

## Sally Rodwell

### IN MEMORY



#### *Farewell to Sally*

*Sally was my friend, colleague, performance partner, and co-artistic director with me of Magdalena Aotearoa. She was the person who has most deeply influenced my life and work. For me she was a teacher, mentor and inspirator and I deeply adored her. She was the funniest, most lively, charming, inventive, brilliant, will-full, witty, likable, creative, political, poetic and best dressed person, friend, and artist I have ever known. Since Alan's death she was also the saddest and most fragile person I have ever known. I have also not met a Mother who remained so consistently in love with her daughter Ruby.*

*Although we were both living in America around the same time, she in New York and New Mexico and me in Boston, ours paths did not really cross until we were both in Island Bay. I first met Sally when I was 33, and she had been asked by Kate Jason Smith to be the key tutor for the Hens Teeth (Women's Comedy) workshops. For so many of us it was the first time we learnt to create comic original material out of our own lives and struggles and the struggles of those around us. Sally through Kate's invitation shaped so many of our futures from that time. We began to learn how to make our own work. Sally was, and continued to be, the most brilliant teacher. My attraction to Sally, and then to the Red Mole enterprise and entity, was immense. It satisfied a part of me that I was missing so badly after living and making political and mainly feminist inspired theatre in the States and the UK since the late 1970s and a theatre that I had not yet found in Aotearoa. I threw myself at her shamelessly and insisted that I become her friend. We made the nutty Nobodies together for Not Broadcast Quality, the series of women's performance events we co-produced. The Nobodies were homeless and hapless nomads who carried their homes on their backs and lived in the in between spaces, women who loved and fought and entertained each other in insalubrious ways and moved on when the OHMS manilla envelopes, which shot in over the audiences heads, became of such nightmarish proportions that all one could do was pack one's bags and run.*

*Then two shows with Red Mole: Comrade Savage and Just Them Walking. Touring in Hokianga, Dargaville, Auckland. Realising the influence and effect they could have on people in so many communities. Live and brilliant musicians, masks, puppetry, costume, poetry, the rituals of the white face, the prop wine was always real! Irresistible theatre. These days were hard. They missed the world. The company Red Mole was smaller now,*

funding was scarce but they had secured Erskine College, as a rehearsal space and studio, and dreamed of it becoming a great centre for performance and artistic relevance and excellence. And then it was going to be destroyed. And Alan and Sally said "No!" And so we all said "No!" And joined the Save Erskine College Trust and saved the building and protected this beautiful chapel where we joined for Sally's funeral.

But it was in this inspirational space that we made Crow Station. The Nobodies were too outrageous to be limited to one twenty minute piece so, with Robin Nathan as musical director and Lisa Maule as designer and at different times musicians Helen Jonstone and Lorraine Horstmanhoff, we created and performed the full length version which became Crow Station. We were the remnants of ancient Sybils of Cumae and Delphi, ancestors of the female clown. We took our work to Magdalena '94 in Cardiff and exploded onto and amongst a most splendid collection of women theatre makers from around the world with whom we danced and sang and raged for ten whole nights and days. I went on to New York for four months and Sally went home to make plans. When I returned we continued to work together and subsequently toured Crow Station to Coventry, Berlin and Amsterdam. In 1997 Sally invited Jill Greenhalgh to New Zealand and invited me to help host her and to plan with Jill's guidance the 1999 Magdalena Aotearoa International Festival of Women's Performance. For the next two years, and alongside Te Itirawa and Katarina Kawana and Parekotuku Moore and so many others, we organised the ridiculously overly ambitious but ultimately awe inspiring festival that was The Magdalena Aotearoa International Festival and Te Ao Te Toha Toha Mohiotanga in Paekakariki. 1999 was a Crazy Voyage and most beautifully documented by Sally and Alan in the video of the same name. It was a wildly ambitious project that nearly killed us all, though not Sally. She thrived on that kind of energy; it was just the sort of energy level she loved to work at. And it was one of the things she was so sad about that she couldn't bring that kind of energy to our project since Alan's death. But of course that wasn't true. In the last four years she travelled the world as a guest of the Magdalena in Australia, Cuba, Denmark, Norway and Singapore, worked tirelessly with Deborah Hunt giving their Strange Council Mask workshop to young people who so desperately needed that kind of inspiration. She continued to perform, teach, write, organise with us and be part of the network. It was just that she didn't have the heart for things anymore. She did not see how much she continued to do.

Along with Helen Varley Jamieson her co-editor of the newsletter, Sally has inspired not only our network but the international network with the clarity of her vision and the beauty of her words in the quarterly editorial, her final one being one of the most beautiful.

The last performances we did together were in the three Magdalenas: a piece we created for the launch of *Ti Kouka* and that then became a vehicle for cabaret performances along with Dale as the *kuia*. A piece of clowning based around a board and a chair and three ancient Magdalenas. *Tips for Trusts* it was called and was the collective wisdom of three extremely powdery old ladies who knew all about what happens when a chair decides to attack a board and how to run a meeting; especially a bicultural one.

And then there was Demeter's Dark Ride - An Attraction. She played Constanza (her own name for her character). I cast her as the seer, the visionary, the fortune teller in her flowery den full of the ground wheat sacred to Demeter. The themes of the show were

birth, death and regeneration. I hoped her involvement in the show would lift her spirits and for some moments they did. Nightly she invented her part, she was a lore unto herself, and invented a different ending every night. Each night she made the homemade organic fortune cookies that contained the fragments of wisdom and philosophy that she dispensed to each person whose fortune she told. And each person took them home with them to help them in their days.

I want to finish by quoting from the last editorial she wrote in the Magdalena Aotearoa newsletter: "Women with Big Eyes is one of the stories Julia Varley has proposed for the next Transit Festival to be held in Holstebro, Denmark in January 2007. This will celebrate twenty years since the start of the Magdalena Project. Transit 5 is called Stories to Be Told. I am drawn to Julia's description of how she hopes the stories 'will allow us to meet in a place half way between history and fiction, reality and imagination, truth and falsehood, presenting events we wished had not happened and ones we wished had, inventing a future of dreams, passion, relations, ideals and tangible actions.'"

"Non, je ne regrette rien" sings Edith Piaf, and yet there are many things we regret, both personally and historically, many things we wish we had accomplished, and so much to be done. The world seems to be balanced precariously between actions of violence, hedonism, consumerism and a terrifying depletion of resources, and the possibilities put forward by many brilliant thinkers, activists and artists that there are other ways for humans to live on this planet.

Let us be those brilliant thinkers, activists and artists and find those other ways for humans to live on this planet, inspired by Sally and in her memory.

Madeline McNamara