

Search Party

SIZE

(working title)

A new performance for 3-5 year olds

Produced by MAYK

Introduction

SIZE is a new performance for 3-5 year olds and their accompanying adults. Playful, accessible and interactive, Search Party will create a colourful and stimulating environment for toddlers to engage with the idea of age.

Performed by a young girl and an old man, we see a grandfather and granddaughter dancing together, celebrating, learning, teaching, and helping each other. We see them bouncing on trampolines, playing games of dressing 'grown-up', wearing Dad's shoes or Mum's jewellery. We see their birthday cakes with vastly different numbers of candles. We see things that don't last forever, like butterflies and bubbles and dandelions. We see two bodies - one young, one old - performing a simple vocabulary of movement and images, being playful, exuberant, wise and caring. We see a moment where there are enough hats and shoes, and roller-skates and jewellery for everyone, including the audience, to dress up in, to bounce on trampolines, to all be a part of something.

Background

Forming part of Search Party's life-long performance project Growing Old With You (see below), SIZE will explore ideas of age from the perspective of young children. SIZE combines Search Party's intimate and accessible performance style with new collaborations with a scenographer and musician to reshape Search Party's interactive live art practice for a young audience. SIZE celebrates intergenerational exchange and playfully challenges

notions of value in relation to both the young and the old.

For many of the toddlers in the audience the idea of 'size' will have started to take on increasing significance in their lives. With the new arrival of younger siblings, cousins or friends, these toddlers will be dealing with the realisation that they are not the 'smallest' anymore, whilst at the same time having a conscious understanding of how they are different from their grown-ups. With tangible changes in their daily lives (potty training, stopping afternoon naps etc), come more complex emotional developments, including notions of responsibility, of doing things for others, of looking after and being looked after, of an increasing recognition of difference. SIZE aims to playfully engage with these ideas, viewing them from the perspective of our young audience.

Process

To ensure the unique perspectives of our young audience are valued and included in the work, the project will begin with a participatory research and development (R&D) phase. Working with a range of child/adult pairings we plan to create a small pack for parents/carers and their children to enjoy in the comfort of their own home. The pack will invite both parent and child to playfully engage with the idea of age. The pack will include images (like flash cards), games and a few other simple stimuli to engage the parent and child in discussions about age. These interactions are designed to take place during the everyday lives of the participating pairs, over breakfast, in the pram, on the swings, whilst getting ready for bed - and will be

playfully documented by the adults using digital voice recorders. The pack will borrow from ideas already familiar to the parents and children, from experiences with bookstart packs from their local library, take-home toy libraries and 'Bertie the Bear' projects where children take a bear home from nursery to stay the night and record their experiences in Bertie's diary.

The results of this phase of R&D will in turn inform the creative process as it moves into rehearsal, and help shape the material generated for the final performance.

Performance

Although the specific content of the performance is to be informed by the carefully designed interactive R&D process, we also have a number of practical ideas we hope to explore in rehearsal.

We're interested in bringing a range of material into the rehearsal room:

- We're interested in how 3-5 year olds imagine the process of getting bigger. We're interested in reaching and stretching, squashing and squeezing. In the exuberance of jumping. We're interested in sunken trampolines as a visual method of being bigger, if only for a moment.
- We're interested in children playing games of dressing 'grown-up', wearing your Dad's shoes or your Mum's jewellery. We're interested in endless supplies of dressing up clothes, enough hats and shoes, and roller-skates and jewellery for everyone, including the audience, to dress up in.

- We're interested in birthday parties and the social rituals of celebrating the marking of time. We're interested in birthday cake candles and the visual representation of your 'number'. She blows out 10 candles on a birthday cake; he tries to blow out 80 (and needs some help).
- We're interested in the dynamics of party games, freezing when the music stops, throwing yourself on the floor, chasing each other around, pinning the tail on a donkey, party hats, a giant piñata exploding.
- We're interested in the 3-5 year olds not being the smallest anymore, in things being smaller than them, more fragile, needing to be looked after. We're interested in ephemerality, in 3-5 year olds beginning to have a notion of the past, of things being over, not being the same, of things that don't last forever manifested in playful ways like butterflies and bubbles and dandelions.
- We're interested in dancing as an action celebration. As something that brings people together. Something we all do in different ways, and how our age and consequently our musical tastes have an effect on our dancing. We're interested in cross-generational dance teaching, learning another's dance, taking part in another's celebration.

Working with young and old performers

We're excited about the potential dynamic between young and old performers on stage, and anticipate a rich devising process. We also recognise that working with a younger performer (of around 8 or 9 years old) and an older man (of retirement age) presents some challenges and opportunities.

The rehearsal process will take place outside of school time and the young performer will be accompanied

by a chaperone during rehearsal and performance times. We also anticipate that we will have to schedule rehearsals carefully to ensure we get the best out of both performers.

Growing Old With You

GOWY is a life-long performance project, which attempts to document lived experience in real time. Starting in 2010 and punctuated by performance works every 10 years, Search Party aim to explore ideas of age, duality and accumulation at different points in their own aging process. The first performance marked the approach of Pete and Jodie's 30th birthdays, and explores ideas around intimacy, the future and preservation. Research and development for the first performance was supported by Arts Council England, South Hill Park, BAC and Forest Fringe. Further development was supported in association with Ferment and Bristol Old Vic and The Showroom, Chichester. The performance premiered at Inbetween Time Festival (UK) and has since toured throughout the UK and Europe.

Search Party

Search Party is the collaboration of artists Pete Phillips and Jodie Hawkes. Since 2005 Search Party have created performances for studio, gallery and public space throughout the UK and internationally. They are committed to making immediate, hopeful performances that engage broad and diverse audiences. Search Party's work attempts to re-negotiate the relationship between artist and audience, creating temporary communities, inviting spectators to become co-collaborators in the live event. Search Party are members of Residence, an artist-led space in Bristol.

Search Party's work is renowned for its accessibility and ability to attract 'non-art' audiences. Jane Greenfield, Associate Producer of Home live art,

describes Search Party vs... as a "huge success with local residents" and "incredibly engaging in the most immediate way". Gregg Whelan notes "the showing (of Search Party vs Kuopio) was incredibly successful, attracting the attention of local and national media along with a huge amount of audience interest and involvement."

(Search Party vs...) is playful, humorous and oddly moving... a truly entertaining and innovative work." Gregg Whelan: Artistic Director ANTIfestival (Finland).

"...unique storytelling that feels absolutely of the place...you can't help but smile." The Guardian (UK) on Save Me.

"...moments of emotional beauty dotted about an arid landscape of salt and smoke." Realtime magazine (Australia) on Growing Old With You.

searchpartyperformance.org.uk

MAYK

MAYK is the producing partnership of Kate Yedigaroff and Matthew Austin, established in 2011. Matthew and Kate have worked together for a number of years as Artistic Directors of Mayfest, Bristol's festival of contemporary theatre. Alongside producing Mayfest MAYK develops projects throughout the year. MAYK are currently developing a new-site based project for St Nicholas Market in Bristol, as well as new projects with Firebird Theatre, Dan Canham, Sleepdogs and Sam Halmarack.

"Few festivals sizzle quite so deliciously as Mayfest, which always succeeds in feeling both very local and completely universal". The Guardian on Mayfest 2011

mayk.org.uk