an extraordinary and unexpected visitor to high streets, public squares and green spaces, transforming each environment it enters.

Inside they meet a lovesick submariner who sings a song and hands them a message to take away.

Its portability means it can move from place to place and is especially effective in contexts involving water or environmental themes.



Brief biog of company

Established in 1992, Talking Birds is a theatre company based in Coventry, UK known for its astonishing acts of transformation. In 19 years of operation (2012 will mark its 20th Anniversary), Talking Birds has produced over 100 projects in venues that range from the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank to Kilkenny Livestock Mart; from a giant underground car park in Scarborough, to a decommissioned hospital in Coventry. It also works in conventional theatres - more than 4,000 people went to the Belgrade Theatre to see Talking Birds' "We Love You City" which told the story of Coventry City Football Club's epic 1987 FA Cup win.

Their work is keenly, and often profoundly, felt by the communities in which it is presented, and is characterised by a distinctive blend of humour, music and visual flair. It defines its trademark style as Theatre of Place.

Talking Birds is a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council, England.
www.talkingbirds.co.uk

How audiences engage with the work

Audiences see the whale and are invited to queue. The queue is managed by an sou'westered fisherman who builds the sense of anticipation and keeps the queue happy and entertained while they wait. The Whale swallows audiences (of one to four people at a time).

You enter and the mouth of the Whale closes, you discover yourself inside a submarine. Opening a red velvet curtain reveals a submariner named Jonah. He has a dilemma - how to communicate a message of great importance to his loved one on shore, using the regulation 40 words prescribed by the Operations Manual for Submariners. He asks you for a rhyme for the word 'regret'. The sailor sings you his message, based on the rhyme, which you are asked to pass on in the form of a small, paper whale, which he has made for you during the course of the performance.

Our performers put audience members – who are sometimes a little nervous to begin with - entirely at their ease. Surprise, delight and disbelief are the common characteristics of people on their way out! Comments have included:

"I loved being swallowed by a whale."
"It was very beautiful and funny."
"Unexpected and fabulous."
"Like nothing I have experienced before."
"A Musical Poetic Whale - absolutely fantastic."
"I couldn't stop laughing."

"You leave feeling lifted, warm... and with a small gift."
(audience comment)

Brief track record

Talking Birds has a 19 year track record of successfully managing productions in a wide variety of contexts both inside and out, and with engaging with the public in formal and informal contexts. It has worked in partnership with various organisations to deliver its work including local authorities, heritage organisations, city events teams, schools, as well as galleries, theatres and festivals.

Previous performance history

The Whale was originally commissioned by the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, as part of “The Battle of the Guilds”, which reinvented the tradition of performing mystery plays from the back of carts.

Since then The Whale has seen over 5000 people pass through it (including at least one government minister), and been present at events, festivals and openings including The National Theatre, Lyric, Hammersmith, Sloane Sq/ Royal Court, Kinsale Arts week, Kilkenny Arts Festival, Terryglass Arts Festival, Dartmouth Regatta, Birmingham Artsfest, Warwick Arts Centre, Larmer Tree Festival, Kendal Mintfest, mac Birmingham, outside football stadia and more...

“It is always a pleasure to have the Whale in Theatre Square – and to see all the happy faces on the way out!”

(Angus MacKechnie, National Theatre Watch This Space Festival Producer)

Technical Specification

The Whale is mounted on a car trailer, which is towed to the site and then the tow vehicle unhitched. Being entirely self-contained it is of very low logistical impact and low environmental impact, without the need for elaborate infrastructure.

Site: The Whale is best sited outdoors on flat paved areas, grass, public squares. It is towed to and from site. It is entirely self-contained in terms of power etc, highly weather resilient and positively enjoys the rain. (In over 5 years of touring no performances to date have had to be cancelled.)

Size:

In transit the dimensions are: 5.5m long x 3m wide x 3.5m high.

The minimum space required during performances is: 7m long x 5m wide x 5m high.

Approx weight (without tow vehicle) is 800kg.

Get-in/get-out:

Get-in time from arrival is 45mins-1 hour.

Get-out time 45 mins.

When staying overnight locally, secure overnight storage is required for Whale + tow vehicle

Number of shows per day

Audience capacity: 200-400 per day (based on 6 hours of shows, 2 x 3hr slots with a 1 hr break, 12-15 shows/hour average).

Crew / Front of house: 2 performers and one stage manager look after The Whale day to day. Total in team on tour: 3

The crew steward the Whale, so no additional FOH staff required, unless the local situation requires this.

Lighting: During the day no lighting is required; the Whale can also be highly effective at night when suitably lit.

Insurance: The Whale is fully risk assessed and Talking Birds has public liability insurance to the value of £5 million.



Accessibility

The Whale is accessible for wheelchair users and is fitted with an induction loop. Our actors are highly skilled at tailoring performances to individual audience members and can take specific access needs into account.

Links

More info: <http://www.thewhale.info>

Trailer: <http://tinyurl.com/TBwhale>



Contact Information

Artistic / Creative Directors

Derek Nisbet (Composer), Nick Walker (Writer/Director), Janet Vaughan (Designer)

Referees

Angus MacKechnie
Platforms & Watch This Space Festival
Producer
AMacKechnie@nationaltheatre.org.uk
020 7452 3328

Ed Collier
Co-Director, China Plate
(programmed The Whale for Lyric,
Hammersmith)
ed@chinaplatetheatre.com
The Bond, 180-182 Fazeley St, Birmingham, B5
5SE

Address and contact details

Name: Lou Lomas
Email: lou@talkingbirds.co.uk
Address: Talking Birds Theatre Company,
Institute for Creative Enterprise, Parkside,
Coventry, CV1 2QR
Telephone: 024 7615 8330
Mob: 0785 532 3499
Website: www.talkingbirds.co.uk

Note:

The Q and The Whale can tour in tandem.

