

The following is an exchange between Amy Guest, of the Centre for Applied Theatre Research at the University of Manchester, and Lowri Evans, about Lowri's experience of performing in *Make-believe*:

Amy: I'm interested in how the performance of the self affects you throughout the process - are you presenting or representing the self or perhaps a version of the self?

Lowri: A performance of the self is a very weird thing to do. During the rehearsal process I felt very aware of an audience, even though I had not met them yet. I kept thinking, what will they think of me? What bits of me will be picked out and pieced together, which version of me will be shown? And then when we performed with an audience, I didn't think about the audience or what they thought. It was like once the material was selected and rehearsed - the construction of me in *Make-believe* - the actual performance I just concentrated on being me in the confines of this construction. It was like once the boundaries (the order, the set, the script: the show) were set up I could be free within it.

I am trying to think what the difference is between being myself, presenting myself and representing myself in *Make-believe*. For me, I was being myself in a presentation. I don't think I was representing myself because what I did was independent of an audience; I did not let them affect what I did. I sense that a representation does the thinking for an audience to find; whereas a presentation lets the audience find something to think about. I think I am always me but the context always changes, so I am fragmented into millions of different versions, and I cannot be a pure essence of myself because I always have a context; whether it's being in *Make-believe*, queuing in the bar afterwards, chasing a man that's stole my handbag, waiting for a bus, meeting Yusra's baby for the first time. So *Make-believe* is the context, like queuing in the bar is, each a inescapable confine for me to be in.

There are many different ways of being myself in the show too; the autobiographical script bits, the dance routines, the waiting (visibly) in the wings, the audience interaction. I think the most autobiographical parts were oddly enough the most formal, as the choreography managed to reveal a lot more than I could know- I think the choreography was a distraction allowing the very real act of attempting the choreography to be seen. In that moment I was simply trying to dance. Not to be seen trying to dance. And maybe this is the difference between being and performing. Being is the pure act of doing something and performing is more complicated.

And now, after performing as myself I am finding it impossible to perform as anybody else. Just as at the beginning of the process it felt odd to just be me, it now feels odd to be someone else.

Amy: ...does this performance change you? And do you seek to change your audience?

Lowri: For 'change' I am reading that as to impact, affect, influence an audience.

Every experience I have changes me a little bit all of the time. I do want to make the audience see something familiar from a different angle. I think the danger of making work to change an audience is that, that motive can be really obvious, preachy and dominate all space for the audience to make their own mind up. But I think changing audiences is what makes good theatre, because otherwise it is separate from life; when at best it reflects and reveals something about it. Like two wiggly parallel lines, art and life should play and shape each other.

Amy: I would particularly love to hear about the moment when four young women hugged you all after Take That.

It was really lovely but for me just as lovely as when no one got up and just stared at us. I think it seemed too set-up (even though it wasn't) and I liked the ache of expectation and failure and desperation that couldn't be tidied up with some young women from a college trip. Although it was wonderfully human, and I liked being part of a show where some young women from a college trip felt they could hug the performers. When I got hugged the girl said 'I love you' in my ear, and there was a beautiful, embarrassing human connection right then, sort of epic and pathetic. Much like what I think *Make-believe* does the best, changing scale from micro to massive and back.

Amy: As well as your final speech?...and how did that speech come about?

When I first read the speech that was written by Sonia I was very moved. It came about after Yusra, Marcus, Johanne and myself had written timelines of our lives, jotting down real events to the present and then imagined ones into the future. After a discussion Richard was interested in the mixed feelings we all had about our own deaths. Only I could talk about it. There was a real sense of it was bad luck, or disrespectful, or meddling to talk about your death. Yet it is one of the few things we could all be certain of. I said I did not mind talking about it, because it is just a fiction, a nonsense. Then when this imagined description of my death arrived it suddenly felt the most real thing in the process for me. The sparse text is laced with autobiographical details; my brother and memories of my garden, with precise biological information; my skin weighing heavy on me and my heart getting fainter. It is not flippant, it is painfully probable. When I first read that speech was when I first truly considered my death. And I think the weight of that and the bareness of words makes it so powerful, even after performing it thirty times. It is such beautiful writing and so muddled up with my own life that in that framework of the show I am most exposed, but also the safest. Exposed in the sense that it is very personal and difficult, and safe in the sense it is very personal and difficult-

I made myself very vulnerable to an audience, but then it also has the affect of being hard to ignore. It is that vulnerability that makes it appeal to the audience. Every night it could feel a different ratio of exposedness and safeness. When somebody I knew watched it felt harder, because I the choice of this moment being in the show and they did not. My brother felt exposed even as he sat anonymous in the audience, but it was partly his biography that was revealed too. And he saw a version of me and a version of him that he was not expecting.

Amy: And any others that might be significant/relevant/truthful for you...

Here I need to list the moments in order and then think. This is how I remember the show:

Johanne is Marcus
Lowri is Johanne
Marcus is Lowri
Slides
Jeziel and Johanne duet
Could it Be Magic
Chairs
Ice Cream
History of the World
Johanne's Winters Day
Guns n' Roses
What's Inside Yusra
Lowri's Death
Greg Drumming

But I think they each have a different significance to me I cannot pick out any.

Amy: Who do you believe owns the work?

I think the whole production team (creative and technical) are collectively responsible and intrinsically involved within the work. It belongs to us all but it is owned by Richard as he instigated it, lead it and saw it through.

Amy: And how the devising process finds the material?

I think task based exercises and discussions were key to generating material. Both allowed freedom to fail. They can flag up things to follow and things to abandon. There has to be a willingness to share from the contributors (performers), I think an important word is generosity. To not edit yourself, to not present yourself in the early part of the process, and leave that in the good hands of Sonia and Richard, who can oversee

everything. Therefore the earliest weeks in the process are the most fun because there is so much room to play in, and time to explore things. Then there is a moment when the mountains of material have to take shape and a show needs to be made. This was a little bit of a rocky transition. Because we the contributors have to give the material to the writer and director, and whilst we worked freely with it, it suddenly seems precious and we were aware that we had attached our own ideas to the show. This part of the process is normal, because there is no more creating but still no sign of a finished show yet. After the handover, you can really see the evidence of the director and writer. Because they have been working invisibly until this point- constructing the exercises and discussions for us to be present in. And now it is tailored just so, and you can see their ideas take form. We are working together all the time, but there are points when people's roles are more evident. The answer to this question is to devise freely but to edit fiercely.

Amy: Who was the man who wound down his window and said "get in"?

It is funny, this seems to have stuck out for a lot of people, but nearly didn't go in the show until Richard realised he wanted a balance of characters represented on the chairs. Until that point, we had each chosen to place people we loved or were fond of. It felt important to count the other people who have impacted our lives, for better or worse. I would rather not say who the man was, for one I don't know his name, but mainly because there is a magic in the minimal description that would be lost in description. The man has become very ominous and important in the audience's imagination for some reason, and whilst I do not want to mislead anyone, I also think its anonymity is why it works. It is not important (even to me) what he did, but what it meant to me. Those small things that can leave a big impression. I think by being so open, it allows the audience to access this or their own memory. But I'd like you to know it isn't a really dark story and I am not disturbed by it now.