

# Dreaming Alice: An Easter Treat

by Anne O'Keeffe

Arriving at Cecil Street Studio for the **Little Con** was a homecoming for me, a delightful feeling as I walked into the empty space. This space has seen so many ephemeral performances come and go, with 'families' of improvisers meeting and dissolving. This was an opportunity for me to dance with old friends and new acquaintances; the empty space our stamping ground.

An individual warm-up and the performers gather. Tonight's **Little Con** performers will be **Shaun McLeod, Dianne Reid** and **Grace Walpole**, with **Ann-maree Ellis** on sound and light. Supporting them are Special Guests **Ilan Abrahams, Sarah Cooper, Stephanie Hutchison** and **Anne O'Keeffe**. Steph Hutchison is also Guest Curator, and for tonight's performance, she serves up an Easter score as delicious as chocolate and as unpredictable as the White Rabbit.

Steph suggests we place the seating in a hot-cross bun arrangement in the centre of the space, creating four quadrants to perform in. Chairs are arranged facing in alternate directions and a hat filled with typed scores is placed in the centre of the cross of chairs, that we can dip into whenever we want (or not). There is to be no less than two performers in the space at any one time, though the whole group can enter if they wish. We can move from quadrant to quadrant as desired; the audience presented with a revolving feast of Easter treats.

The audience gather...the usual band of Improv junkies, many of whom delve into the form regularly themselves. The hot-cross bun of chairs becomes filled – energy, excitement and expectation filling the air. The event begins, with some of the regulars entering the performing spaces immediately, as I hang back to survey the landscape, to absorb the seeds of beginning. Simultaneous performing in a range of spaces makes for a kind of chaos at first, but almost immediately the performers begin to read the space and each other - making choices in the moment to complement or contrast other happenings. Gradually, as I watch, it becomes one event comprised of many parts – like looking at a landscape through a prism.

Though all the performers are movement-based, the evening becomes multi-modal – with speaking, singing and characterisation all edging in to support the content. Shaun punctuates his precise, poetic movement style to sing a sweet Hawaiian fishing song from his childhood. Dianne's filmic physical storytelling is interrupted with her crawling under someone's seat saying: 'Don't worry, I've done this before.' Grace pauses her lush, lyrical movement to seek help from the audience in interpreting a score. Meanwhile, Sarah dances languidly in one corner, Ilan rolls sensuously on the floor and Steph walks along the wall in an impossible handstand.

Separate events seem to coalesce into one - images of fishing and whaling interweave, a giant hook found hanging on a wall makes an appearance, a sea-

shanty is sung in harmony. My score is **REPORT** and it's hard not to think of the constant reports in the news of death and destruction. I begin to 'drown' in a sea of reportage. I become a whale, imagining a Japanese whaling boat casting its shadow down through the water from above. I continue to explore the score in little chapters, entering and leaving the same quadrant. Sometimes there are no words; at other times speaking and singing support these investigations. It is deeply enjoyable to absorb the activities emerging on all sides of me, and to interact with these when appropriate – to answer a question from Shaun using fabricated sign-language, to sing quietly with Dianne in a corner, to blow kisses to Ilan across the space; a sailor leaving the shore.

Ann-maree's sound design rises, swells and disappears and I am reminded how important the sound and lighting person is in improvised performance – their choices help to guide and shift the dynamic of a piece, and support the beginnings and endings of things. This hour-long piece culminates in an absurd moment with me in a chair and Dianne and Shaun threatening to eject me. We sing bluesy lines to some bluesy music Ann-maree has chosen, and she abruptly turns out the lights. Somehow this is the perfect ending to a chaotic, yet poetic piece.

Gradually the audience amble out, talking to performers along the way and taking **Little Con** postcards home for their fridges or noticeboards. The performers debrief, sharing moments of enjoyment and marvelling at moments of synchronicity. Stephanie's score for this month's **Little Con** has been a great success and we pack up and leave the studio, picking lavender from the bush near the front door on the way out and kissing each other goodbye.

The empty space has yielded another fabulous event, arising from nothing and going back to nothing. And I begin the journey home, from one family to another.