

# OPEN NEWS

## SING FOR WATER (Britain)

Perhaps it only happens once in a person's life that a small idea blossoms into something of quite unexpected proportions, something which you no longer control but which has its own momentum. The Magdalena Project must have been that for Jill Greenhalgh: a dream made one evening by an Italian lake which became an international network with its own life.

One winter, a few years ago, when the British Government were threatening to attack Afghanistan, thousands of us wrote to the government in protest. Our letters changed nothing. I felt I had to direct my anger and frustration into something positive, something that you could not argue with, that was not party political in any way. Overnight the idea of Sing for Water came. I imagined a weekend festival with a few friends giving singing workshops and a concert to raise perhaps £ 1,000. As usual I was busy with concerts, theatre projects and albums, and considered Sing for Water a small side project to be fitted into a weekend. Almost five years later it has raised over £142,000, and I hope this is just the beginning.

So far the money raised has gone to WaterAid projects in India, Ghana and Burkina Faso. Last month I went to Ghana because I felt I had to see the work in the field. The local partners, APDO, who run one of the projects we currently support, are inspirational people. They use theatre, song and participatory exercises in their health education programme, as well as building bore holes and training local villagers in pump maintenance. They were delighted to be supported by singers. The need for their work is endless. In the villages we visited, Guinea worm is carried by the dirty water and brings great hardship and suffering. The lives of those who now have safe clean water have been massively changed for the better.

Sing for Water grew into something big because Catherine Reiser, the one time Producer for Theatre Complicité, then Associate Director at the Thames Festival, heard me talking about the first Sing for Water workshop. She asked me to collaborate with the Thames Festival. Together we cooked up a format which has just had its fourth year. Choirs are invited every September from all over Britain, from France, from Belgium, from wherever they are willing to travel, to the banks of the Thames to perform together. Each choir leader gets sent the scores for six songs and a teaching CD with all the parts. They all arrive for one rehearsal together on the final day. The first year we had about 250 singers, each year numbers have grown. For the first three years I conducted it and now new leaders are conducting it each year. As well as some collection on the day, the money is mainly raised by each singer getting people to sponsor them to take part in the concert.

As well as the London event I asked choirs who couldn't come to London if they would like to do their own Sing for Water concert locally. Many choirs around Britain and abroad took up the challenge and their own events contribute greatly to the overall sum raised. One choir leader in Cambridge invented a wonderful event called Sing and Swim for Water where they rent the local outdoor pool and have bands and choirs singing whilst people swim.

Catherine has now moved to Australia and set up Sing for Water Australia. A concert took place at the Riverfest in Brisbane this September, and I will be visiting Melbourne in March for one which is part of the Commonwealth Games, the biggest so far with 700 singers. The Australia events will support WaterAid projects in East Timor.

WaterAid works in parts of Asia and Africa. Sing for Water could also support other charities and NGOs if someone wanted to do a concert towards water projects in countries where WaterAid don't yet have projects.

Perhaps the most joyful thing about it all is the fact that the participants enjoy themselves so much, experience singing in a mass concert, learn some great songs, meet colleagues and new singing collaborators, whilst knowing that what they raise is of great value.

My longer term hope is that we may be able to involve more well known singers to do concerts for water. It would be great if Sing for Water events could involve singers from all genres, professional and amateur so that we can help to make changes for thousands of the poorest people on earth.

Sing for Water now has a life of its own, beyond my direction. It is a simple idea, infinitely adaptable. People are making it happen in their own way. I am hoping that the project will continue to grow interna-

tionally. Someone is interested in doing Sing for Water in South Africa. If you know a choir or singer who might like to do their own event or come to London for the mass concert, do put them in contact with me.

[www.singforwater.com](http://www.singforwater.com)

[www.wateraid.org](http://www.wateraid.org)

[www.thamesfestival.org](http://www.thamesfestival.org)

[www.helenchadwick.com](http://www.helenchadwick.com)

Helen Chadwick

## WITHOUT BORDERS (Cuba)

In January of 2005 Magdalena Without Borders Festival was organised in the city of Santa Clara, Cuba. Directed by the actress Roxana Pineda, and supported by her group Estudio Teatral de Santa Clara, the encounter welcomed students, actors, theatre critics, theatre directors, dancers and musicians, who participated for ten days in events which included workshops for theatrical creation, work demonstrations, conferences, theatre performances, concerts and oral narrations. The city of Santa Clara was possessed by the ten days, and the symbolic possession, directed by theatre teachers from all over the world, was accompanied by more than 200 participants arriving from all corners of the island, comparing experiences and meeting the work of the Magdalena Project at close hand. The encounter had a strong pedagogical emphasis and prioritised the possibilities for establishing work relationships and the sharing day by day between the actors and directors. It was a shared space for practice and reflection. Participants included: Jill Greenhalgh, Geddy Aniksdal, Julia Varley, Patricia Ariza, Ana Correa, Cristina Castrillo and Bruna Gusberti, Brigitte Cirila, Ana Woolf, Deborah Hunt, Sally Rodwell and Maria Ficara, who led the programme; and from Cuba: Graziella

Pogolotti, Luisa Campuzano, Raquel Carrió, Vivian Martínez, Fátima Patterson, Nora Hamze, Miriam Muñoz, Monse Duany as well as other artists.

Events included: a visit to the Marta Abreu boarding school (an orphanage), with the parade of giant masks which was the result of the workshop imparted by Deborah Hunt and Sally Rodwell; an encounter with old women at the Old Women's Home next to our theatre space; different performances every night; the final presentations of the workshops on a 'black-out night' lit with candles; the planting of the three tamarind trees (of which only two have survived) at the Art School, and the possibility to experience ten days of intense work - sharing lunches, walking the streets of the city, riding in cars or on horses or praying for the transport not to fail or the light to stay stable.

There was a Forum where the teachers spoke of their history and their projects; the hurried farewell of some participants who had to return early, my voice that disappeared on the second day; everything showed that Magdalena Without Borders was the result of a lot of effort - but I hope we achieved it with dignity and that it will happen again.

Magdalena Without Borders announces a next Festival from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2008. The difficulties will continue to be the same, but also our determination. We want to dedicate the next event to actor's improvisation and the search for theatre material. The structure will offer once again: workshops, conferences, work demonstrations and performances.

Roxana Pineda

## **BEYOND THE MIRROR (USA/AFGHANISTAN)**

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After four years of work together in Afghanistan, Bond Street Theater has prepared the USA premiere of *Beyond the Mirror*, a historic collaboration between Bond Street Theater and Exile Theater of Afghanistan. It is a pictorial journey through three decades of war and occupation in Afghanistan and a search for identity and renewal, woven through myths and memories, family stories and first-hand accounts, filmed montages, traditional dances and live music by a rubab master, Quraishi. *Beyond the Mirror* is directed by Mahmoud Shah Salimi and Joanna Sherman; devised and written by the ensembles and performed by Anisa Wahab, Christina Gelsone, Jamil Royesh, Seth Bloom, Mahmoud Shah Salimi, Michael McGuigan, and Joanna Sherman. The music is composed and performed by Quraishi, with additional music composed by Andy Teirstein and Michael McGuigan. The lighting design is by Jeanne Koenig. This production was made possible by The National Endowment for the Arts.

Bond Street Theatre and Exile Theatre also present a video-lecture that documents the two theatres' creative collaboration in refugee camps and areas of conflict, with specific focus on Afghanistan. Speakers from Exile Theater discuss living and working in Afghanistan, the history of the conflict, and theatre's unique ability to cross cultural barriers.

For more information about *Beyond the Mirror*, visit [www.bondst.org](http://www.bondst.org)

## **MAGDALENA SINGAPORE (Singapore)**

Magdalena Singapore's International Women's Theatre Festival, Crossroads 2006: A Meeting with the Magdalena Project in Asia that intends to be a festival of encounters, to inspire and empower Asian women to articulate their visions, passions and

stories through theatre. To make this festival a success, we welcome the full-hearted support and participation of women (and men) from the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

The confirmed dates for the festival are 9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> July 2006. During the first half of November 2005, we have been working hard to submit our final applications to key foundations and other organisations for base funding for the festival. We hope to hear affirmatively from these bodies by mid-January 2006; and if the news is good, then the festival will be on! In the meantime, we are also approaching other organisations for other forms of sponsorship; aiming to launch a new revamped and improved website (<http://www.magdalenasingapore.org/>) by December 2005; aiming to publish a confirmed programme of events and full participation details on this website by February or March 2006. Thus far, some of the accomplished theatre practitioners and groups who have been invited and/or expressed a positive interest in showcasing their work at Crossroads 2006 include: from Singapore, Elizabeth de Roza, Koh Leng Leng, Low Yuen Wei, Amanda Heng, Ang Gey Pin (Theatre Ox), Mime Unlimited, In Source Theatre, Joanna Wong; from the Asia-Pacific, PETA (Philippine Educational Theater Association), Mek Nab (Malaysia), Yani Mae (Women Community Bandung, Indonesia), Luh Luwih (Bali), sacredCOW (Australia), Kerensa Dewantoro (Australia/Indonesia), Indija Mahjoeddin (Australia/Indonesia), Raka Maitra (India), Rita Matumona (Indonesia); from the rest of the world: Jill Greenhalgh (Wales), Geddy Aniksdal (Grenland Friteater, Norway), Gilly Adams (Wales), Cristina Castrillo (Switzerland/Argentina), Teatret Om (Denmark), Hisako Miura (Japan), Deborah Hunt (Puerto Rico/New Zealand) and Sally Rodwell (New Zealand). For more information about Crossroads 2006, [\[singapore@yahoo.com.sg\]\(mailto:singapore@yahoo.com.sg\)](http://www.magdalena_</a></p>
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Verena Tay

## ENTROPIA (Greece)

In October 1996 the construction of Theatre Entropia started in the centre of Athens, in order to house a newly-established non-profit cultural organisation that aims to gather together young artists, to promote a creative dialogue among different art disciplines, as well as establishing a fluid exchange between Greece and the International Contemporary Art Scene.

From 1996 until the present, Entropia has made the following productions: *Leatherface* by Helmut Krausser; *Projekt RAF*, a dramatisation of non-theatrical material by Marilli Mastrantoni; *Faust is Dead* by Mark Ravenhill; *Go Go Go* by Juliana Francis.

Several artists and art groups from Greece and abroad have been housed at Theatre Entropia. In spring 2002, The Improvisation Week was organised with the participation of several Performing Arts' groups and in April 2003, the First Alternative Stage Festival, with the participation of artists and art groups in the field of theatre, choreo-theatre, music, dance, performance, improvisation, fine arts, video art, multimedia, short films. In March 2004, the Second Alternative Stage Festival took place, with a richer programme, including several workshops and invited important artists from abroad (such as Yoshi Oida). The Third Alternative Stage Festival took place in April 2005. Marilli Mastrantoni, after participating in the Articulate Practitioner Conference in Aberystwyth, is planning a Magdalena Project Festival at Theatre Entropia in Greece.

## MAGDALENA USA (USA)

From July 30 to August 6, 2005, Providence Rhode Island, USA, population 170,000, hosted Magdalena USA-International Festival of Women in Contemporary Theatre. I had dreamed of gathering these artists in my hometown on the eastern seaboard of North America since I was a participant in the Magdalena Australia festival in April 2003, but nothing prepared me for the reality of welcoming Jill Greenhalgh, Julia Varley, Gilly Adams, Cristina Castrillo and Bruna Gusberti, Dijana Milosevic and Dah Teatar, Margaret Cameron, Rosa Casado, Anna Yen, Verena Tay and the Singapore contingent, Stacy Klein and Double Edge Theater, Kathy Randels and ArtSpot Productions, Karolina Spaic of Zid Theatre, Marty Pottenger and Maria Porter to perform and teach for the week. I was overcome by the thrum and excitement of introducing these artists and the registered participants to my home and to each other through their work.

The week was not without challenges - we worked through the worst heat of the summer, last minute venue changes had to be made to accommodate construction delays, and we even walked into a rented venue that had removed its sound system! - but I am going to remember always the surprises. Our opening ceremony commenced with a sung blessing by Nettekusk, an inter-tribal Native American singing group from Rhode Island, who, as traditional owners of the land, welcomed us all. One member of the group told me afterwards, with tears in her eyes, that she had been dreaming of this festival experience for a long time, and that being in the room with all the women from around the world was incredibly important to her.

Later in the week, the festival

hosted some readings of scripts by Native American women, the first such event to happen among the North eastern tribes, and as such, a moving experience. We were treated to ArtSpot Productions' performance *Nita & Zita*, a show about two Hungarian immigrants to the USA who settled in New Orleans and made their living as burlesque dancers until their non-age. ArtSpot Productions, led by Kathy Randels, is based in New Orleans and was hit quite hard by Hurricane Katrina. The Magdalena USA audience may very well be the last audience to ever get to see that piece in live performance. One last strong memory: Sanja Krsmanovic-Tasic of Dah Teatar, describing the feeling of performing her piece, *Dancing with Darkness*, in the USA, whose bombing of Serbia led to the work's creation. That she may retire the piece after its USA showings struck me.

All in all, the festival imprinted me with the absolute importance of gathering to share work, and of creating a forum in which to talk about our work, especially in the USA, where I am just finding my kindred spirits. As I begin to come out of the post-partum phase of the Magdalena USA festival, I am picking up the threads that were left here. I will begin tugging on them soon.

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Vanessa Gilbert

# TRANSIT V



## Stories to Be Told

Holstebro

18 - 28 January 2007

During **TRANSIT V** women practitioners, artists, intellectuals and scholars of different ages and from various cultural backgrounds are invited to present performances, demonstrations, lectures and to give workshops. More than twenty countries will be represented at the festival.