

DV8 Physical Theatre *To Be Straight With You*

Directed and conceived by **Lloyd Newson**

Co-produced by **spielzeit'europa Berliner Festspiele, National Theatre London, Maison des Arts de Créteil and Festival d'Automne, Paris**

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Further production details can be found at www.dv8.co.uk

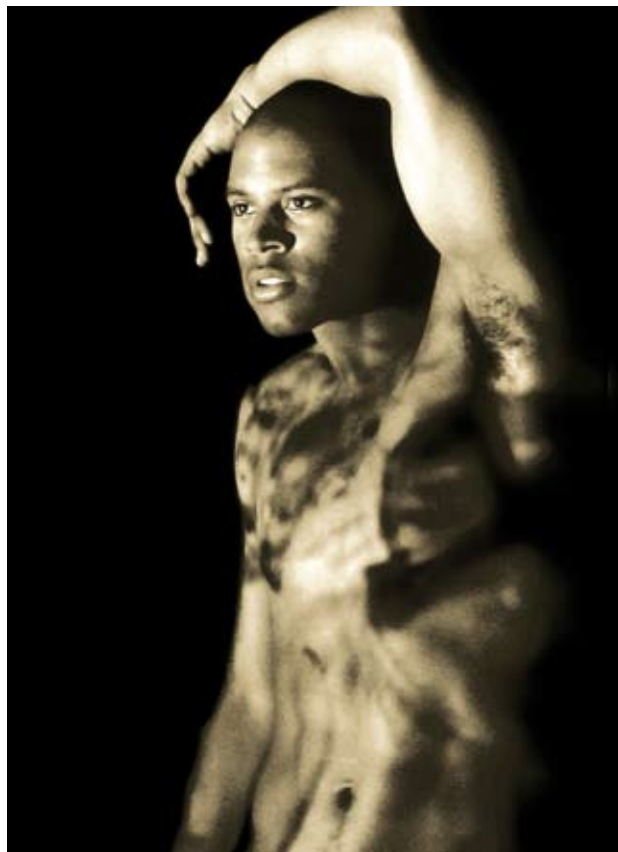


Photo (Ira Mandela Siobhan) by Lisa Ffrench

Further production details:
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DV8 Physical Theatre's production

To Be Straight With You

A work conceived and directed by Lloyd Newson

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LLOYD NEWSON WITH THE PERFORMERS

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Photo (Rafael Pardillo) by Matt Nettheim

Foreword from Lloyd Newson

There are three main reasons, or events, which prompted me to make *To Be Straight With You*, a work about tolerance/intolerance, culture, religion and homo/sexuality.

In the early 1990s, I went on a Gay Pride March which, that year, went through the predominantly Afro-Caribbean neighbourhood of Brixton. My then-boyfriend, who was Indian, and I were astonished at the level of abuse and hostility directed at us as we walked hand-in-hand down Brixton Road. I was struck by the fact that people – who themselves are part of a minority, many of whom must have experienced racism and racist abuse first-hand – were so willing to abuse another minority. Our research showed that many people within the Afro-Caribbean community hold strong religious beliefs, and not surprisingly, use religious texts to justify their negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

In 2006 Channel 4 Television screened a documentary called 'Gay Muslims'. The programme interviewed 200 gay and lesbian Muslims living in Britain, and only one person out of the 200 was willing for their face to be shown on television. It is worrying that people living in a democratic country in the 21st century are still frightened to be open about their sexuality because of potential reprisals within their own ethnic and religious communities.

Currently the word 'schism' appears almost daily in newspapers when referring to the potential split within the Anglican Church over the issue of homosexuality. There are 38 Archbishops and Bishops that represent the Anglican Communion worldwide, and a number of whom boycotted the 2008 Lambeth Conference, hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, because more liberal bishops who condone homosexuality were invited. Last year, the Anglican Mainstream, a network of traditional Christian organisations, sought exemption from the government's Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007, which attempts to prevent discrimination of gay people in the provision of goods and services.

How does a society reconcile religious values if they are at odds with an individual's human rights? Why should religion be protected any more than other belief systems such as secularism, democracy and free speech?

The themes behind this production are complex,

sensitive and not easily translated into movement, so for the first time in DV8's history I sought a writer, and/or an existing text, to help me structure the work. However, after six months of intensive searching, nothing I had read or seen adequately addressed the particular issues or theatrical forms I wanted to investigate.

It seemed a more suitable and authentic approach would be to use first-hand, verbatim accounts of people directly affected by the issues of religion and homosexuality. For a number of reasons it was challenging to find people to interview – often because they were too frightened to tell their stories. We employed a full-time researcher, who found many of our interviewees through word of mouth, as well as through asylum organisations, human rights groups, youth groups and religious and political organisations. We also advertised in the press, leafleted in bars and clubs, and went to anti-gay protest gatherings. We interviewed 85 people living in the UK: men and women, some who are both religious and gay, some who have given up one for the other; members of the clergy; human rights organisations, and people opposed to homosexuality due to their religious beliefs. We also conducted street interviews (vox pops) in different areas of London, in which we asked passers-by how they felt about issues like gay marriage and the relationship between religion and sexuality.

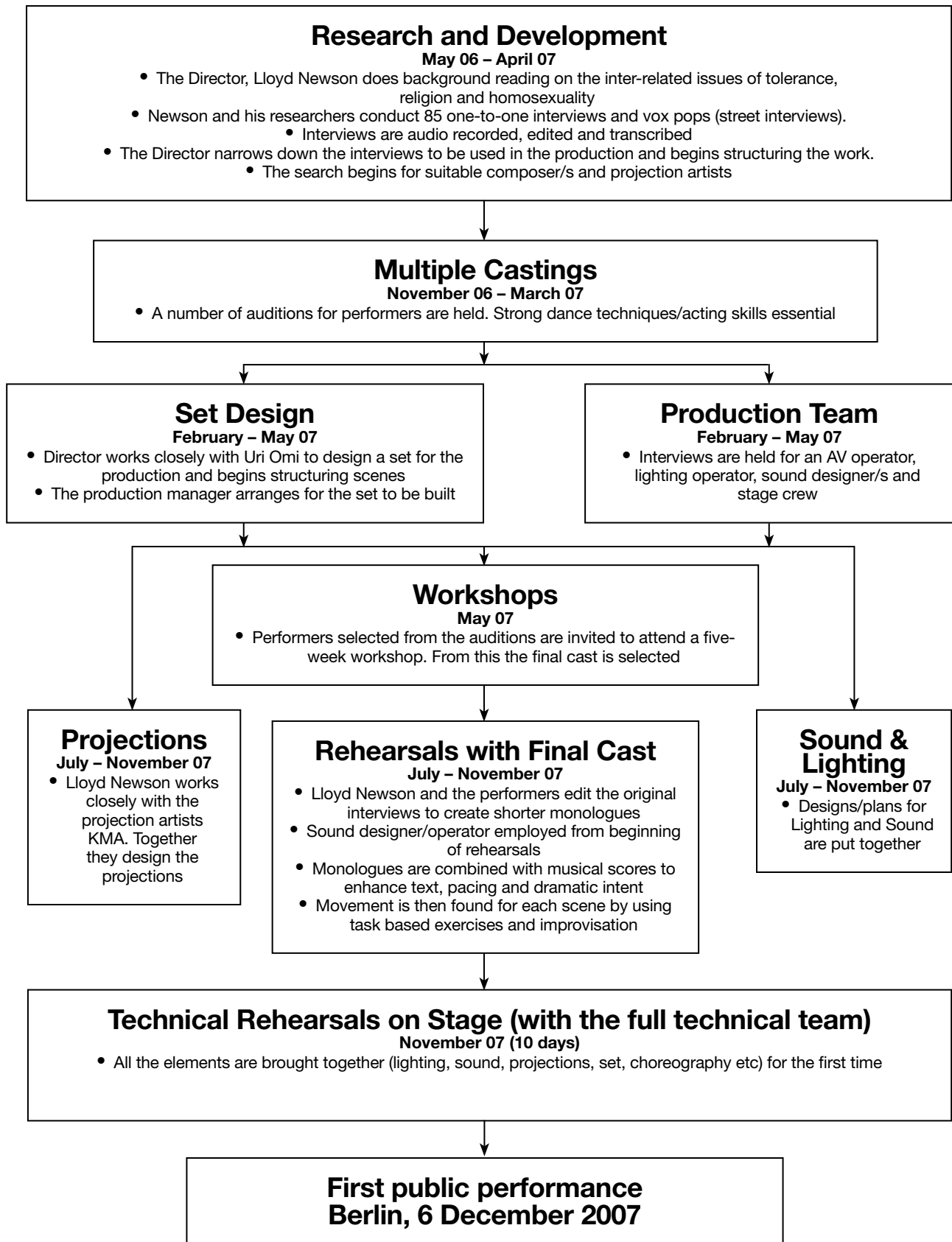
Many of our interviewees, particularly from ethnic minority groups with strong religious ties, requested that their identities remain hidden, fearful of the consequences should their communities discover their sexuality. Despite the great gains in the law to protect gay people in this country, our interviews show how lesbians and gay men, if they choose to become visible, face intimidation or physical abuse. I hope that through this work audiences will become more aware of the lives of many people hidden under the veneer of a liberal and supposedly tolerant society.

Every word spoken on stage comes directly from the interviewees and I would like to thank them for agreeing to let us tell their stories.

Lloyd Newson

Artistic Director, DV8 Physical Theatre
October 2008

Creating To Be Straight With You



A Performer's Experience

by Ankur Bahl

When I read DV8's call to audition, I was convinced this was the project for me. Having studied journalism and anthropology before embarking on my career as a performer, I wanted to be involved with a piece of socially-conscious theatre. It seemed perfect timing that DV8 was looking for performers for a piece on race, religion, sexuality and intolerance. So, when Lloyd didn't take me on at an audition in early 2007, I called him back a few months later and asked to be considered again.

At the end of my second audition Lloyd sat me down and asked me if I was sure I wanted to commit to this project, and the controversial themes it explored. I'd be lying if I told you I didn't have my doubts. The audition itself is enough to scare you away – try repeating spitfire interviews fed to you on an iPod, in accents varying between Patois, Indian, Northern English and Cockney, while you move around a space responding to verbal cues from your potential boss ranging from “skip” to “do Bollywood” to “think about pulling and pushing.”

Needless to say, getting through the audition was only the beginning. One year after joining DV8, I can tell you that you can't be in this show without tremendous grit, determination, persistence, and a steadfast commitment to the power of theatre to achieve social change.

Each moment you see on stage is the result of countless hours of sound editing, choreography sessions, technical rehearsals, and questioning whether a moment would make it into the final version of the piece. I edited one speech 17 times before we agreed on the version you see on stage. The persistence it took to actually get this job remained crucial to the creation of *To Be Straight With You*.

One character that I portray – in which I dance a Bharatanatyam duet with Hannes Langolf to music by Shakira – required six weeks of one-on-one choreographic sessions with Lloyd. It took three full days of technical rehearsals in London and Berlin for elements of lighting, sound, and projection to come together with the performance. We put in weeks of work to produce five minutes of an 80-minute piece. That's why the performers were involved in almost five months of creation before *To Be Straight With You* was presented to an audience. In addition to that, there were weeks of technical rehearsals when we worked long days to bring the show together.

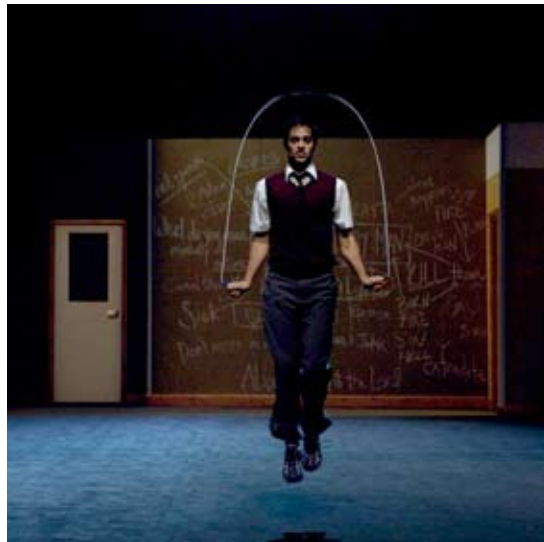


Photo (Ankur Bahl) by Matt Nettheim

Furthermore, the sensitive nature of the piece, and the responsibility we have to the people interviewed for the work, pushed Lloyd's natural impulse to focus on details. I know exactly what I am expected to do for every single moment that I am on stage. Everything from a slight glance at the audience to a casual walk across stage is rehearsed and choreographed.

One aspect of the process that has been extremely rewarding, is the fact that Lloyd has drawn on the specific talents of each performer to ensure that we not only play real-life characters on stage, but can inhabit them with personal truth. An example of this occurred when Lloyd found out that I had been World Rope Skipping Champion. Since we were working on a teenage character, Lloyd incorporated my skipping skills to emphasise the character's youth, and we tailored the rhythms of my skipping to the natural rhythms found in the boy's speech.

I auditioned for DV8 in the hope that I could stretch myself as a performer, and work on a piece that would allow me and the audience to engage in a dialogue about the world in which we live. I can assure you that being involved in the creation and performance of *To Be Straight With You* has accomplished both of these goals. As a performer, I hope we do justice to the people whose stories we tell, and we offer a voice to those who would otherwise be silent.

Q&A with sound designer and engineer Adam Hooper

How did you get involved with DV8 and *To Be Straight With You*?

I've been working with DV8 since 2002. I have been involved with dance companies for quite some time, so they got my number through those contacts, and then phoned me up and invited me to join them. I have worked for DV8 on *The Cost of Living* and *Just for Show* before this, and was invited to come back to work on the sound for *To Be Straight With You*.

What are the unique challenges faced by a technician working on *To Be Straight With You*?

The director, Lloyd Newson, gets quite heavily involved with all the technical aspects of the show, so as a technician for DV8, you're not just working with a designer for the lights or sound, you're dealing directly with the director and you have to translate what his ideas are into technical realities.

Another unique challenge is that the company technicians work directly with the performers. In that way it is different to most theatre companies, as there is no stage manager calling the show. The performers and technicians take their own cues, work together to move the set, change costumes, swap radio microphone packs and run the show. Furthermore, the show is created with all the technicians in the theatre, so the production is created not only around the performers, but around the capabilities of the technicians.

How does this piece differ from other DV8 productions you have worked on?

One of the main differences between this and other DV8 productions is that it is a verbatim piece, which means that there are a lot more technical requirements in terms of sound. In the last two shows, I came in once the actual show had been created, just for the technical rehearsals, and I put sound on top of a created show. However, this time around, I was involved with the initial sound editing stages of the interviews, before any of the performers had been hired. Once the dancers arrived, I taught the performers to use the computer software to edit the original interviews down to smaller speeches that could potentially be put into the show. That was quite interesting for me because normally you don't see the journey that people go through to get to the finished product, but I was able to be a part of each one from the beginning.

When we started making the piece, we had to decide whether we would use original voice or if the performer would deliver the text. So we did a lot of experimentation to figure out how best to resolve this for each scene. There were some practical restrictions we had to be mindful of as certain interviewees didn't want their voices used for fear of being identified. Also when a scene was being created, we had to make sure that the movement would work with the possibilities we had for using microphones, music and sound effects, in order to ensure the text was heard. Sometimes the choreography would be changed to suit the microphone positions, or we would have to change the positions of the mic packs on the performers' bodies to allow for the choreography to remain the same. In this show some microphones are attached to the body, and some are positioned in different places on the stage. The stage design comes with ideas of sound in mind – it originated from the idea of the set resembling a sound recording studio or a translation booth, so that offered possibilities for the placement of microphones.

Was there anything you found particularly difficult in working with the verbatim text?

The original recordings were made on minidisk and cassette, which are considered to be quite low grade. When you try to replay a recording that's been created this way in the theatre, all of the imperfections are amplified and, especially with the interviews that were done on the street, you get a lot of background noise. Some of the interviews were conducted by quite casual microphone methods in public spaces, and trying to get the quality of those recordings to a professional standard, so they can be played in the theatre, is quite difficult and has involved a lot of work.

The show uses live and recorded voices, as well as music. How do you make them work together? How challenging is that task?

The main thing is that we have to spend a lot of time doing very careful sound checks. On the first day of the fit up, I have separate time to work on the sound from the sound system, and I also have the theatre to myself on the second day. That afternoon, I have two hours to work on the sound for every scene – equalising and balancing sound elements – with all the performers. It's been important to work closely with them to let them know what the microphones

Q&A with sound designer and engineer Adam Hooper

and the technical equipment are capable of, especially regarding the levels of the monitors on stage. The performers want to be able to hear their voices and the music on stage, but I don't want to pick up that sound in their microphones, so we have to get the balance just right at each venue. That's also why we have a technical rehearsal, and then a separate dress rehearsal, at every venue before the opening show.

Can you take us through a typical day on tour for the DV8 technicians?

We have three days to fit up a show at each venue. On the first day we arrive between 8am and 9am and start setting up all the equipment. In the afternoon, I have an hour of sound time in the theatre to begin equalising sound levels, and then we have an evening shift to finish setting up. Most of the technical team leave at around 8pm, but the lighting people stay until 11pm to focus all the lights.

The next day we have more time to finish setting up the sound, lighting and set issues. In the afternoon there is an hour and a half set aside for the video projections to be set up with the performers, and two hours to work out sound elements and voice levels. That evening we do a technical rehearsal in which we go through every single scene and iron out any technical problems. We finish at around 10pm.

The third day in a venue is the day that the show opens, and we solve any remaining technical problems in the morning. That afternoon we do a dress rehearsal, get notes, and then, after a dinner break, we do the show.

What kind of training is required to work as a technician for a company like DV8?

You need to have training in the main technical discipline that you will be doing. I studied for four years part-time at City of Westminster college and completed the City and Guilds parts one to three in sound engineering. During this time I had a full-time job in a multi purpose venue, which gave me valuable professional experience and also meant I could put into practice what I was learning in the classroom. With DV8 we do not tour our own sound system and have only just started to tour our own sound desk. This means that I often have to make quick decisions when setting up the sound system in a new venue in order to keep to schedule. The more equipment and problems I come across, the more I learn, and that in turn helps me in future venues. Another very important skill is you need to be able to communicate effectively so that everyone can work as a team and get the job done, no matter where in the world you are performing.



Photo (Ira Mandela Siobhan and Coral Messam) by Matt Nettheim

Tasks for Teachers and Students

(This workpack is intended for students between the ages of 16 and 18, however it can be adapted for tertiary students.)

A. Clarifying What the Work is About and Identifying Underlying Themes

- Write two paragraphs describing what *To Be Straight With You* is about.
- List how many stories you remember from the production. Write down as much specific information as possible that you remember about one of these stories/characters. [It would be helpful if different students were allocated different characters/stories.]
- As a group, list and discuss at least eight other issues/associated themes raised by TBSWY.

Prompts: censorship, free speech, discrimination, ideology versus evidence, myths, hate crimes, racism, sexism, 'respect', human rights, intolerance

- Can a theatre work be sustained if there is no unifying story or linear narrative line through the piece, as in TBSWY? In this work, what might be the "glue" that helps hold the individual monologues together?

Prompts: thematic material, rhythmic/kinesthetic, visuals and stylistic threads

- Which scene's physicality had the most impact on you in the show? Why?
- Does the physicality of the performers enhance or distract from the spoken text? Was there a specific scene in which the physicality was especially effective?
- What are the advantages or disadvantages of using verbatim text instead of a fictional script?

Prompts: the advantage of using the interviewees' own words is that it lends a credence and authenticity to the work. The disadvantage is decreased flexibility in not being able to change or add words, in an attempt to clarify what is being said. Also, the inability to write additional words, fictional or otherwise, can decrease the power of text to serve narrative functions

B. Dissecting Scenes

- Towards the end of TBSWY there is a scene in which the central character is a Muslim preacher, played by Ira Mandela Siobhan. Why do you think the director has decided to interpret this particular scene with performers sitting, standing and moving chairs?

Prompts: The scene is representative of the setting in which the original voice of the Muslim preacher was recorded, ie: Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park. The movement of chairs and people is intended to constantly shift the dynamic between people who support the Muslim preacher and people who disagree with him. Chair and performer positioning/heights are intended to continually highlight the power dynamics played out in the dialogue

- What is the preacher's argument against homosexuality?

Prompts: The preacher disagrees with homosexuality because he says it is condemned by the Koran and references the Story of Lot (Lut)

- What are the arguments of the characters who speak out against the Muslim Preacher?

Prompts: People who disagree with him question his position, i.e. whether the Koran condones violence and murder. Another character argues that the preacher's attitude towards homosexuals is the same as Nazi Germany's persecution of the Jews



Photo (DV8 cast) by Matt Neittheim

Tasks for Teachers and Students

- Halfway through the piece, Dan Canham performs a monologue called the “Christian Protestor,” which opens with the line “I don’t think I’m gay.” In the scene, Hannes Langolf draws chalk images on and around Dan. Why is this scene interpreted with chalk drawings on a blackboard?

Prompts: The character in the interview talks about “God drawing the line.” By physically drawing lines on stage, the company is simultaneously asking the audience where the metaphorical line between sinner and saint is drawn? The drawn images can also act as a subtext, for example when Dan says, “I know what God is saying,” Hannes draws a halo above Dan’s head.

- The section called “Shakira” is the duet in which Ankur Bahl and Hannes Langolf do Bharatanatyam movement to the song “Hips Don’t Lie.” Why does DV8 use movement inspired by Asian dance traditions to portray this character?

Prompts: This is an example of movement drawn from the interviewee’s own words. He states clearly at the beginning of the scene that he thinks he is a good dancer. He talks about not being able to resist the music and ‘the dancing’. He also talks about dancing not being acceptable in his country of origin. An interesting fact is that this married interviewee was ‘found’ by Lloyd Newson and his researcher at an Asian nightclub that continuously plays Bollywood movies and music.

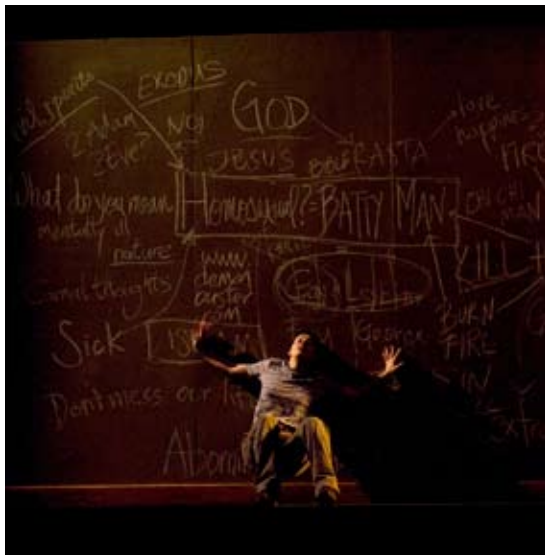


Photo (Ermira Goro) by Matt Nettheim

- Ankur Bahl delivers the monologue of a young Muslim boy while he is skipping rope. This character’s father and brother stabbed him when he was 15 years old because he told them he is gay. Why is the performer skipping whilst delivering the text?

Prompts: Skipping illustrates the character’s youthfulness and nonchalance; it underlines his positive, lighthearted and largely un-embittered recollection of the traumatic experience of the stabbing.

- There is a scene in which Dan Canham plays a hard-line Christian man who sits in a chair and speaks against gay adoption. Dan is joined by other performers who do unison and cannon movement in their own chairs. Why has the director chosen tight unison and staccato movement for this scene? Why are the dancers’ torsos held upright through much of the scene. What else do you notice about the movement that supports the intention of the text?

Prompts: The upright bodies of the performers suggest the characters’ self-perceived righteousness. The small staccato movement implies the tight and rigid position he holds regarding homosexuality. However, there is also a snakelike, creeping quality to some of the movement calling into question the moral superiority this man espouses. The background unison movement suggests agreement/power/intimidation, consistent with the fact that this man was outside the Houses of Parliament with fellow Christian objectors protesting against an ‘Equality Bill’ that would give gay people the same rights as heterosexual people.

- Towards the end of the show there is a recording played on stage of an interviewee who habitually uses the words “to be straight with you” in varying permutations. Hannes Langolf comes on stage and uses this text as a soundtrack for some choreography that is performed in a stiff, angular and awkward manner. Can you think of reasons why the director has chosen this specific style of movement to accompany the repetition of the line “to be straight with you”?

Prompts: The choreography is based on the idea of a man who hides his homosexuality by pretending to be heterosexual. Consequently Hannes dances with straight limbs trying not to be ‘bent’ (bent being a slang term for gay). This movement appears strained, difficult and ‘unnatural’, lending credence to the comment “I’m gay, don’t tell no one” at the end of the speech.

Tasks for Teachers and Students

C. Written Tasks

Write a review.

- Write a review of *To Be Straight With You*. Assess the production in terms of choreography, performances, staging, and its ability to address contemporary issues.

Write a press release.

- Write a press release for DV8 Physical Theatre's *To Be Straight With You*. Make sure to find a genre to describe the work. Could it be called a dance documentary or dancing testimonies? Is the term "physical theatre" sufficient considering the use of documentary, text and film within this production. To serve its function as a press release make sure to highlight the strengths of the work, and describe what an audience member can expect.

D. Physical Tasks

Option 1

1. Conduct an interview with a peer, friend or family member about a topic that you are passionate about. Then, transcribe the interview. (If there is not enough time to conduct an interview, use the text of a newspaper editorial.)
2. Choose the most important sections of the interview, and edit them together so that the remaining script is no more than three minutes long.
3. Choose a partner and ask them to read the monologue aloud and improvise physically in response to the text. Avoid movement that is too literal (i.e. imitates exactly what is being said) or habitual. Try to find movement that complements and strengthens the meanings of the text.
4. Choose the sections of the improvisations that fit best with the rhythm and meaning of the text and then set the movement material.
5. Memorise the text and perform it with the set movement material.

Tips:

- If a performer is locked into a set way of moving, try to get someone who moves very differently to improvise, physically, in front to them. They then have to imitate how this person moves. This can be a rewarding, often liberating exercise that can push a performer out of their habitual movement patterns and produce many unexpected surprises and choreographic ideas
- You may wish to record the monologue and download it onto an ipod. This way the performer can hear and repeat the words simultaneously whilst improvising. This assists people initially without having to memorise the text



Photo (Hannes Langolf) by Matt Nettheim

Option 2

1. Conduct an interview with a peer, friend or family member about a topic that they are passionate about. Then, transcribe the interview. (If there is not enough time to conduct an interview, use the text of a newspaper editorial.)
2. Select the words/phrases that are most critical to the interview.
3. From this reduced selection, find a word or phrase that encapsulates the feeling, or thematic intent of the entire interview.
4. Find a gesture or physical motif that best illustrates this word or phrase*.
5. Create a dance exploring and developing the elements of this physical motif*.

Tips:

- This whole process is lengthy and can be repeated numerous times. It is a way of working that was developed from many different discussions with other artists and was an attempt by DV8 to keep re-invigorating itself regarding its working processes
- *For example, a wagging finger illustrating the word 'don't', can develop into many different hand expressions: in the opening scene a religious fundamentalist says, after saying homosexuals should be killed, "we welcome you" – the performer offers an open palm; "tell you what to do" – the palm closes to a fist; "on the right path" – he draws an imaginary line with his finger; "to please the society to please God" – his hands go upwards gesticulating to 'heaven', and "but don't mess our life" – he points accusingly at the audience

Tasks for Teachers and Students

Option 3

1. Construct a short, abstract movement phrase.
2. Conduct an interview with a peer, friend or family member about a topic that they are passionate about. Transcribe the interview. (If there is not enough time to conduct an interview, use the text of a newspaper editorial.)
3. Choose 30 seconds of text from this interview.
4. Combine the words you have chosen with the movement you created. Try to balance the rhythm of the text with the dynamics of the movement. You can change the pace of the movement to make for a better match.

Tips: Ask students to confirm that the movement supports the text, instead of distracting the viewer from what is being said. Keep both the movement phrase and the script relatively short to maximise the time you can spend exploring a small section of choreography. This exercise is intended as a simple way to explore the combination of movement and text and merge the rhythms of the words and movement. Encourage students to keep the text delivery constant and vary the movement to see how slight variations can change meaning. Ask students to explore the possibility that the movement can create a subtext for the words, and adjustments can allow the words to deliver one message and the movement provide another – sometimes contradictory – message to provide texture and complexity

E. Discussion Prompts

- Define “discrimination”.
- What are the differences between racism and homophobia? Are all forms of discrimination equally unjust?
- Unlike race, gender, disability and age, sexuality can be hidden. Is this a good or bad thing? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being able to hide your sexuality? Would it be reasonable to be expected to hide your skin colour or disability? How much is sexuality a part of someone’s identity like race and gender?
- How can society reconcile respecting religion and religious views that go against homosexuality, but also respect European human rights laws that protect the rights of homosexuals, including their

right to have sex?

- *To Be Straight With You* references a dancehall song whose lyrics begin “Boom bye bye in a batty boy head” (which translates as “shoot a gay man in the head”) advocating the shooting and killing of gay people. How would you respond if “batty boy” were replaced with “black,” or “Asian,” or “women” in these lyrics?
- When music artists sing songs with lyrics saying “shoot gay men in the head” or “burn gay men” do you think their music should be banned for inciting violence? Is some censorship necessary to protect people from being harmed, or is any form of censorship wrong? Does freedom of speech mean you should be allowed to say anything?
- Where do we draw the line between a public employee’s responsibility to do their job, and their right to live by their religious beliefs?
- Is it acceptable for a Muslim policeman not to guard the Israeli Embassy in London on moral grounds (as happened in 2006, when a Muslim policeman refused to guard the Israeli Embassy in London because he objected to the country’s bombing of Lebanon)?
- Is it acceptable for a council-employed registrar to argue that their religious beliefs prevent them from officiating for civil (gay) partnership ceremonies? Would it be right for a doctor not to treat a homosexual because of his/her religious beliefs? Conversely, would it be acceptable for a lesbian or gay doctor not to treat a Christian patient because the Bible ‘condemns’ homosexuality?

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Further Reading – Articles

1. 'What's wrong with the left?' – Peter Tatchell
(5 February 2005)
www.petertatchell.net/politics/whatswrongwithleft.htm
2. 'It isn't racist to target Beenie Man' – Peter Tatchell
(*Guardian*, 31 August 2004)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1293953,00.html>
3. 'Sizzla denied Visa – Reggae star banned from Britain' – contains translations of homophobic lyrics Peter Tatchell (4 November 2004)
www.petertatchell.net/popmusic/sizzla.htm
4. 'We won't desert them – Jamaica must take responsibility for its homophobia' – Rob Berkeley
(*Guardian*, 11 January 2005)
<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1387549,00.html>
5. 'Gay, Muslim and proud?'
Review of Channel 4 documentary 'Gay Muslims' (Workers' Liberty – 29 January 2006)
www.workersliberty.org/node/5568
6. 'There is no room for homosexuality in Islam'
Extract from Al-Ghurabaa website
(Al-Ghurabaa and the Saved Sect are now banned for incitement to terrorism under the Terrorism Act 2006 so website no longer exists.)
7. Leaflet: 'Same-sex love – Same-sex sex, What does the Bible say?', handed out by Steven Green (Christian Voice) at the Cardiff Mardi Gras (2 September 2006)
<http://www.christianvoice.org.uk/Press/press019.html>
8. Letters from Black Pastors to the *Telegraph* (see footnote 4 – 13 July 2006)
<http://www.eauk.org/media/black-churches-letter.cfm>
9. Letter to the *Telegraph* in response to the black Pastors' letters above, from Richard Kirker (Chief Executive, Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement)
<http://www.eauk.org/media/richard-kirker-letter.cfm>



Photo by Beky Stoddart